

Response To The Oracy All-party Parliamentary Groups (Appg) Speak For Change Inquiry

Who we are:

The Fair Education Alliance is a coalition of approximately 200 of the UK's leading organisations¹ from business, education and the third sector. These organisations have come together to create a fair and equitable education system, ending the persistent achievement gap between young people from the poorest communities and their wealthier peers.

In response to the Oracy All Party Parliamentary Group Speak for Change Inquiry, the Fair Education Alliance has brought together members and stakeholders from across the education sector to provide key recommendations to:

- a) Help improve outcomes for children from disadvantaged backgrounds; and
- b) Tackle the long standing inequalities in education

We have set out 4 key areas for change in oracy provision which our 200 organisations collectively believe would create an education system which meets the needs of the most disadvantaged young people.

Case for change:

Although high-attaining pupils in England perform very well when looked at in comparison to international standards, as a nation we continue to face challenges around improving low performance. This is even more pressing as low performance in education is highly correlated with persistent disadvantage, including poverty, special educational needs and other characteristics of vulnerability.²

In 2019, the most persistently disadvantaged children (on free school meals for more than 80% of their school life) were on average 22 months behind their more advantaged peers - this gap has not improved since 2011.³ What is more, data shows that the overall attainment gap between disadvantaged young people and their more advantaged peers has stopped closing for the first time in a decade and has started to widen as more children have fallen into deeper poverty and more persistent disadvantage.

¹Fair Education Alliance. (n.d.). *Our Members*. [online] Available at: <https://www.faireducation.org.uk/alliance-members> [Accessed 21 Sep. 2020].

²Hutchinson, J., Reader, M. and Akhal, A. (2020). *Education in England Annual Report*. [online] Education Policy Institute. Available at: https://static1.squarespace.com/static/543e665de4b0fbb2b140b291/t/5f3f9a353e183776e6f0cb4a/1598003777133/2020_ReportCard_FEA.pdf.

³Ibid.

Concurrently, numerous studies show that the level of language development of children who are persistently disadvantaged, in their first term of nursery school, is on average lower than their more advantaged peers and lower than their own non-verbal cognitive abilities.⁴ Whilst we would expect their language development to improve as they are exposed to a wider range of language and language modelling in the classroom and encouragement to share their non-verbal thoughts, this is often not the case. Data shows that these gaps in language development between disadvantaged young people and their more advantaged peers tend to widen rather than narrow as children progress through school.⁵ The widening of this gap indicates that many children, particularly those that are most persistently disadvantaged, miss out on the benefits of oracy development when it is not explicitly taught, encouraged and embedded in the classroom from an early age.

But we have an opportunity to change this.

A child's ability to use spoken language has a profound effect on their attainment as well as their social and emotional wellbeing.⁶ Through impactful oracy teaching young people gain the confidence, self-belief and courage to speak in public and share their thoughts, intellect and creativity with the world in ways in which people will listen.⁷ Improving oracy education could therefore provide an immense opportunity to "level-up" and improve the outcomes of all children, particularly the most persistently disadvantaged.

As Robin Alexander, a British Educationalist and academic pointed out in 2012, the "educational consequences of social disadvantage can be compounded by children's difficulties in oral development and communication". However, oracy can also "be an effective means of re-engaging the disengaged and closing the overlapping gaps of equity and attainment."⁸ Yet since 2012 little has changed. The way that oracy is currently taught in schools is not consistent across all context or year groups, and is not embedded into everyday learning or the curriculum despite the fact that it could have a positive impact on children's development. There is also a lack of shared language when it comes to oracy, which has deep and long-lasting implications when young people leave school and go onto employment.

Importantly, we recognise that teachers are doing what they can, particularly in current circumstances to ensure that children are learning effectively.

However, with the uncertainty of what this year will look like in terms of education (factoring in catch-up, blended learning as areas continue to go into lockdown, and families making the decision

⁴ Waldfogel, J. and Washbrook, E. (2010) *Low Income and Early Cognitive Development in the UK*, London: Sutton Trust

⁵ Millard, W. and Menzies, L. (n.d.). *Voice 21 Oracy The State of Speaking in Our Schools*. [online] Available at: https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/2c80ff_c167ea8db0c845b887113b1c8a62ebef.pdf [Accessed 24 Sep. 2020].

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Alexander, R. (n.d.). *Improving Oracy and Classroom Talk in English Schools: Achievements and Challenges*. [online] Available at: <http://robinalexander.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/DfE-oracy-120220-Alexander-FINAL.pdf>.

to stay at home to shield), teachers' confidence in their ability to deliver Oracy education, and the support that they are receiving to deliver this has never been so important.

