The Plymouth Oracy Project: Evidence for the Oracy All Party Parliamentary Group

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We would both be willing to give oral evidence to the inquiry.
In addition, we would be interested in hosting an event or visit for the APPG

1. **Introduction**

    1.1. The Plymouth Oracy Project was designed to develop theoretical and pedagogical understanding of dialogic talk for learning amongst school staff.

    1.2. A particular focus was on improving the Oracy development and educational outcomes of pupils falling into the 'disadvantaged' category.

    1.3. A key aim of the project was to 'close the gap' between pupils from poorer socio-economic backgrounds (as demonstrated by pupil premium qualification) and those from more affluent backgrounds.

    1.4. There was a strong emphasis on effective Continuing Professional Development and Learning in Oracy for school staff.

    1.5. The project sought to extend the success of existing collaborative teaching projects across schools in the UK, such as that demonstrated in Voice Bradford, Voice 21 and Oracy Cambridge.

    1.6. This research aimed to evaluate the extent to which The Plymouth Oracy Project successfully:

        1.6.1. Developed staff confidence and competence to deliver Oracy;

        1.6.2. Improved attainment and progress for learners;

        1.6.3. Narrowed the gap for disadvantaged learners;

        1.6.4. Impacted other measures of pupil success (e.g. pupil confidence, attendance).

2. **Background**

    2.1. Oracy is argued to reduce the attainment gap of those most disadvantaged pupils (Alexander 2017) and is essential for effective learning (Nichol and Andrews 2018; Alexander 2012). Central to this is the role of school staff in helping pupils gain a broad

repertoire of talk (Alexander *et al.* 2017). However, changes to educational policy (Haworth 2001) and skills and confidence shortages amongst school staff (Evans and Jones 2017) is argued to have resulted in a devaluing of Oracy in schools. Therefore, The Plymouth Oracy Project aimed to address this by using high quality, national Continuing Professional Development and Learning (CPDL) sessions to support acquisition of Oracy development and teaching in Plymouth schools. To ensure effective implementation, Specialist Leaders in Education (SLE) and Plymouth Leaders in Education (PLE) and additional cluster meetings provided further bespoke, targeted support to schools to ensure Oracy skills developed in pupils according to specific needs.

3.   The Intervention

3.1. The Plymouth Oracy Project provided high quality, CPDL sessions to support acquisition of Oracy development and teaching in Plymouth schools. To ensure effective implementation, Specialist Leaders in Education (SLE) and Plymouth Leaders in Education (PLE) and additional cluster meetings provided further bespoke, targeted support to schools to ensure Oracy skills developed in pupils according to specific needs. This programme of Oracy support was designed in such a way to address many of the challenges school staff can face in implementing Oracy (e.g. lacking confidence in Oracy, competing priorities and support from school leadership) as outlined in a study by Millward and Menzies (2016).

3.2. Current research (Mercer *et al.* 2017) suggests that the measurement of Oracy skills in children can be problematic. In the absence of a universal indicator for measuring Oracy proficiency in children a range of data was utilised, gathering data focusing on school performance for disadvantaged pupils (identified as pupil premium) and non-pupil premium (identified as others).

3.3. 'The Plymouth Oracy Matrix' generated a more accurate measure of progress in Oracy proficiency, especially in the short-term due to the time delay for improvements in Oracy to translate into school-wide improvements in reading, writing and maths

3.4. The Plymouth Teaching School Alliance (PTSA) also continued to develop an indicator which is named 'The Plymouth Oracy Matrix' and was informed by three key documents:
   ● Tower Hamlets Progression in Language Structures
   ● The Communication Trust Universally Speaking
   ● Green Lane Primary School, Bradford

4. The participants

4.1. The Plymouth Oracy Project involved 31 eligible schools (DFE Guidelines) across Plymouth, in which two teachers from each school were part of the training. In addition to six CPD days, eligible schools had a named SLE/PLE who visited the school five times during the first year to support with action planning, assessment and project development, including development of Oracy across the wider school. For the eligible schools initially, one key teacher in a specific targeted year group led the project but as the project developed, successful initiatives were disseminated across the whole school. The 31 SLEs involved in this project also received five days of training from the Voice 21 Oracy Leaders Programme. The schools were divided six clusters in total, one Early Years, three primary clusters, and two secondary clusters.

