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'

Rebecca Pinfield

Full name:

Newham Collegiate Sixth Form Centre (The NCS)

School or Organisation:

Assistant Principal and English teacher

Role:

Written evidence:

Evidence submitted by Rebecca Pinfield: Assistant Principal in charge of Oracy and English Teacher at Newham Collegiate Sixth Form Centre (The NCS), 326 Barking Road, London E6 2BB.

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Summary:
- The NCS is a 16-19 Free School Academy serving the young people of Newham as part of the City of London Academy Trust. Despite the challenging socioeconomic backgrounds of our students, since opening in 2014 we have achieved outstanding A level results and University progression (90% A*-B and 99% A*-C in 2018 and over 30 offers for Oxbridge, Medicine, and Dentistry, with 95% of students again receiving an offer to study at a Russell Group University.)
- I believe that the removal of the assessed Spoken Language unit at GCSE and explicit oracy education at other Key Stages has had a negative impact on the future pathways and social mobility of all state-educated students.
- At the NCS, we have created our own oracy education programme, which has produced successful results in some instances and come up against challenges in others.

Value and impact

Given many teachers recognise the important 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? –

- State schools have been put under increasing pressure by the Government (and consequently parents and society as a whole) to perform in the 'real terms' of public exam results, rather than life-skills and the provision of a rounded education of the type independent schools still provide.
- The removal of Speaking and Listening from English Language GCSE in 2014 had a huge impact as it deprioritised oracy in the eyes of non-English teachers, but more importantly in the eyes of increasingly exam-focused students. Working in a 16-19 Free School, the standard of oracy among the students coming in from GCSE has clearly declined compared to when it was still assessed.
- I would still stop short of giving oracy the same status as reading and writing, as I don't think it's possible to be an effective orator without first being an effective reader and writer, and these two should still come first within state school budgeting and resourcing restraints. However, it certainly needs to be re-introduced to the curriculum from Early Years onwards, assessed at GCSE and given much greater status at KS5.

What are the consequences if children and young people do not receive oracy education?

- Research has proven the connection between talk and problem-solving, both practically and as part of inter-personal skills.
- Students who haven't received explicit oracy education leave school as less effective communicators when it comes to future pathways, higher education and relationships; and potentially display
- a lack of confidence in these areas compared to their peers.
- The lack of oracy education in the state system is also a barrier to social mobility, as privately-educated students still receive it as a matter of course and priority. For schools such as mine, the consequence has been that we have had to assign staffing, budget and resources to developing our own oracy initiatives in order to give our students as much chance as possible when competing at the highest level.

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)?

- My experience relates to the provision of oracy education for students from mostly disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds at KS5, as well as EAL. The impact for them has been huge, as we work with them at a time when they're applying to University and preparing for interviews, often at Oxbridge and Russell Group universities.
- As mentioned earlier, oracy education is so important in order for them to be able to compete for places on a level playing field with students from more privileged backgrounds. It is also extremely valuable as they negotiate social situations such as moving out of their community away from home, making new friendships and developing purposeful relationships with tutors and employers.
- Students who don't have English as their first language or speak it at home will naturally struggle with social situations such as these more than those who do. The same is true for students who don't come from families where discussion and debate is encouraged, and therefore lack the cultural capital of some of their peers.

How can it help deliver the wider curriculum at school?

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?

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?

- In my experience, students are often unsure of the skills they will need for their future pathways, as they either have unrealistic expectations of the amount of support they will receive at University or in employment, or are not aware of the role oracy skills will play in making the transition easier for them. Raising awareness of the purpose of oracy education is therefore a key part of it.

What is the value and impact of oracy education in relation to other key agendas such as social mobility and wellbeing/ mental health?

- See above re social mobility. We had a student who won best individual speaker at the Eton Debating competiton as a result of attending debating society at school. This was a national news story and had a huge impact on both her and her community, inspiring many of her fellow students to no longer see their backgrounds as a barrier to achievement on a par with the privately educated.
- We have also arranged oracy and drama workshops with outside organisations specifically for students lacking in confidence, and gathered data from their teachers which showed a marked improvement in their verbal confidence. We hope this will have in turn have had a beneficial impact on their mental health and general wellbeing.

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

What should high quality oracy education look like?

- It needs buy-in and support from the whole school in order to be effective (SLT, teachers from all subjects and students), and not just seen as something that happens in English or discussion-based Humanities subjects. In my case, it is one of the school's SIP targets.
- It also needs to be carried through in to the pastoral programme, as this is a key space for oracy-specific activities as well as a platform for getting the whole-school message across.
- Initiatives themselves should be plentiful, varied and tailored to the needs and groups within the student body, for example the workshops for less confident students mentioned above, or mock interviews for students applying for Medicine.
- As a result of high quality oracy education, students and teachers should develop the tools to see all verbal interactions as oracy, feeling comfortable enough to challenge and give feedback on the quality of their peers' and students speaking and listening. Ideally, this will build a whole school

oracy ethos over time.

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?

In our school, oracy education has been provided in the form of:

- Regular staff CPD run by a staff oracy group on the importance of oracy and how to incorporate it in to lessons, for example ideas for starters and plenaries and strategies on how to structure effective group talk.
- Regular consultation and collaboration with teaching staff on ideas for how to improve oracy provision as part of these CPD sessions.
- Student assemblies on the importance of oracy for future pathways and life-skills.
- Rules for effective oracy and active listening skills which are displayed in every classroom and referred to by teachers.
- Speech, drama and life-skills workshops with outside agencies including the Old Vic Theatre and Barclays Life Skills.
- Debating society.
- 'Teach me to' segments in form time where students speak to peers about a skill or talent.
- Student hustings for the election of the student head team.
- Seminar-style 'supervision' lessons and mock interviews as part of the higher education preparation programme.

