

1:

Oracy should be placed at the forefront of education , its status should be above that of reading and writing.

All teachers know that, in-order to be able to read and write with accuracy, understanding, and clarity, we must be exposed to a wide range of high level vocabulary; the initial manner in which we all receive language is orally. This begins at birth.

It is a sad but true reality that many of our young children are not exposed to this at home. There is a deficit that is difficult to address once children are at school where the focus on the more measurable subjects. Oral language is more difficult to data log and thus of less importance in a system that insists on the importance of measuring data.

Because of the emphasis on measurable data, teachers and schools are forced to limit 'talking time' in-order to focus on the learning that produces data outcomes, for which both children and staff are measured against.

Allowing children time to talk allows all children the opportunity to demonstrate knowledge, ideas, and depth of thought. In our teaching experience this can be the only opportunity that some children may have to 'shine'. The ability for conceptual thought bares no relation to a child's ability to write a subjunctive clause or complete an algebraic equation. These children , able to share thoughts and ideas regardless of there level of measurable skills are excluded from learning if not given time to articulate their thinking, to acquire the skills to debate and discuss, to explore ideas and learn to understand themselves, others and the world around them. Children are capable of this at a very early age. If we don't give children the language, they will never understand the language or be able to use it for themselves.

2:

Without high levels of oracy, there is a barrier to achievement which hinders social mobility.

If children lack a wide range and high levels of language, the need to convey meaning is frustrating and can lead to aggressive behaviours; our behaviours become our language.

Without high levels of Oracy our ability to communicate on multiple levels with a myriad of people is lessened; we are excluded from parts of society.

If children have little Oracy they are vulnerable, they are less likely to access the curriculum, less likely to access higher level learning, their life chances may have been reduced.

3:

When children are given time and space to talk they feel valued and respected, they feel confidently able to share thoughts and ideas knowing that they will be listened to. This is vital in all stages of life, for all children, everywhere, regardless of socio-economic background. Children of all ages need to be able to express fears, interests and needs easily. If children are unable to tell adults what 'hurts' they are vulnerable and excluded; if we are unable to understand a child's fear they will become fearful and vulnerable and excluded. There is a misconception that differentiating for some children means 'dumbing down'

4: Oracy allows all children access to the curriculum. It is an equaliser , a leveller. Being able to ask questions , explore ideas join discussions is open to all children as long as they have good oracy skills. You don't have to be a high achieving pupil to access the curriculum through oracy and once the door is open children's self esteem and confidence grow and , as a result, their engagement with the learning process deepens. For true social mobility to be realised all children must be engaged in education and good oracy skills deliver this

5: Oracy is the vital ingredient in the social mobility dream . Oracy is the key that opens the door to learning. It allows children to ask questions, to be curious, , to explore their own and others ideas and assumptions. Children who have high oracy skills will interview well, will find it easier to mix with a range of people. They will enter a board room, a staff room and be able to engage in meaningful dialogue . As a business we know that a candidate's ability to articulate their thoughts

6:

Children need to be able to leave school with high levels of Oracy so that they are able to understand and listen respectfully to others , and articulate themselves at multiple levels knowing that they will be listened to. Children also need a strong set of executive functioning skills and this will ensure they are able to access learning, regulate themselves, organise themselves, prioritise, and adapt without stress or confusion.

7:

Mental Health/well-being: The confidence to express emotions and feelings is vital for children's well-being and thus mental health.

If a child 'feels' well, they will think well and learn well.

Anxiety and fear produce cortisol and disconnects the thinking brain - thus it is virtually impossible to learn in an anxiety state.

In-order to 'feel' well we must be able to share our feelings and anxieties in a space that gives us time to do so; it is extremely vital however that the sharing is in a forum in which all views, emotions and needs are respected and valued. If the space allows for humiliation and judgement then a child is silenced and excluded. Children need to know that every emotion is valuable, this includes negative emotions; this ability to share, to co-regulate and then self-regulate leads to emotionally resilient, open-minded individuals who understand themselves and can begin to understand others; this in turn leads to tolerance, empathy and respect. These are key characteristics that lead to harmony in a diverse society.

Social mobility: With language and dialogues we are heard and we are able to listen; conversation can be a 'leveller' as we come to realise that more joins us than divides us. All socio-economic groups will be able to work together with shared levels of language

8:

A lack of language and an inability to articulate is divisive and exclusive; sections of society feel isolated and unheard. Those made to feel 'voiceless' feel dismissed and irrelevant by those who use high-levels of language and words which aren't fully understood.

