Summary

- Oracy skills such as code switching, academic language, speaking and listening and speech and language are essential since they are the basis of literacy and communication.
- Oracy also encompasses all the reasons we need to communicate for social development too, for instance to build positive relationships, collaborate and work in teams towards a common goal and to discuss and share ideas in clear ways.
- Poor oracy and communication skills can prevent young people from performing well in the interviews and throughout employment
- Developed oracy gives people the ability to adapt to different environments and to access future opportunities. It can help boost social mobility.
- Provision is patchy, largely because spoken language isn't prioritised in the statutory assessment frameworks and public examinations
- Teachers and schools lack the confidence and knowledge to develop young people's spoken language skills and would like more support

1 Value and impact

1.1 Oracy is essential to underpin strong literacy development. The amount of dialogue – and its quality – that children receive at home is vital to academic attainment. Thus schools may offer the only chance for young people who don't have that home-life opportunity to develop oracy skills. Students need the chance to develop their spoken skills as this, in turn, improves students' reading and writing. A 2017 Sutton Trust report highlighted the importance of well-developed communication skills for academic and life success: it is one of the 'essential life skills' (along with confidence, social skills, self-control, motivation, and resilience) which are increasingly seen as important to children's wider development. The Sutton Trust suggests that the ability to work well with others, build relationships, and communicate effectively underpin success in school and work. Research from the Communication Trust also shows that all forms of communication is fundamental to children's development; children need to be able to understand and be understood. Communication is the foundation of relationships and is essential for learning, play and social interaction in young people and then to future school and workplace success for young people and adults.

1.2 Oracy encompasses all the different reasons why we need to communicate for social development too, for instance to build positive relationships, collaborate and work in teams towards a common goal and to discuss and share ideas in clear ways. It is through speaking and listening that we develop our views, apply knowledge and extend our capacity to think critically. These skills are needed today more than ever before.

1.3 Developed oracy gives people the ability to adapt to different environments and to access future opportunities. This undoubtedly goes hand in hand with research into social mobility. We know that children from disadvantaged communities do less well in school than their wealthier peers, and that this affects their chances to find work. But according to a 2017 report, "*the skills that London employers seek in young people above all else – whether school/college leavers or recent graduates – are related to communication and attitude.*" Improving young people's educational opportunities therefore includes an in-depth focus on oracy and its relevance to all subjects

1.4 Spoken language doesn't have the same status as reading and writing since it is not formally assessed anywhere except MFL and English (at KS4, but not examined). This is largely down to its ephemeral nature which can make it hard to capture.

1.5 Given the lack of emphasis on spoken language in the assessment frameworks, it shouldn't be surprising that the Oracy Report (2016) reveals that "*Schools are not consistently supporting oracy. Only 1 in 4 (27%) take into account pupils' verbal contributions during lesson observations, and only 1 in 5 communicate with parents about their children's progress in the area*". Research by Neil Mercer at Cambridge University successfully outlines why oracy should play a larger part in the curriculum and how important spoken language skills are to future school and workplace success. If schools don't develop children's communication skills, where does that leave students who do not learn "strong communication skills" from home?

1.6 Some subject areas related to oracy are also declining. For example, GCSE drama entries are down 14% from 2012-2017 (https://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/creative-arts-gcse-subjects-ebacc-drama-music-design-technology-school-funding-a8473211.html)

1.7 Oracy should have the same status since strong oracy skills are vital for learning. If you have strong oracy skills then you are going to better understand other subjects that are taught to you and you'll be better able to share understanding of a subject area with your classmates. You will also be able to respond to your teachers' feedback more successfully. Young people without good spoken language skills experience frustration at many levels. For example, they are more likely to get into trouble at school as they are unable to articulate problems and they will struggle in the workplace.

1.8 Good oracy education is particularly important for specific groups such as EAL pupils who are new to English. Oracy is paramount and needs at least a year's taught focus. If oracy is not taught, it holds them back, e.g. pronunciation, intonation, stress timing, support for spelling and understanding sound symbol correspondences in a second language which are otherwise hard to read.

1.9 Oracy can also help deliver the wider curriculum. For example, it is vital for PSHE, RE, History, PE and other subjects without 'right' answers. It develops skills of debating. Practical subjects such as PE continue to rely on speaking and listening extensively at KS3 e.g. need to listen and then follow instructions.

