

## 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](mailto:inquiry@oracyappg.org.uk) with the subject line of 'Oracy APPG inquiry'

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Nicky Pear

Full name:

Cubitt Town Junior School/Tower Hamlets Oracy Hub

School or Organisation:

Assistant Headteacher and Oracy Lead

Role:

Written evidence:

Please see below for my written evidence. All of the views stated are my own and are based on my experience at Cubitt Town Junior School and the Tower Hamlets Oracy Hub. At Cubitt Town, we have placed oracy at the centre of our curriculum and spent the last year developing a whole-school approach. This year, I have helped to develop a hub of schools working together in Tower Hamlets to improve the provision of oracy education across the borough.

I work in a primary school setting and my evidence therefore only relates to oracy in primary schools. I have answered n/a where I feel I have nothing of worth to contribute.

I have split my evidence into the three sub-headings suggested in your guidance. I would be happy to provide further evidence orally if it were deemed helpful.

## **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?**

I believe that what holds a number of schools back is the fact that oracy as a discipline is not assessed in the same way that other subjects are. When recruiting schools to participate in the Tower Hamlets Oracy Hub, the argument that managed to convince most school leaders to take part was that there is evidence of a link between oracy education and academic outcomes. School leaders, who face the twin challenges of maintaining high results at the end of KS2 and being ready for Ofsted, are understandably wary of making changes that may detract from these aims. For a whole host of reasons, I believe that spoken language skills should be given the same status as reading and writing – this is particularly important for children who do not have a good model of spoken language at home. In these circumstances, if we do not provide it at school, they may simply not get it.

- 2. What are the consequences if children and young people do not receive oracy education?**

I think children who are not taught at home or at school how to effectively verbally communicate are at a huge disadvantage when it comes to applying for jobs and universities, as well as participating meaningfully in society.

Oracy education can have a direct impact on children's confidence. Pupil voice surveys of 350 children in our school point to a dramatic increase in confidence during our first year of teaching oracy, with a significant jump in the percentage of children who identify as 'very' or 'extremely' confident in speaking to partners, in front of the class and in assemblies (I could provide figures from this survey if useful).

- 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)?**

The points made above are particularly pertinent for children from deprived backgrounds who face a whole range of barriers to success already. These are compounded if they are behind their peers in terms of spoken language skills. As such, the case for oracy is intrinsically linked to a belief in education as a driver for social mobility and equality of opportunity.

- 4. How can it help deliver the wider curriculum at school?**

In our school, oracy is now used across the curriculum with spoken outcomes in all lessons. We are beginning to see the impact that carefully planned opportunities for talk can complement outcomes in maths (especially with mathematical reasoning) as well as knowledge retention and vocabulary acquisition in the humanities.

- 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?**

n/a

- 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?**

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?**

In our school we our work on oracy is linked with a secondary drive looking into children's wellbeing. We have a teacher carrying out an action research project looking at the link between oracy education and children's mental health. I would happily report back on her research at the end of the academic year, or any preliminary findings in Spring 2020.

- 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**

n/a

## **Provision and Access**

- 1. What should high quality oracy education look like?**

We believe that oracy education should not be an 'add-on' but rather something that permeates the entire curriculum. Talk outcomes should be scaffolded with the same planning and precision as reading, writing and maths, so that children of all abilities are able to use their voice. Teachers should assess their children's abilities and needs with regards to spoken language skills and use a range of assessment for learning strategies to aid progress. Children should also be made aware of their own personal targets and given regular feedback on how to improve their spoken language skills.

- 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?**

n/a

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

From personal experience in Tower Hamlets, there is a growing desire to embed oracy within curriculums. In setting up an oracy hub of schools to share practice and train teachers to become oracy leads, we have been inundated with schools wanting to sign up. We had to limit the hub to 45 participants, but could have had many more. There seems to be a growing consensus that oracy (in our particular context) could be the missing link in many schools.

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

Examples of good practice are most evident in classrooms that develop a culture of oracy. In two of our Year 6 classrooms for instance, the teachers play the role of facilitator in many lessons and the children are trained to use their voices effectively in a range of contexts. The oracy work has had a direct impact in these classrooms on reasoning skills, writing outcomes and overall confidence.

**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?**

(see answer above re children from deprived backgrounds)

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

n/a

## **Barriers**

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

- Already full curriculums
- Lack of knowledge and training in the subject
- Unsupportive leaders
- Schools priorities being linked to subjects in statutory tests

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

Teachers need to be well trained in the theory and practice of oracy education. They also need to be given the time and space to implement this within their classroom. Furthermore, I think for oracy to be successful, a whole-school approach is required, with support from the leadership team. The success at our school has been reliant on this 'buy-in' from all staff and the raised status of oracy in the classroom, the corridor and the playground.

**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?**

Little if any statutory accountability at primary school level. I believe incentive comes from persuading teachers of the value of teaching spoken language skills and training them well to provide oracy outcomes across the curriculum. A statutory test in spoken language skills would certainly raise the profile and incentive to teach oracy. However, it could also risk narrowing its scope and lead to an 'exam-focused' form of oracy.

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

I think what this APPG is doing is exactly the right approach. Talk to practitioners and consult them at every step of the way. Including oracy within the national curriculum would be a great start, alongside expert guidance given that it is a relatively new idea for many school leaders.

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

I would advise against a narrow test for primary aged children for the reasons explained above. However, if a formative teacher assessment of children's oracy skills could be developed this could be helpful. This would have to look at expectations for oracy skills at different ages. If this were too onerous and had too negative an impact on teacher workload however, it could also have the opposite effect.

**6. Are the speaking and listening elements of the current curriculum sufficient in order to deliver high quality oracy education?**

No

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

I think that to raise the profile of oracy by including it in the national curriculum would be beneficial. I also think that it would be advisable to not be too prescriptive, and focus on providing a broad framework, ideas and support as opposed to a narrow set of testable outcomes.

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

n/a