Teachers already understand and recognise oracy's importance in pupils' social and emotional development. 64% of Voice 21 survey respondents believe oracy contributes 'a great deal' to pupils' social development and 48% say the same regarding pupils' emotional development.⁹ As young people return to classrooms our focus has to be on re-engaging them, supporting them emotionally and socially and understanding what is needed with regards to their wellbeing.

Support for teachers will also be needed as we return to "normal", particularly in the initial phases of return. However, we do not want this to be a short-term intervention. Support for teachers is key to unlocking the potential of young people, and we believe that this should be factored into a long-term strategy that emphasises teachers value and places emphasis on a rounded, holistic education that serves all young people, not just the lucky few.

In recent years the Fair Education Alliance has been working with organisations across education, business and the third sector to put together a comprehensive plan to create a fairer and more equitable education system.

We have drawn on the expertise, evidence and experiences of our 200 members to create a clear consensus on what a fairer education system needs to look like. This is an education system that:

- gives all young people a rounded education, so that they develop skills, are looked after emotionally and physically, and can achieve academically no matter their personal circumstances;
- engages parents and communities of all backgrounds, so that education does not stop at the school gates;
- supports, incentivises and rewards teachers and leaders to enable all children to thrive – including incentives to work in more disadvantaged areas;
- gives all young people the knowledge, skills and awareness to succeed in life after school, whether in further education, higher education or employment.

This submission into the Speak for Change Inquiry covers 4 areas for improvements in Oracy education which align with the above vision.

⁹ Millard, W. and Menzies, L. (n.d.). *Voice 21 Oracy The State of Speaking in Our Schools*. [online] Available at: https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/2c80ff_c167ea8db0c845b887113b1c8a62ebef.pdf.

We are therefore calling for:

1. Oracy to be embedded into the National Curriculum
2. Teachers to be supported to prioritise oracy in classrooms
3. There to be a shared language between schools, employers and the wider world to talk about oracy
4. For Oracy to be a key factor when thinking of new approaches for post-16 and post-18 destinations, especially taking into consideration wellbeing and social and emotional learning

The recommendations we have outlined below are aimed at providing systemic change to enhance the outcomes of all young people, particularly the most persistently disadvantaged.

This session (including a summary of key points from breakout discussions) and the zoom recording is being submitted directly as evidence to the Inquiry as the Fair Education Alliance submission.

In this submission document you will find:

1. Key recommendations
2. A summary of key points from breakout sessions
3. List of attendees

Key Recommendations:

1. Oracy should be embedded into the National Curriculum

We are calling for the government to be more explicit in embedding Oracy provision into The National Curriculum, guidance documents and frameworks, particularly those that speak to wider personal development for children and young people.

Although we recognise that the National Curriculum does currently include some Oracy development, it only appears in specific places, often related to English. To improve Oracy provision for all young people, we believe that Oracy should be embedded across all subjects and all stages of the education system.

Once it has been embedded into the National Curriculum, more emphasis can then be placed on improving assessment for Oracy. Current assessment frameworks, especially in Primary, are guided towards written outcomes. Although this is important, it only speaks to one part of Oracy development. To ensure that all children and young people are receiving the full benefit of Oracy education, we need to be able to assess all Oracy skills effectively so that progress can be tracked. As with embedding Oracy provision, Oracy assessment and tracking should also be implemented across the entire National Curriculum, across all subjects and all stages of the education system.

2. Teachers should be supported to prioritise oracy in classrooms

We know that the attainment gap between disadvantaged young people and their more advantaged peers is not closing, and that Covid-19 is likely to have worsened the situation. However, according to the Education Endowment Foundation, Oracy intervention could be key to changing this. Their research on Oracy shows that pupils who participate in Oracy interventions on average make

approximately five months' additional progress over the course of a year.¹⁰ We therefore propose that teachers are supported to prioritise oracy in classrooms as part of catch-up and that it is given the same status in schools as written literacy and numeracy.

In order for this to happen, investment needs to be made in the ongoing professional development of educators not just now, but for the long-term. Teachers are key to improving the oracy skills of students. However, whilst some schools have oracy embedded in their school ethos and teachers are supported in prioritising this, what oracy looks like in schools varies greatly across the country.

Despite Voice 21's survey data showing that teachers emphasise oracy's importance in supporting pupils' development in a range of areas and report frequently using strategies to support oracy, over half of all teachers (57%) say they have not received any training in oracy in the last three years. Furthermore Voice 21 have found that more than half (53%) would not know where to go if they needed information about oracy.¹¹ In order for all teachers to be supported to prioritise oracy in their classrooms, teaching oracy needs to be embedded into ongoing professional development and whole school practices. This is crucial as not only do teachers model oracy every day in the classroom, but in order to help pupils learn effectively, they need to be able to support them in the development of their oracy skills.