Provision and Access

1:

Oracy education should be based on the development of skills that are used for debate and discussion - such as the skills developed and formed by using a philosophical approach to teaching and learning

2:

Within our settings we train staff to use a variety of questions that prompt thinking and discussion. We focus on skill development through games and this runs throughout our entire setting. We also have focused philosophy time where we explore concepts

3:

Teachers and schools, as stated previously feel unable to give children time to talk and share knowledge. Especially knowledge and information not directly related to the 'test'. We, at Dandelion however, celebrate discussion and the sharing of ideas, feelings and knowledge

4:

Dandelion! Our TED talk discusses our approach (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2grwGTu9YfQ&t=4s>). OFSTED awarded us outstanding in all areas. Our focus / ethos is very much based on giving children a voice. Our staff are trained to be a thesaurus for the children, we never 'dumb down' language eg we call parts of the body by their proper name so a vulva is a vulva not a 'daisy' or 'foo foo' etc. This empowers children and makes them able to tell us when something hurts / has been

hurt etc. All staff carry emotion cards so children have a rich language with which to discuss their emotions. Philosophy sessions at lunch time teach children that they have a right to articulate their ideas. They learn that they can have a different idea from their peers and still be friends. At Dandelion our behaviour scripts are very tight so children own them / use them. They use language to manage their own disputes. At Dandelion there are very few physical incidents between children as they use oracy for resolution.

5:

There are several factors that create unequal access to Oracy education.

***Early Years Funding:** Nurseries in particular are underfunded. There is a huge shortfall between government funding and actual costs. This is varied across the country dependent on LEAs and top-slicing. This underfunding leads to cuts in ratios, meaning that practitioners have less time to give to children, listening to them and speaking with them. This has a knock on affect as settings have slashed training budgets and are unable to offer fair pay that attracts highly qualified practitioners/teachers.

***School budget cuts:** Schools have reduced the number of support staff due to budget shortfalls- again, this means that fewer children are spoke to and heard

***SEND:** There is inadequate funding available for children with SEND and difficulty in accessing small amounts of SEND funding available - children who may be in the most need or oral support are not receiving the support most needed

*** Data pressures:** All settings are faced with pressure to measure children and assess them at all educational levels - this has led to a polarisation of teaching , the measurable elements being highly prioritised

*** Oracy levels of the workforce:** Due to funding shortages Early Years settings are unable to attract staff with high levels of qualifications, or offer training packages that ensure high level teaching and learning take place

*** High-quality early years learning is threatened continually by sustainability, and Oracy MUST be a priority in the Early Years if we are to achieve high levels of Oracy for all children**

6:

From region to region we are all familiar with accents and colloquialisms. It is a characteristic that must be preserved - we need high levels of Oracy and this means that children have a wide range of vocabulary and thus an understanding of terms. At Dandelion we explain the meaning of colloquialism and draw attention to differing pronunciations - we are able to do this as we have a range of staff from differing parts of the country.

Barriers:

1:

As already stated, we must move the focus away from the more measurable elements of the curriculum and allow teachers the freedom to give children time to think, talk and share. We no longer need 'workers' who sit in rows silently performing tasks, we need articulate, confident, tolerate adults who can problem solve and are emotionally resilient - these characteristics need high levels of Oracy and the time and space in which to develop them

2:

Support needs to be top down.

The government need to ease data and assessment pressure and give teachers the time and resources (staff, funding, and access to staff training for ALL teaching staff) in which to deliver an Oracy programme. Staff need to be trained in the development of language, potential speech and language barriers and how to address these. Acknowledging the value of Oracy is key: To be able to read and write articulate, complex sentences we must first be able to speak in articulate, complex sentences.

3:

Accountability for Oracy doesn't exist, though in the Early Years there is a greater focus on Communication and language, this doesn't extend deeply beyond that.

4:

The government need to address the pressures placed on school and direct funding to the Early Years sector where children are learning the foundation skills needed to meet their potential

5:

Assessment:

Assessment can be 'discreet'. Children should not know we are assessing them as this will directly impact on the process.

Timed observations that record language used and understanding MUST be carried out by trained , skilled staff. At Dandelion we call our staff teachers (many are ex primary school teachers) because we believe that , in the early years, we need to reflect the importance of the job and the need for high quality staff with appropriate qualifications and levels of professionalism

6:

No, because time is not sufficient to give children time to think and respond. It is quicker to 'tell' children what to think so that the teachers can get to the elements that will be measured and for which they and children will be judged against

7:

Less prescriptive, but a programme against which teachers COULD measure with a view to addressing need over inadequacy would be valuable.

8:Dandelion ! Please see section 2 number 4 ! Our ethos is entirely focused on oracy built on a foundation of philosophy, respectful communication BETWEEN adults and children, children and children and adults and adults, emotional literacy and HIGH levels communication and language.

Dandelion website: <https://dandelionsnorfolk.com>