Evaluation Design Research tool	Description
Online questionnaire	Issued to school staff involved in The Plymouth Oracy Project at three intervals during the 16 month project (January 2018, n=41; June/July 2018, n=22; Feb/March 2019, n=20).
CPD questionnaire	At the end of Oracy CPD events staff were asked to complete a short questionnaire consisting of open and closed questions (n=320).
Case-study interviews	Eight 20-60 minute interviews and walking tours of school grounds (including taking photographs of Oracy resources).
Analysis of quality assurance school visit reports, action plans and meeting records	All schools were asked to document the developments they made to teaching and learning as part of The Plymouth Oracy Project. Analysis of 175 documents from 31 schools.
Analysis of existing attainment and attendance data	Primary schools: • EYFS Communication and language (% of pupils reaching the expected level for this age);

	• End of year 2 assessment (% of pupils reaching the expected level for this age in reading, writing and maths);
	• End of key stage 2 assessment;
	• Progress of the year group involved in the project;
	• Oracy matrix scores;
	• Attendance data.
	Secondary schools:
	• Assessment scores for the year group involved in the project (% of pupils reaching the expected level for this age in reading, writing and maths);
	• Attainment 8 scores;
	• Progress 8 scores;
	• Progress of the year group involved in the project;
	• Oracy matrix scores;
	• Attendance data.

5. **Results and Recommendations**

6. **Developed staff confidence and competence to deliver Oracy**

   6.1. The data indicates that the combination of professional development activities, school to school support, quality assurance visits and the school specific action plans have led to substantial increase in staff competence and confidence delivering Oracy. It was clear that the project has refocused staff on the importance of Oracy and encouraged greater staff reflection on the role of talk in the classroom. Whilst the project was initially implemented in target groups, evidence suggests that schools have embedded their training in the wider school practices (e.g. assemblies, Oracy classroom displays etc). Both qualitative and quantitative data collected suggested a positive impact on staff confidence and competence teaching linguistic, cognitive, physical and social and emotional aspects of oracy. It was clear that the model of CPDL used in the intervention achieved its intend outcomes.

      6.1.1. **Recommendation 1:** The importance of continued investment and delivery of training in Oracy for new staff and existing staff to update skills. Research shows the

considerable significance of school staff receiving Oracy training (Alexander 2013; Nichols and Andrews 2018).

    6.1.2. **Recommendation 2:** Given the considerable success of this sustained CPDL model, there is a need to look at how this model could be applied in contexts beyond Oracy, for example to address issues in teacher retention.

    6.1.3. **Recommendation 3:** This evaluation highlights the value of future investment in initiatives designed to address Oracy, especially in the EYFS. High quality early intervention can change a child's developmental trajectory and improve outcomes. This evaluation also highlights the importance of rigorous evaluation of these initiatives to understand and evidence impact.

7. Improved attainment and progress and narrowed the attainment gap for disadvantaged learners

7.1. Early Years Foundation Stage: The attainment gap between disadvantaged and other pupils almost halved over the course of the project. The percentage of disadvantaged pupils reaching at least the expected standard in Communication and Language increased from 16.6% to 62.3% (an increase of 47.7%). Meanwhile, the proportion of 'other' pupils reaching at least the expected 18 standard in Communication and Language increased from 36% to 73.6%, an increase of 37.6%. The gap between disadvantaged pupils and others decreased from 20% (autumn 2017) to 11.3% (summer 2018), demonstrating the impressive impact of the project in 'closing the gap' between pupils from poorer socio-economic backgrounds and those from more affluent backgrounds

7.2. Key Stages 1 and 2: The Plymouth Oracy Project had a considerable impact on improving learner attainment and progress in reading and writing, whilst narrowing the gap for those most disadvantaged learners with the gap reducing from a 3£ average to 1% ab average. The Plymouth Oracy Matrix data concerning disadvantaged pupils in primary schools, show scores have increased from 33% – 61% (an increase of 28%) and scores have increased from 44% - 62% (18%) for other pupils, indicating a 10% reduction in the gap between disadvantaged and other pupils.

7.3. Secondary schools: Progress data suggests a reduction in the gap between disadvantaged pupils and other children decreasing from 7.9% to 4.8%, demonstrating a 3.1% narrowing of the gap. In terms of attainment 8, the gap between other and disadvantaged pupils decreased from 9.2 to 4.4. In terms of The Plymouth Oracy Matrix, there has been a 17.8% reduction in the gap between disadvantaged and other pupils.

7.4. Special school: Although this evaluation only focused on one special school, making it difficult to form reliable conclusions regarding impact, there was a 33% increase in maths and reading attainment. Furthermore, qualitative data demonstrates the immense impact of Oracy in improving pupil confidence, peer relations and almost rebranding English as something pupils can engage with and achieve highly.

    7.4.1. **Recommendation 4:** A need to explore how Oracy could be implemented in other special schools and the key impacts on pupils in doing so.

8. Impacted other measures of pupil success

8.1. Positive impact on attendance: The data regarding the impact of The Plymouth Oracy Project on attendance was very positive, although the improvements in attendance cannot be attributed solely to the Plymouth Oracy Project. Quantitative data suggests small improvements for EYFS and primary targeted groups on +0.8 and +0.01m but greater improvements in the secondary and special school, there have been improvements in attendance for secondary schools +1.4 across all schools and + 1.17 for targeted year groups. Data for the one special school involved in this project indicated greater improvements. However, there is a need to advise strong caution due to the very limited sample size and the impact this had on analysis.

