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'

Courtenay Norbury
Full name:

University College London
School or Organisation:

Professor and Principal Investigator SCALES
Role:

Written evidence:

I have been leading the Surrey Communication and Language in Education Study (SCALES: www.lilac-lab.org) which has been following a cohort of children who started mainstream reception classes in 2011, and have assessed language, cognitive and academic skills in reception, year 1, year 3, year 6 and are now visiting the children in year 8.

Our key findings (references at end of document):

- 7.58% of children in Year 1 had significant but unexplained language deficits and a further 2.34% had language deficits associated with biomedical conditions such as intellectual disability or autism

- Fewer than 11% of children with language deficits met curriculum targets on the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile. Not also that oral language impacts every early learning goal, not just speaking and listening

- This academic disadvantage is maintained over time – those we identified as having 'low language' at reception are less likely to pass the phonics screen or achieve expected levels on KS1 SATS (we are currently investigating KS2 SATS and writing all of this up)

- Children with unexplained language deficits were twice as likely as peers with good language to be rated by teachers as having social, emotional, and behavioural problems. 50% of children with language and other developmental concerns had clinical levels of behaviour problems.

- Language was stable across first years of primary school, with a ~2 year 'language gap' between those with good language and those with poor language at school entry.

- This mean that while all groups made progress, there was little evidence of 'narrowing the gap'. It also means that those with the most deficient early language skills have the same level language competence in Year 3 that their peers demonstrated in Year 1.

- There is a clear social gradient in which the rates of language deficit are much higher in lower SES brackets, though we do see language difficulties across the socio-economic range

- However, while SES is associated with the level of language children have when they start school, it is not associated with rate of language change

- Work just submitted indicates that the child's language skills in Year 1 predicts ability to recognise emotion cues in facial expressions and tone of voice

- Children with language deficits also find it more challenging to engage in emotion regulation strategies (and may find 'talking therapies' challenging).

In sharing these findings with schools and leaders in education, and in considering my experience as a Chair of Governors, the following suggestions have been put forward to improve oral language skills for all children, but especially those disadvantaged children who may have underlying language disorders:

- Much greater emphasis on oral language in the Early Years, as the level of language children when they start school is highly predictive of their language level at end of primary
- Oracy co-ordinators in schools with similar role to literacy & numeracy co-ordinators
- Improved initial teacher training- emphasis on oral language demands in the classroom, making explicit links between language and literacy, training on 'teacher talk' and how to better facilitate oral language in the classroom
- For example, one school I work with is focusing on oral narrative as a means to improve written work – an opportunity for teachers to hear and scaffold limitations in vocabulary and grammar
- Better access to speech and language therapy for children with significant language deficits
- Access to speech and language therapy at different developmental points – several pointing out that language demands increase in secondary school, risk of adverse mental health increases in secondary school, and yet access to therapy services decreases after primary
- Lack of access to specialist services a key reason that parents of children with special educational needs leave local schools and fight for out-of-borough school placements

- ‘coaching’ from speech-language therapy – the feeling was that teachers need more in the moment advice on how to facilitate language for children who are struggling. General advice/training was less helpful
- Materials that highlight the language demands of maths and science, so that teachers can ‘pre-teach’ challenging concepts
- Debating/public speaking in lessons to develop oral language and confidence in speaking – this may be especially beneficial for children from disadvantaged backgrounds (though more robust research evidence is needed)

In sum, my research programme has unequivocally demonstrated wide variation in the oral language competences children have at the start of their school careers. From the very beginning, those children with poor oral language are struggling academically, socially, and behaviourally, and these challenges are maintained throughout the primary school years.

Schools tell me they need more specialist support and an explicit structure that allows school leaders to prioritise, monitor, and deliver high quality programmes to improve oral language. Some have also expressed a desire to learn more personal strategies to facilitate communication in the classroom.

The longitudinal aspect of our research has clearly shown that with additional initiatives, closing the language gap does not automatically happen. I therefore strongly support oracy initiatives in education.

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?

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Norbury, C.F., Gooch, D., Vamvakas, G., Baird, G., Charman, T., Simonoff, E. and Pickles, A. (2017). Language growth in children with heterogeneous language disorders: a population study. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry,* 58(10):1092-1105. doi: 10.1111/jcpp.12793.

Gooch, D., Maydew, H., Sears, C. & **Norbury, C.F.** (2017). Does a child's language ability affect the correspondence between parent and teacher ratings of ADHD symptoms? *BMC Psychiatry*, DOI: 10.1186/s12888-017-1300-8.

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Please contact me for work that is currently under review: c.norbury@ucl.ac.uk