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'

Wendy Lee
Full name:

Submitted in a Personal Capacity
School or Organisation:

Speech and Language Consultant
Role:

Written evidence:

Summary
- Many children have poor language – 7.6% of children have a developmental language disorder. 50% of children in areas of disadvantage have language difficulties. Currently these children are under identified and therefore do not have the necessary oral language support.
- The impact of poor language for any child can be far reaching; the impact for the most vulnerable in our society is particularly hard hitting in the short and long term
- Poor language impacts on academic attainment, wellbeing, long term life chances and employability. Oracy education can provide support for oral language skills.
- A high quality inclusive approach to Oracy can support metacognitive skills, enable learning and support social and emotional development of all children
- Teachers should be given high quality evidence based professional development in Oracy at ITT and beyond
- Implementation should be based on pupil, school and community; one size is unlikely to fit all
- Inclusion should be at the heart of any Oracy approach; the majority of children with SEN have language difficulties
- Assessment of Oracy is important though challenging; careful thought by academics and experts in the field will be needed to do this well.
- Changes can happen from the ground up, though policy change and a systemic approach that shifts the focus of accountability would make the process easier for educators and lead to a more consistent approach

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?**
   - There are interconnected high stakes in terms of children's outcomes and school accountability that are focused mainly on reading and writing, leaving less space and time for oracy.
   - A packed curriculum – practitioners have reported "there is no time for conversation" whilst I have been involved in supporting schools and working with staff during professional development sessions
   - Teachers can be afraid to focus on spoken language
     - It is difficult to measure
     - It leaves no evidence / paper trail
     - Many teachers don't fully understand the power of language to impact on reading and writing
     - There is a huge lack of awareness of children with language needs and continued under identification – literacy and behaviour are identified often when language needs are at the foundation
   - There continues to be a lack of understanding at the highest levels around the importance of spoken language for learning; there remains confusion around the difference between teaching oral language skills and a dialogic approach to teaching, which doesn't help.
   - Despite a tacit recognition of the importance of communication for life, there is no reflection of this in the curriculum or wider education (though this is often not the case in public school education where pupils are encouraged and supported in this area)

2. **What are the consequences if children and young people do not receive oracy education?**
   - For some, bright, able, outgoing children with lots of spoken language experience at home, limited impact.
   - For the majority, lack of knowledge, skills and confidence in using language for learning and life.
   - For more introverted children, missed opportunities and potential impact on learning and life choices
   - For the most vulnerable children in our society, impact on learning outcomes, mental health, cognition, emotional and social development. Ultimately, impact on the cycle social deprivation and poverty. Potential impact on life choices – 60% of children in the youth justice system have limited language

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)?**

- In the early years – important foundation for learning / literacy and wellbeing / social and emotional development.
- In primary schools; as in early years, plus good Oracy teaching will include metalinguistic / metacognitive skills and comprehension monitoring, supporting all aspects of learning. More sophisticated use of language for higher order thinking and reasoning. Development of collaborative practice and problem solving between children.
- In secondary; as in earlier phases, plus support for the huge social changes in secondary school, building confidence and supporting young people to have a voice. Enabling understanding of more complex concepts and processes reflective of secondary phase education.
- Children in areas of disadvantage are at high risk of poor language; Oracy education can be the only opportunity they have to develop these skills. Around 50% of children in areas of disadvantage have poor language; an inclusive Oracy education can scaffold their Oracy skills and support development. For some children, school is the only opportunity for these skills to be developed. Guidance around register and how to use language in different contexts can be crucial to the life chances of these children.
- Children with SLCN / SEN are hugely under identified in our schools. This is often due to a lack of knowledge or understanding in class teachers, which ultimately is due to no focus on language or child development more broadly in their ITT or continuous professional development; a focus on Oracy education, including building expertise of practitioners, should mean better knowledge, leading to better identification. It should also mean more skilled practitioners who can ensure language is not a barrier to learning for these children. More accurate identification should also allow for more accurate focusing of intervention and support – ie support for language, rather than for the "symptoms" of poor language, such as behaviour or literacy.https://www.bercow10yearson.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/337644-ICAN-Bercow-Report-WEB.pdf https://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/media/31961/tct_genadrift.pdf
- http://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/media/540327/tct_talkingaboutageneration_report_online.pdf

4. **How can it help deliver the wider curriculum at school?**
   - Spoken language is the vehicle for all teaching
   - Ensuring children have the necessary language for different subject areas can only enhance the curriculum and wider curriculum

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?**
   - The majority of job descriptions include some reference to communication, teamwork, problem solving etc. Oracy is at the heart of these skills. Businesses regularly highlight the lack of "soft skills" in their workforce, of which spoken language is the core. http://licensing.ican.org.uk/sites/licensing.ican.org.uk/files/pdfs/ICT8_Skills_for_work_Skills_for_life.pdf

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?**
   - Children and young people value spoken language and teachers who support these skills https://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/media/13556/childrens_consultation_final.pdf

