

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'

Nicola Spencer

Full name:

Herts and Bucks TSA (Lead School, St Clement Danes)

School or Organisation:

The author of this report is Nicola Spencer, a highly experienced secondary school English teacher and senior leader who has led on developing Oracy at St Clement Danes School, an 'Outstanding' 11-18 non-selective secondary school in Chorleywood (URN 136901) for the past three years. She has recently taken on the role of Oracy Lead across the Danes Educational Trust.

Role:

Written evidence:

Summary

- The following is largely based on personal experience. It is drawn from meetings with a cross-faculty oracy group, learning walks, visits to School21, training delivered to teachers, previous teaching experience at Greenford High School in Ealing and extensive teaching across the age and ability range
- Spoken language has been side-lined due to changes in curriculum partly necessitated by pressure on schools for accountability systems
- Colleagues recognize the inherent value of oracy and can see its impact in terms of many aspects of students' education including cognition, literacy, empowerment, social and personal well-being as well as future employability
- Although oracy is valued and is being developed at St Clement Danes and ultimately across the Danes Educational Trust, I cannot say whether this is the case in every school within the Teaching School Alliance which comprises 12 Strategic Partners and a further 32 affiliated Partner Schools
- We would be interested in offering oral evidence at a later date or more robust evidence in person, if a visit is requested

Value and Impact

1. Spoken language has been side-lined since 2014 when it was removed from GCSE English Language having previously contributed 20% to a student's final mark. There were issues with the way spoken language was assessed but it did have equal status to reading and writing. I believe that it should have the same status as reading and writing, not least because it is our primary means of communication and is an essential life skill. It retains its status in MFL (50% of final mark) but is not examined in any other subjects.

2. Children and young people who do not receive oracy education are socially disadvantaged. Although many of the learners in our setting are already articulate, confident and eloquent due to socio-economic advantages, it is important that every learner has good speech modelled and is given opportunities to develop his or her communication skills. Not only does oracy help to improve cognition and understanding (evidenced in more coherent written answers in lower ability students who have verbally rehearsed responses) but it allows all students to access society in its widest sense. It is partly for this reason that all of our students participate in 'Open Day' showing prospective parents around and engaging in conversations as well as undertaking work-shadowing in Year 8 and work experience in Year 12.

3. The value and impact of oracy education:

i) KS3, 4 and 5 – improved social skills; broadening vocabulary; better cognition; improved mental health; confidence in presenting to a range of audiences; clearer articulation of ideas leading to more detailed written responses; greater engagement in learning through, for example, deeper questioning; delivering and leading SMSC presentations and discussions in preparation for future democratic engagement; presenting in assemblies.

KS5 – practice at interview techniques as preparation for University and the workplace; using Harkness discussion as preparation for deeper thinking; presenting or discussing through a VIVA as part of EPQ.

iii) All groups of students benefit from an oracy rich curriculum.

- Arguably, students who are from lower socio-economic backgrounds or from less 'word-rich' environments, have more to gain in terms of social mobility.
- Students who have lower attainment have an even greater need for effective spoken skills to enter, succeed and thrive in the workplace.
- Excellent communication skills will be needed to perform the tasks of diplomacy, problem-solving and imagining which cannot be replaced by technology.
- For our most academic students, excellent oracy skills are needed to give them opportunities to compete for places at University and ultimately in positions of power (including in government) which are currently dominated by individuals educated outside of the State sector where oracy is already highly valued and central to education.

4. Oracy has been proven to lead to better cognition and therefore understanding of the curriculum in a number of studies (Mercer and Howe (2012), Alexander (2008), Resnick, Asherhan and Clarke (2015)):

- Lesson observations reveal that where students are engaged in discussion or debate, they become increasingly adept at recalling knowledge and using it to further an argument (as evidenced in lesson observations and learning walks).
- My own experience of using Harkness discussions, particularly at A Level, reveal that students engage more fully with the thinking behind arguments leading to more coherent and analytical written responses. We have fuller video evidence of an example lesson.

5. We recognise the importance of oracy and its impact on future life chances and employability. Evidence of the value we assign oracy can be seen through:
- business mentoring
 - practice interviews before actual interviews (impact: many offers to Oxbridge and other competitive courses)
 - asking ALL students to be involved in our 'Open days' showing around prospective parents
 - opportunities to be on Student Council, and to participate in student voice feedback on curriculum and the recruitment of staff
 - all Y8s presenting their work shadowing experience to their peers
 - a robust work experience programme in Year 12

8. Our students have a weekly SMSC (social moral spiritual and cultural) session in form time where they take it in turns to present to the class (with minimal notes) and then to lead a discussion resulting in greater engagement with current affairs and the wider world. Our sixth form has two popular and thriving student-led societies (Politics and Debating). All Year 7s and 8s take part in an annual inter-form public speaking competition and a number of students have participated (and been successful) in Rotary Club and ESU public speaking and debating competitions. Our students are taught the value of speaking in society as well as the skills required to help them participate more fully in public life as adults.

