

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'

Full name:

School or Organisation:

Role:

Written evidence:

I have focussed on the importance of oracy education to primary school age children and the role of drama-based pedagogy. This is based on my professional experience as the manager of a participatory drama programme for primary schools.

Summary

- Pedagogy that supports oracy is fundamental to reducing the attainment gap between privileged and disadvantaged pupils.
- Development of oracy skills in a learning context supports wider understanding, engagement and confidence of learner.
- Teachers who have embedded drama-based pedagogy with National Theatre support through the 'Let's Play' programme report pupils speaking with a broader range of vocabulary, and with more confidence, volume and clarity.

1. A focus on oracy in state education is of the utmost importance if we are to have a system of teaching and learning that is truly inclusive, and develops engaged and confident learners. Allowing space in the school day for children and young people to ask questions, have discussions and converse with peers about topics of study supports a curiosity approach to learning, leaving space to ask questions such as "what if?", "how about?" and "what would happen if?". A focus on speaking and listening opens learners up to possibility, before distilling that possibility down into the learning of more concrete facts. Taking children through this kind of learning journey engenders a sense of discovery, agency in their learning, and a fuller understanding of the topic of study.

2. From our experience of working in primary schools, we know that many children have little opportunity to engage in conversation at home, leading to children from lower socio-economic backgrounds entering school with access to significantly less vocabulary than their more privileged peers – the word gap. In response, schools are having to think creatively about how they elevate the status of speaking and listening in the classroom, and encourage children to use their voice both in school and at home.

3. The teachers we work with report that engaging in high quality drama activities, including projects run in partnership with schools by the National Theatre and other theatres across the UK, facilitates this kind of conversation. Children are excited by the stories and characters they are exploring and want to discuss them. Drama-based lessons ask questions of children and typically give them more ownership than more traditionally taught lessons. For example, we might ask a child what their character is thinking at any one time, or why a character has chosen to behave in the way they have. That child is then able to think about their answer, choose the best way to articulate their ideas and then have those ideas listened to and often actioned. The value of this in terms of children's confidence and sense of self-worth is significant.

4. As an example, the National Theatre's 'Let's Play' programme run in primary schools across the country supports teachers to make theatre with their pupils and embed drama-based pedagogy into their practice. Teachers who have engaged in this programme report children speaking with more confidence, volume and clarity, in both performance and day to day in the classroom. They also tell us that their children speak more often, and with a broader range of vocabulary, this being especially true of pupils

with Special Educational Needs and those with English as a second language. There are also noteworthy anecdotes of children speaking about their school play with such enthusiasm at home that historically unengaged parents are actively coming into the school to speak to teachers, and demonstrating a keener interest in their children's learning.

5. Ensuring school is a place of confident speaking and active, respectful listening is key to children's academic and social development. This clear focus on oracy needs to work alongside the teaching of literacy and numeracy if we are to adequately equip our children to grow and thrive in the future.

6. I would draw the APPG's attention to the evidence submitted by my colleague, Jeannette Nelson, Head of Voice at the National Theatre. She reflects on how the development of strong oracy skills achieved through the speaking and study of literature and especially through participation in drama, empowers young adults and help them to live full and productive lives.

September 2019