3. There needs to be a shared language between schools, employers and the wider world to talk about oracy

Oracy has not been explicitly called out in the National Curriculum, guidance documents or frameworks. It has therefore not been given one clear definition or meaning which could be used by the sector. Although many organisations have done a lot of great work on oracy and making the skills related to oracy understandable, there is still not one shared language that is used to describe what we mean by oracy, across schools or into the wider world.

As called for in our Spending Review Submission we are continuing to call for the government to invest in capacity building across organisations and schools in order to support skills building, including additional training and support to join up schools and businesses.

¹⁰ educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk. (n.d.). *Oral language interventions | Toolkit Strand*. [online]

Available at:

<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/evidence-summaries/teaching-learning-toolkit/oral-language-interventions/>.

¹¹ Millard, W. and Menzies, L. (n.d.). *Voice 21 Oracy The State of Speaking in Our Schools*. [online] Available at: https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/2c80ff_c167ea8db0c845b887113b1c8a62ebef.pdf.

Evidence has shown that taking part in a wide range of activities can help young people to develop confidence, motivation, resilience and communication skills, leading to better academic outcomes. However, it is not good enough to rely on activities that take place outside of the school day to help build these skills.¹² In order to level-up educational outcomes across the UK there needs to be a systemic roll out of the Skills Builder framework across all schools in England.

This includes:

- **Funding for capacity building across Skills Builder partner organisations**

There are already 800 organisations in the Skills Builder partnership behind this and a huge opportunity to grow capacity. By supporting organisations who support building essential skills for example The Careers and Enterprise Company, Department of Work and Pensions, NCS Trust and National Careers Service, there will be greater alignment in the definitions of what these skills are, approaches that can be taken to build them and also how we can effectively measure them.

- **Funding to train teachers on Skills development**

Teachers, particularly those supporting young people from disadvantaged backgrounds should receive targeted support based on the Skills Builder Framework methodology so that they are confident in how to build these skills in students.

- **Funding to join up apprenticeship routes with the education system**

Skills Builder are currently working on embedding the same language into apprenticeship standards as is used in schools and colleges. Building on this work will enable increased transparency of the essential skills needed for apprenticeship routes and help teachers and advisors to navigate into apprenticeships for these individuals.

With meaningful investment, schools, colleges and businesses can align behind this approach ensuring that skills are embedded in education and that no child leaves school without the skills needed to thrive in life, enabling them more opportunities and enabling a levelling-up of outcomes across the country.

¹² Yeo, A. and Graham, J. (2015) A deep dive into social and emotional learning: what do the views of those involved tell us about the challenges for policy-makers? EIF/ Cabinet Office/ Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission/ ReachAbility.

4. When considering the post Covid-19 agenda, oracy should be a key factor when thinking of new approaches, especially taking into consideration wellbeing and social and emotional learning

The deliberate, explicit and systematic teaching of oracy across phases and throughout the curriculum to support children and young people to develop oracy skills, is crucial when thinking about the post Covid-19 agenda.

The benefits of oracy skills go far beyond academic achievement and employability. They boost a whole range of social, emotional and interpersonal skills, including self-confidence, self-awareness, resilience and empathy.

As young people return to classrooms our focus has to be on re-engaging young people, supporting them emotionally and socially and understanding what is needed with regards to their wellbeing. To re-engage students effectively, schools need to be able to support all pupils in articulating their emotions, in listening empathetically and offering space to talk through any problems they are having. Without this focus, any catch-up provision offered will not be as effective. Oracy is the key to ensuring learning readiness and engagement.

Key points from breakout discussions

Room 1: The importance of oracy in building essential skills in education

Key points:

- Oracy helps young people to demonstrate their knowledge. If students can not communicate well, their knowledge of a topic can be overlooked. Therefore, students need vocabulary and relevant context to engage with content at school.
- Oracy is highly valued in the workplace, especially when it comes to structuring arguments and communicating effectively. A lack of oracy skills is a huge barrier to employment.
- A barrier to effective oracy education is its current focus on 'listening' which is poorly defined and sometimes can mean "being quiet".

Current barriers:

- The misconception that oracy (and other essential skills) are innate abilities and therefore cannot be taught, or that oracy will come naturally if young people develop literacy skills.
- Students may be at very different levels, yet streaming can hinder the development of skills including oracy.
- Oracy is central to the curriculum but is hidden in English requirements.
- It is difficult to measure oracy skills. How can we more rigorously measure students' progress in these essential skills and demonstrate that oracy can be taught effectively without taking up valuable classroom time?

- There is a mismatch between the language used in schools and employers.
- Learners are not sufficiently equipped to support each other with their oracy.