Provision and access

1. High quality oracy education requires engagement by all involved. It should include progression of skills, a degree of assessment and hold equal value (by students/teachers/other stakeholders) to other types of assessment. The dialogic classroom is at the centre of oracy but it would also cover the wider culture of the school with conversation and dialogue being central to pastoral care, decision-making and extra-curricular activities. Oracy skills would be taught explicitly across the curriculum (perhaps initially in Year 7 in a timetabled lesson) with a shared language across the school which enables students to reflect/evaluate their oracy (meta-cognition).

2. A range of opportunities are offered as extra-curricular provision: ESU competitions; LAMDA (38 currently with 18 on a waiting list); regular visits by outside theatre companies such as Frantic Assembly to do workshops; business mentors.

3. Colleagues have been asked to complete the survey using the link provided.

4. Good practice can be seen in many areas of our school and by many different practitioners. Specifically: Let's Think in English programme (Kings College) fortnightly in Year 7 English lessons; SMSC sessions delivered weekly by students across all Key Stages; Harkness discussions at Key Stage 5. We have embedded many aspects taken from Voice21 materials, including teachers referencing the four strands of oracy, different groupings, using verbal sentence stems and assigning specific roles within groups.

Barriers

1. These are the threats and barriers identified by teaching colleagues in 2017 when we started to broaden our oracy curriculum:

- Risk of becoming another thing to do
- Students who already talk will excel – how do we address the ‘most shy’?
- Listening skills of students
- Students unwilling to take risks in speaking
- Teachers’ resilience when things don’t go to plan
- Teachers’ willingness to give up control of talk
- Lower sets – behaviour management – how we ‘train’ them in talk
- Giving oracy a label and reducing to a tick-list rather than changing the mindset of how we teach/students learn
- Lack of self-discipline in students when given discussion tasks leading to off-task talk
- Perceived lack of value which students place on ‘talk’ as opposed to writing

An emerging barrier is the concern of covering heavy curriculum content to meet the demands of new GCSEs, resulting in potentially cognitively productive discussion being side-lined. For some colleagues there needs to be a cultural shift in terms of teacher-talk and developing a dialogic classroom.

2. It is important that oracy is written into the ethos of the school and is modelled and encouraged in every aspect of school life, from conversations in the corridor to formal speech day. For oracy education to succeed it is important that it is not just seen as the remit of English teachers. Spoken language needs to be given the same time and value as written work and to be celebrated. Teachers need quality INSET and time to plan oracy into their curriculum. They also need to have the permission of their senior leaders to experiment with different ways of using oracy and support to try again when it does not go to plan. There should not be a requirement for spoken feedback to be written down.

3 and 4. It is difficult to talk about incentives when it comes to oracy as the experience of me and my colleagues is that well-planned oracy content leads not just to better outcomes but also to more rewarding teaching. The greatest incentive is smaller class sizes and more planning time (luxuries enjoyed by colleagues in the independent sector) to maximize opportunities to develop oracy.

5. We do not currently carry out any form of assessment in terms of oracy education, largely due to lack of resources (time/personnel). It would be useful to have base-line assessments in oracy skills and Voice21 set out a clear methodology to do so. However, whilst oracy has such a low status in the National Curriculum it is not perceived to be a priority and we do not have time/space/resources in the curriculum to carry out such assessments.

6. Due to changes in the National Curriculum and GCSE specifications since 2014, the limited speaking and listening assessments in the curriculum (50% GCSEs in Modern

Foreign Languages and the presentation element of level 3 EPQs) are not in line with the value they hold.

7. It is not a simple binary between accountability and a less prescriptive approach. Teachers need to be accountable for their examination results, but whilst the focus remains firmly on the final outcomes, the narratives which accompany those numbers are lost. It is very difficult to measure quantifiably the impact of oracy on examination results or indeed on the future lives of young people. There is perhaps a need for more legislation to give oracy the same value as numeracy and literacy, alongside permissions given to teachers to develop new areas of expertise.

Additional guidance:

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?
2. What are the consequences if children and young people do not receive oracy education?
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)?
4. How can it help deliver the wider curriculum at school?
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?
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?
7. What is the value and impact of oracy education in relation to other key agendas such as social mobility and wellbeing/ mental health?
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

Provision and access

1. What should high quality oracy education look like?
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?
3. What are the views of teachers, school leaders and educational bodies regarding the current provision of oracy education?
4. Where can we identify good practice and can you give examples?

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

Barriers

1. What are the barriers that teachers face in providing quality oracy education, within the education system and beyond?
2. What support do teachers need to improve the delivery of oracy education?
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?
4. What is the role of government and other bodies in creating greater incentives and how can this be realised?
5. What is the role of assessment in increasing provision of oracy education? What is the most appropriate form of assessment of oracy skills?
6. Are the speaking and listening elements of the current curriculum sufficient in order to deliver high quality oracy education?
7. What is the best approach – more accountability within the system or a less prescriptive approach?
8. Are there examples of other educational pedagogies where provision has improved and we can draw parallels and learn lessons?