

## APPG Oracy Submission

Kate Irvine. Network Lead Teacher, Bristol Early Years

[Kate.irvine@bristol-schools.uk](mailto:Kate.irvine@bristol-schools.uk) [kate.irvine161@btinternet.com](mailto:kate.irvine161@btinternet.com)

### Value and impact

1. 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?  
***The high-stakes accountability system in English education right down to the reception year for 4&5 year olds measures mathematics and literacy means that status of C&L is lowered compared to Literacy and Maths.***  
***Although communication & language is included, it is not given priority but sits with equal weight against 12 other Early Learning Goals of the Early Years Profile.***  
***Many head teachers of schools and school improvement advisors have little or no experience of child development and learning and there is a tendency to focus on more visible 'work' in books that promote and prioritise the language upon which all learning is predicated.***
  - ***349 teachers found that only 27% had received training around speech, language and communication and 81% felt they would benefit from more training on this issue. (Communication Trust )***
2. What are the consequences if children and young people do not receive oracy education?  
***Low self-esteem and poor mental health***  
***Poor educational outcomes and lower economic opportunities***  
***Poor economic opportunities & outcomes – education, work and participation***
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)?
  - i) ***In EYFS communication and language and oracy are pivotal to learning to development of social and emotional well-being as well as learning to read, to understanding the teaching and curriculum, social and emotional development. It should be prioritised.***
  - ii) ***Disadvantaged pupils are more likely to have circumstances which limited their language development.***  
***Pupils with EAL and SEND may often also be disadvantaged in the early years of education in accessing the curriculum and required augmented or alternative provision to make good progress.***
4. How can it help deliver the wider curriculum at school?  
***In the early years learning across all areas is dependent on language development, attention, listening and speaking (or alternative forms of expression).***

***Teachers need better understanding of language development and how to deliver the curriculum in ways that meets children's developmental stages of attention and understanding.***

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?

- ***In the UK, over 1 million children and young people – that's 2 – 3 in every UK classroom – have some form of long term and persistent speech, language and communication difficulty.***
- ***The first three years of life are recognised as the most intensive period for acquiring speech and language skills.***
- ***The average four-year-old will reportedly have a receptive vocabulary of 8,000 words and an expressive vocabulary of 2,300 words.***
  - ***At least 60% of young people in young offender institutions have communication difficulties***

(Communication Trust)

6. What do children and young people at school and entering employment want to be able to access, what skills do they want to leave school with?

N/A

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

***Two thirds of 7 -14 year olds with serious behaviour problems have language impairment. At least 60% of young people in young offender institutions have communication difficulties.***

***When language difficulties are resolved by the age of 5 and a half, students are more likely to go on to develop good reading and spelling skills. This good performance continues throughout their school careers and they pass as many exams on leaving school as children without a history of speech, language and communication difficulties.***

(Communication Trust)

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?

***Confidence to have a voice***

***Self-esteem and positive mental health***

***Access to support services and wider participation in society and education***

**Provision and access**

1. What should high quality oracy education look like?

***In the early years high quality provision should reflect the research on how children develop language:***

**Adult-child conversations are robustly associated with healthy language development. (Zimmerman et al 2009)**

**In particular, guided play during which adults scaffold child-initiated learning seems ideal for developing language skills. Based on this evidence, they argue that understanding the efficacy of play for learning requires paying careful attention to the type of play involved and to its results. (Skolnick Weiseberg et al 2013)**

#### **Hassinger-Das et al 2011: Six Principles of Language Development**

- **Frequency** - children learn what they hear the most
- **Interest** – children learn words for things that interest them
- **Contingency** – **Interactive & responsive** environments build language
- **Meaningfulness** – children learn best in **meaningful contexts**
- **Diversity** – children need lots of **different examples** of words
- **Reciprocity** – vocabulary, grammar & narrative develop through exchange, discourse and **organic conversations**

**This means that children aged birth to 7 yrs should be actively experiencing their word and being supported by high quality interactions from skilled adults and a learning environment that enables them to meaningfully practice and embed vocabulary and expressing their ideas.**

**Children should not be spending long periods of time in passive, adult-talk-led activities where they cannot use their innate sensory processing needed to learn well. Formal teaching of phonics before communication and language is developed will be shallow and wasted learning.**

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?

**In Bristol we have several examples of nurseries and school settings that are using a targeted approach with quality interactions practice to drive improvement in language and communication and literacy.**

**There are also schools following the Voice 21 programme from YR upwards which have increased their GLD measure since starting the programme.**

**There are Bristol settings which are part of the DfE funded Changing the Conversation on Language initiative.**

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

**My experience of working with leaders in over 20 schools is that there is a growing awareness of the importance of oracy. However, the current school accountability situation means that they have to prioritise short term formal academic gains for phonics tests and SATs etc, over oracy, and oracy remains a significant area for development.**

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

**There are schools in Bristol prioritising communication and language and providing training in quality interactions that support language development.**

*There are also schools who are following the Voice 21 programme.*

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?