8.2. Substantial improvements in pupil confidence: The qualitative data collected highlighted changes in pupil confidence. The project resulted in major improvements in pupil confidence at all levels. Staff enthusiastically described examples of children who were previously mute, have EAL or complex SEND and the immense impact of The Plymouth Oracy Project on these children. It was clear from the analysis that the provision of stem sentences and triad/paired working was key to supporting pupil confidence.

8.3. Emotional literacy: It is clear from the qualitative data that The Plymouth Oracy Project has had an impact on creating a calmer school environment for pupils. Other evidence from the interviews with school staff, indicate that pupils are much better at hearing other opinions, even when they strongly disagree with the opinion. In some schools, this has also improved behaviour at playtimes, with less conflict. Oracy development outlined above highlights the importance of pupils gaining a broad repertoire of talk to support their learning, including aspects such as emotional literacy and prosocial behaviour Prosocial behaviour is the ability to maintain the relationship with others. According to Porkodi and Vasimalairaja (1991) a number of skills contribute to the development of pro-social behaviour, such as perspective

taking, empathy, and self-regulation. Pro-social skills involve regulating negative emotions, taking turns and sharing and support orientations to others that are fair, just, and respectful

8.4. A culture of meaningful talk: Discussions with all the schools highlighted that Oracy has very much become an embedded part of the school culture. Teachers commented that there is now an expectation that pupils will talk and will be held accountable for what they say. The Plymouth Oracy Project suggests that when we teach children how to speak, have expectations for their dialogue and provide real opportunities for discussion, debate and sharing of their voice that children achieve better socially and mentally.

8.5. Impact on parents/carers: All schools involved in The Plymouth Oracy Project have plans for how to engage parents/carers and their wider communities in Oracy. It is clear that the project is starting to have an impact on parents/carers, although it is still early on and this is an area schools are planning to expand on.

8.5.1. **Recommendation 5:** Continue to consider how schools can raise awareness of Oracy amongst parents/carers and wider communities.

9. Conclusions

10. Value and Impact

10.1. The Plymouth Oracy project results suggest that quality oracy education that embeds oracy in a school curriculum and develops oracy skills in pupils developing impacts on different life stages, EYFS, primary and secondary, in addition it has an impact in different settings from different types of schools e.g. faith based, selective, free school and academies in addition to specials school settings, and also impacts positively for types of pupils, in the case of this study in particular disadvantaged pupils, SEN and EAL. In addition, the Plymouth Oracy project shows promising results linked to other key agenda such as wellbeing and mental health.

11. Provision and access

11.1. The Plymouth Oracy project was received very favourably by teachers and senior leaders and the views of teachers, school leaders and educational bodies regarding the current provision of oracy education were sought and as a result of the CDPL programme resulted in clear change in practice and provision across the city. The results of the project suggests that in order to have a high quality oracy education it is essential to invest in high quality and sustained CPDL and develop communities of practice to continue to sharing of best practice, e.g. establishment of SLE for Oracy and Teacher hubs. The development of a tool to enable progress in oracy to be identified and targets set for pupils development, such as the

Plymouth Oracy matrix would be a valuable tool for teachers to use to support the education programme.

12. Barriers

12.1. The success of the CPDL model in the Plymouth Oracy project was directly linked to the funding for the project through the school Self Improvement Fund which enabled SLE and NLE to provide ongoing support to schools beyond the CPD sessions, a barrier to this is the financial pressure schools are under and freeing up resource to oracy development. A solution could be to use the current review of ITT framework and embed the development of Oracy skills and pedagogies for teachers into initial teacher education programme and the Early career framework.

12.2. The accountability of schools has just undergone significant review (OFSTED 2019) and the focus on intent, implementation and impact affords schools a new freedom to design a curriculum that meets the needs of their learners with less of a focus on data as a proving mechanism. A risk would be to add another key measure that might result in narrowing the curriculum just as schools are looking to approach curriculum design more innovatively.

12.3. Being very mindful of the recent moves forward in addressing teacher workload particularly relating to assessment and data, it is important that any way of assessing oracy does not add a new layer of complexity to teacher workloads, therefore the most appropriate form of assessment of oracy skills should be teacher led formative assessment, in addition the move to an a exam based test of memory at GCSE and A level does not encourage oracy development nor assess it, an opportunity to review approaches to assessment that might include a wider variety of summative assessment forms, including presentations, in the secondary phase would better incorporate oracy and other employability or preparation for higher education learning skills.

13. References

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