Room 2: The importance of prioritising wellbeing with a focus on inclusion

Key points:

- During Covid-19, students have missed out on opportunities for social interaction. The school environment is unique in the opportunities it provides, in particular, opportunities to learn from each other, be exposed to a broader range of ideas, and be immersed in a language rich environment.
- There are worries about the loss of language and social & emotional skills. Oracy can be a big part of the recovery.
- Oracy is not just a 'nice to have'. We must give young people a chance to develop other skills.
- A recovery curriculum is crucial in rebuilding relationships between students and teachers. Oracy is at heart of this and how you support each other within the school community. In these particularly challenging times oracy can also help compensate and mitigate experiences children have had.
- School closures have meant young people have especially missed out on critical thinking and valuable conversations/interactions - we need to rebuild this.
- Voice 21 and Nesta are currently undertaking a project in PRUs focusing on oracy and social & emotional skills. They are seeing very powerfully the impact of oracy on students with challenging behaviour and who are often transient in terms of their engagement with schools. An oracy focus has helped them engage with school and settle into their environment, and engage with each other in more positive and constructive ways using language and frames provided to be able to express their ideas.
- Students being able to listen and be listened to is very important. The Education Endowment Foundation and Voice 21 pilot showed the impact of listening before speaking. If we want oracy embedded in the classroom for all students we have to value every voice.

Room 3: Supporting teachers and leaders to develop students oracy skills, particularly in the most disadvantaged areas

Key points:

- Although teachers value oracy, it hasn't been prioritised like some other skills have. There is also not enough focus on how it can build confidence.
- There is more of a focus on language in early years, but this drops off as you go through the education system. Best practice is often seen in more disadvantaged areas in early years - e.g. EAL students etc. Children often have poor speaking skills or speaking skills in a different language - so it's given a lot of attention. This drops off as the focus becomes more academic higher up the education system.
- There is a much higher prevalence of speech, language and communication problems in some groups, e.g. excluded pupils/SEND. For these groups there is a huge value to boosting oracy.
- Some schools come to oracy after they have tried lots of other approaches and then they realise its value for young people above and beyond just getting the grade.

Current Barriers:

- Accountability is a big burden, especially for a school that has had a bad OFSTED report or is struggling with other delivery aspects. Realising the value of oracy can be hard when you're judged ultimately on OFSTED or ESTYN.
- It is often not built into a whole school approach.
- There can be a lack of confidence in teaching oracy skills, strategies and tasks. It can be especially difficult if you're not confident about behaviour management. Some teachers feel if they give a student too many opportunities to talk, it feels like letting the lessons get distracted.
- We have to balance the need for high quality in written language with the need to allow young people to have their own authentic voices and not penalise them so much that they lose the confidence to speak up.

Room 4: How we can maximise existing mechanisms and vehicles for oracy in education?

Key Points:

- Given the growing attainment gap, the power of oracy and speaking skills could help to tackle disadvantage.
- More than ever all young people need to practice speaking to be effective in the world of work (especially online)
- We could use a two track approach to tackle this:
 1. To recognise that there are opportunities for developing oracy in everything children are already doing in school (school trips, lessons, school visitors, assemblies). School 21 is an example of how this can be embedded within a school curriculum. There is also an opportunity to name more explicitly how this is developing oracy and meets the Ofsted requirements.
 2. We must create opportunities for students to practice and speak to people who are different to them. When put in new situation eg. job interviews, even those with good speaking skills in class can lose confidence. To tackle this, students need Intentional practice in new situations eg. employability programmes, social action (eg. IWill) etc.
- It is dangerous to campaign too much for oracy to be included in Ofsted before we have a plan for how this is encompassed into teacher training (Dr Arlene Holmes-Henderson is leading research on this).

Attendees

Talk the Talk	Richard	Hull
Speakers Trust	Victoria	Costello
Speakers Trust	Russell	Findlay
Unknown	Barbara	Firth

Tales Toolkit	Kate	Shelly
Skillsbuilder	Evelyn	Haywood
ESU	Jane	Easton
IntoUniversity	Emily	Magrath
The Economist Educational Foundation	Emily	Evans
CFEY	Alix	Robertson
Achievement for All	Catherine	Knowles
Ormiston Trust	James	Murray
Nesta	Emma	Sutherland
Envision	Jo	Clark
Envision	Jennie	Butterworth
Debate Mate	Margaret	Mccabe
Debate Mate	Enayah	Byramjee
Voice 21	Beccy	Earnshaw
Voice 21	Lizzie	Lynch
Whole Education	Charlotte	Lewis
Student	Yawo	Evevi
Teacher	Nerys	Jones
Speaking Citizens	Arlene	Holmes-Henderson
Centre for Literacy in Primary Education	Charlotte	Hackind