***Poor language and communication development is directly correlated with poverty and deprivation.***

- ***Local government cuts have caused huge reduction in numbers of children's centres and Sure Start services – for example my children's centre used to run a evidenced-based and well researched successful language intervention called Early Words Together throughout the year as well as short-course interventions run by Speech & Language therapists called Talking Tips - Now there is no funding to run any of them. Families in need and families in poverty do not have any access to services to support them how to support language.***
- ***Isolated deprived communities with inadequate & expensive public transport links makes it very difficult for families to access services and language-enriching experiences outside of their communities.***
- ***Few early years (YR) & Key stage 1 teachers in schools have had any training on language development at all which means that their provision for language is often not adequate***
- ***Oral language is not assessed as part of the KS1 or KS2 curriculum and due to the increased academic standards imposed on younger children there is no longer time in the curriculum to support it. This is particularly acute issue with younger children 4 – 7 years in UK schools who have to follow an academic curriculum unlike their counterparts in most of Europe where under 7s have an early-years curriculum focussed on Language and social and emotional development. The larger gaps for summer born children are no surprise***

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

***Local and regional needs should be looked at specifically. E.g more support for families with EAL may be needed in some areas, where access to speech & language support services, or specific projects in schools may be required in others.***

### **Barriers**

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

***High stakes accountability and the pressure through performance related pay and school leadership that has little understanding of early language development, creates a situation where support for oracy and language is not prioritised.***

***Initial Teacher Training course do not include enough on child development and language development in particular.***

***The Ofsted inspection framework does not recognise the importance of language and oracy in learning, focussing instead mainly on phonics.***

*The DfE has proposed changes to the statutory assessment of reception year 4 – 5 yr old that has completely and inaccurately changed the way that language and oracy is framed.*

*Most worryingly, the DfE proposals have actually removed receptive developmental stages of communication & language of Attention (from listening and attention) and also Understanding, reducing communication development to just listening to adults and speaking.*

*The new Ofsted frameworks ignore the academic research on language development and encourage schools to focus on later developmental aspects of learning, particularly phonics at the expense of language through the assessment and accountability systems.*

2. What support do teachers need to improve the delivery of oracy education?  
*Teachers need research-informed training on language development and oracy. Teachers need an accountability system that acknowledges and measures the right thing – development of attention skills, development of understanding and meaningful, conversational experiences with children.*
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?  
*Current accountability systems fail to value or capture language development or oracy. The pressure in the system for literacy, phonics and maths detracts from the importance of oracy, therefore early years teachers & KS1 teachers in particular need to have systems that recognise and reward language development and interaction- based teaching.*
4. What is the role of government and other bodies in creating greater incentives and how can this be realised?  
*Government and its bodies for schools' accountability and inspection should create and support systems that have direct impact on language development and oracy. In the early years and through primary school these should prioritise language and oral communication above early academic skills which, whilst appearing impressive to non-educators, are in fact shallow learning that minimise opportunity for oracy development.*
5. What is the role of assessment in increasing provision of oracy education? What is the most appropriate form of assessment of oracy skills?  
*In the early years' assessment of children's oracy can only be done through meaningful interactions by skilled and trained teachers across time.*
6. Are the speaking and listening elements of the current curriculum sufficient in order to deliver high quality oracy education?  
*No. The removal of oral assessment from the national curriculum has created a devaluing of time for oracy in the curriculum to make room for the higher levels of academic performance imposed by the DfE. The New proposed Early Learning Goals do not even include the key developmental strands of language - attention and understanding - within the communication and*

***language assessment. This is a catastrophic oversight which will damage a generation of 4 and 5 year old's oracy development.***

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

***There needs to be accountability for the right thing. To paraphrase Einstein:***

***“Not everything that counts can be measured and not everything that can be measured is valuable.”***

***Assessment and accountability measures and systems need to look at the key foundations of positive outcomes not short-term reductive measures that simply give an illusion of progress.***

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

- ***Voice 21 schools in London & around the country***
- ***In Bristol I have worked with schools and nurseries on school / nursery improvement deployments tackling improvement in EYFS through targeted interactions & reciprocal principles of language development to support language and cognitive skills, not simply academic cramming with positive outcomes.***
- ***The In the Moment Planning approach in EYFS specifically supports language development in under 5s***
- ***Scandinavian pedagogies are designed to support quality early language and formal learning does not start until the age of 6 /7.***