This academic year we are also introducing:

- Student oracy ambassadors who are trained as oracy 'experts' in lessons and form time.
- A 'speech day' event featuring monologue performances and student panel talks.
- Half-termly student-led podcasts.

Outside of school, the Jack Petchey Speak Out challenge and Voice 21 organisation provide excellent oracy education and resources for teachers and students.

3. What are the views of teachers, school leaders and educational bodies regarding the current provision of oracy education?

Feedback from staff voice with 2 Maths teachers, 1 RE teacher and 1 History teacher:

- Oracy needs more prioritisation as many of our graduating students who move on to University are very academic but lack verbal and social confidence.
- However, there is a concern that oracy is difficult to incorporate in to A-Level lessons, particularly because of the perception that it involves planning and structuring time-consuming extra discussions, debates etc rather than oracy in its true sense, which can just refer to the quality of all verbal interactions in a lesson.

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

See above.

- At my school we also used the school reporting system to generate measurable data regarding oracy; asking teachers to rate each student they taught from a 1 (excellent) to a 4 (requires improvement) in terms of their verbal confidence at the end of the 2016 Autumn term. As most students are taught by at least three different teachers, we were able to use the data in a number of ways.
- Firstly, we worked with the students who had received all 3s or 4s in the workshops mentioned above, as well as encouraging students who were graded excellent to get involved in oracy initiatives like debating society. Teachers were made aware of who this group were, and encouraged to refer to them for the modelling of good oracy and peer assessment of other students during verbal activities. This year we are formalising this approach to create a group of student oracy ambassadors across all subjects and forms who will receive training on how to do this (using Voice 21 and National Literacy Trust resources.)

- We collected the data again in the Spring term of 2017 following the student involvement in oracy initiatives, and found the percentage of students given 3s or 4s for oracy in Year 12 had reduced from 46% to 23%.

What factors create unequal access to oracy education (i.e. socio-economic, region, type of school, special needs)? How can these factors be overcome?

s already mentioned, state schools are too regulated in terms of 'teaching to the test' when it comes to their metabling and curriculum, as well as budgets and resources. Oracy education is therefore not prioritised.

Relating to region more specifically, how should an oracy-focused approach be altered depending on the context?

- Oracy provision in schools needs to be tailored to the needs of the student body, for example in our context we have a lot of academically able students who lack verbal confidence, as well as some very verbally confident students who lack the self-belief to compete with students from more privileged backgrounds.
- Having said that, if one of the purposes of oracy education is to level the playing field in terms of social mobility, it can't be too specifically catered to the school's regional context or social demographic and needs to contain some generic elements.

Barriers

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

- On a practical level, the fact that it is no longer on the curriculum or assessed as part of GCSE English Language means it is difficult to timetable.
- Lack of budget for things like outside agency workshops.
- Within schools, whole-school buy-in from teachers and students who are more concerned with assessed content and learning than oracy.
- Teachers sometimes not feeling comfortable giving feedback to students about their oracy skills as they don't want to make them feel singled out.
- Teacher reluctance to plan discussion/debate in to lessons and lack of experience in how to structure this.

What support do teachers need to improve the delivery of oracy education?

It needs to be prioritised, mainly by being reintroduced to English Language GCSE as an assessed unit. This means all students will transition to KS5 or further education with some level of skill and understanding, giving non-English teachers less ground to cover at this stage when it comes to improving oracy and therefore improving the students' future prospects.

What accountability is currently present in the system? How can we further incentivise teachers to deliver more oracy education to children and young people?

Not enough – it must be reintroduced as a publicly assessed unit in order to be taken seriously.

What is the role of government and other bodies in creating greater incentives and how can this be realised?

In addition to the above, the Government needs to place more trust in teachers' ability to assess speaking and listening fairly and accurately.

What is the role of assessment in increasing provision of oracy education? What is the most appropriate form of assessment of oracy skills?

- Although the GCSE Speaking and Listening unit was flawed in the sense that it was hard to monitor and grades were inflated (presumably the reason it ceased to be an assessed unit), there are ways around this – for example filming all entries to be uploaded or available to exam boards calling for a sample similar to coursework, or insisting on staff moderation during presentations.
- It could also account for a smaller percentage of the final grade, as it is not really the mark itself which is important, but the benefits for students derived from the level of preparation required for a formally assessed unit.

Are the speaking and listening elements of the current curriculum sufficient in order to delivery high quality oracy education?

Not as far as I know – the optional element at KS4 has had very low uptake.

What is the best approach – more accountability within the system or a less prescriptive approach?

To begin with, accountability and official assessment will be necessary in order for oracy to be re-embedded into the curriculum, although I think there should be flexibility within this, for example teachers being able to choose from a range of tasks which best suit their students.

Are there example of other educational pedagogies where provision has improved and we can draw parallels and learn lessons?

Not that I know of – in fact the removal of controlled assessment, coursework and centre-assessed units across all subjects seems to be narrowing students' skillsets, with a similarly negative impact as the removal of assessed Speaking and Listening.

Additional guidance:

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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?

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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

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2. What support do teachers need to improve the delivery of oracy education?

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