7. **What is the value and impact of oracy education in relation to other key agendas such as social mobility and wellbeing/ mental health?**
   - There is a wide range of evidence supporting the importance of spoken language for social mobility and for wellbeing. The EIF produced a detailed evidenced report highlighting the importance of language as a child wellbeing indicator https://www.eif.org.uk/files/pdf/language-child-wellbeing-indicator.pdf
   - There is also evidence dating back more than 25 years around the prevalence and impact of poor language for children living in poverty. The EEF have produced an evidenced report highlighting how spoken language can support these children in the early years. https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/public/files/Law_et_al_Early_Language_Development_final.pdf

- EEF guidance around supporting literacy at all phases highlights the importance of spoken language

Provision and access

1. **What should high quality oracy education look like?**
   - Explicit high quality teaching of spoken language, collaborative talk and metacognitive skills
   - High quality following evidence from Oracy experts
   - Inclusive, ensuring children with poor language due to life experiences and language difficulties due to neurological or biological difficulties are identified and included
   - Delivered by practitioners with a high level of knowledge and skills
   - Based on children's abilities and scaffolded

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?**
   - Yes, this is the nature of all our work. We have data and outcomes measures as well as detailed information about our approaches and outcomes
   - Our focus is children with poor language; this is sometimes children with identified SLCN, often children with unidentified SLCN. Often our work is in areas of deprivation where we find high numbers of children with language difficulties
   - We encourage a whole school approach, though this can take time for schools to take on board; change is challenging to make and maintain, especially in a system that does not support the areas of change being attempted

3. **What are the views of teachers, school leaders and educational bodies regarding the current provision of oracy education?**
   - In our experience, mixed.
   - We see a lack of understanding, some schools with high quality provision and others who are keen to take this approach and value Oracy.
   - We also see schools who do not value or acknowledge the importance of spoken language, as well as teaching staff and leaders who feel they cannot prioritise Oracy in a busy accountability led system.

4. **Where can we identify good practice and can you give examples?**
   - Very happy to share data and examples of good practice if useful

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?**
   - A system that doesn't value it
   - A lack of understanding in some senior leaders
   - Budget – often schools will prioritise tight budgets and spend on other areas seen as more of a priority
   - In our experience, children with special needs can be excluded from Oracy approaches; schools have to be very skilled in knowing how best to ensure children with very limited language skills can access and thrive in an Oracy based curriculum. This can apply to children in areas of disadvantage where children with low language levels are not necessarily given the right level of support / approaches / strategies to effectively access Oracy education

Barriers

1. **What are the barriers that teachers face in providing quality oracy education, within the education system and beyond?**
   - The majority of teachers recognise the importance of spoken language, however many feel under huge pressure to tick accountability boxes, often against their better professional judgement

- There are currently no incentives for teachers or senior leaders to focus on Oracy, other than their intrinsic belief that it is the right thing to do for the children
- Teaching Oracy well requires a high level of expertise; it is easy for teachers to get it wrong, especially if they have not had appropriate professional development.
- There is a lack of understanding in the education sector as a whole that leads some people at all levels to believe that Oracy teaching is an easy option and something that doesn't work

2. **What support do teachers need to improve the delivery of oracy education?**
   - More support for schools to implement approaches that work for them, their children and their communities – one size does not necessarily fit all.
   - High quality professional development at ITT and CPD
   - A system that rewards a focus on supporting children's Oracy
   - An acknowledged systemic change in the curriculum to include Oracy
   - An evidence based approach

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?**
   - Many senior leaders are convinced by positive outcomes in other schools, positive messages from peers
   - Greater focus on the evidence base, particularly how to translate this into practice in a way that works for each school
   - Systemic change
   - More effective ways for teachers to see and understand positive changes in Oracy skills of their children

4. **What is the role of government and other bodies in creating greater incentives and how can this be realised?**
   - They need to value Oracy skills and demonstrate this with policy change and support for translation of policy and evidence into practice
   - Where the government have believed in a particular approach (e.g. phonics teaching), it has been implemented. Although there are clear challenges with the way in which this has happened, it does demonstrate the ability of a government to affect change where they hold strong views.

5. **What is the role of assessment in increasing provision of oracy education? What is the most appropriate form of assessment of oracy skills?**
   - It is important that teachers understand the components of Oracy skills; currently this is generally not the case.
   - It is possible to assess spoken language – speech and language therapists do this all the time, gaining good insight into the language of children with disordered speech and language.
   - It is possible to assess components of language such as vocabulary, narrative, receptive language etc, all of which are strong indicators for children's educational outcomes. Skills such as those that make up exploratory talk can also be assessed, but should be done with care and caveats that reflect the complexity of different situations, temporal issues and contexts.
   - Any assessments need to have the ultimate aim of ensuring we capture children's spoken language abilities and provide us with a basis to scaffold learning from that point. Summative assessments of Oracy are probably not a great idea, unless research and investment is made to ensure they can be delivered accurately and with benefit to the children

6. **Are the speaking and listening elements of the current curriculum sufficient in order to deliver high quality oracy education?**
   - No. They are too vague. They do not highlight important components of Oracy in a way that can support teachers to teach these skills. They give no indication of the difference we might expect in the Oracy skills and development in children of different ages and stages.