1.10   The National Literacy Trust's <u>stand-alone CPD</u> session and the <u>Oracy CPD</u> run as part of the post-16 Words for Work programme demonstrate that oracy has different strands, helping young people to understand and articulate their ideas better and then to develop their writing and presentation skills as a result. That is why improving oracy is highly relevant to improving wider literacy in primary and secondary students and to raising <u>employability and employment opportunities</u>. The National Literacy Trust continually collates research into why oracy is at the heart of social equality. For instance, <u>a 2018 Scotsman article</u> showed that ccommunication difficulty is the most common type of disability experienced by children and adults and can have a serious impact on life chances. The government's <u>Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission</u> highlights how many non-academic barriers there are to elite professions; developing strong communication skills is so important to improve social mobility and the opportunities that individuals can access.

1.11   Over two-thirds of employers (70%), rate Literacy and Numeracy skills as one of their three most important considerations when recruiting school and college leavers. Broader skills such as communication is also highly important when recruiting, with over half (60%) rating these skills as among their top three priorities. For employers, formal qualifications are valuable indicators of application, achievement and ability. However, businesses are clear that key drivers of success for young people in their working lives are attitudes and attributes such as resilience, enthusiasm, creativity and communication skills. (CBI, 2018).

2 Provision and access

2.1 Schools should integrate oracy across the curriculum, to support all learning. It should be delivered in a way that is enjoyable, for instance by teaching through play in primary school, and by incorporating new technology/trends at secondary level (e.g. youtubing)

2.2 Oracy should have as much focus on listening and understanding as on speaking, and encourage people to change their mind depending on what they hear. It should have less focus on winning an argument, and more focus on understanding, collaborating and coming to the best answer collectively.

2.3 Improvisation is an effective way to improve children's literacy in a way that is collaborative, fun, emphasises listening and teaches through play. Here is a case study of improvisation being used at Dulwich Prep School is available here:

2.4 http://www.dplfocus.org/DPL-Focus-22/mobile/index.html#p=82.4 There are also examples of activities for using improvisation in school here:

https://cdn.literacytrust.org.uk/media/documents/Comedy_Improvisation_for_Comic_Relief_Teacher_Resource_XCVuTcQ.pdf

2.5 Poor oracy and communication skills can prevent young people from performing well ininterviews and throughout employment. Words for Work, the National Literacy Trust's flagship employability and literacy programme, gives young people the confidence to use and develop their literacy and communication skills by providing authentic opportunities to practise these skills. Post-16 students that participated in the programme increased their confidence in speaking and listening by 40%, students' understanding of workplace communication increased by 90% and 91% of students felt that Words for Work has made them better prepared to enter employment. The programme provides authentic opportunities to practise literacy and language skills with employers. We have seen that the impact of quality oracy education can prepare young people for the workplace.

2.6 The percentage of students who felt able to give a formal presentation in front of an audience nearly tripled over the course of the programme. 1 in 4 (25.5%) said they are able to give a formal presentation in front of an audience before taking part compared to nearly 3 in 4 (71.8%) after taking part. Also, nearly all teachers (10/11) noticed a change in students' awareness of communication needs in the workplace, ability to identify formal and informal situations and knowledge and ability to give a formal presentation: "I also noticed an improvement with them speaking to others in the group who are not part of their normal social circle." – Words for Work, Teacher

3 Barriers

3.1 It is difficult to provide authentic opportunities for children and young people to practise literacy and language skills e.g. with employers. There is also little or no training available around oracy nationally and it is very patchy. We find many teachers have had no previous training unless they have come across Voice 21 projects.

3.2 Teachers need more in class support and coaching, including CPD research and theory (e.g. Mercer, Dawes, Alexander). They also need time to practise implementation and how to do it, e.g. managing group work and why it is important.

3.3 Feedback from delegates on the National Literacy Trust's 'Oracy within the Curriculum' training suggests that there is currently insufficient support in planning and embedding oracy across the curriculum. Delegates also highlighted that there isn't enough access to action research in schools and that there is a deficit of strategies and research around oracy in standard secondary teacher training.

3.4 Some other key points from the feedback include:

- Delegates were very keen on the practical examples used in the training: they were put in constructed conversational scenarios which allowed them to see the benefit of effective listening and discourse and in relief see what it looked like when subjects were failing to engage or listen properly.
- They found the sections on active listening and dialogic and explanatory talk particularly useful, suggesting that these elements are taken for granted and so ignored in normal practice. Effectively, they deconstructed the process of communicating and this provided valuable insight.

- They welcomed theory and research, which isn't always the case with our CPD.
- They were especially keen on the cross-curricular applicability: there was an urge amongst the participants that good oracy teaching not be deemed just a requirement for English teachers. Some delegates actually felt that the CPD was too English/humanities based. So extra effort needs to be made to embed across STEM subjects.