

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:

My name is Marie Byrne and I am currently working as a Specialist Leader of Education (SLE) for Noctua Teaching School Alliance. I currently support the SSIF 3 project in Leeds schools to close the word gap in disadvantaged pupils, as well as offering school to school support in English. My previous roles have been in schools in Leeds. I have been a primary school teacher for twenty years, a Literacy leader and senior leader for ten years and acted on behalf on the local authority in key stage two writing moderation.

My submission is on behalf of Noctua Teaching School Alliance, from evidence gathered during my time in schools supporting SSIF 3 and school to school support, and from other SLE's experiences in schools.

Value and impact:

1. Spoken language doesn't seem to have the same status as reading and writing for a number of reasons: it isn't seen as a priority in the current National Curriculum; teachers feel that with a culture of scrutiny and accountability that having sessions where there is no evidence in books would be 'frowned' upon; the fear of losing control of a 'talking' session is a real risk and also teachers don't feel confident enough to facilitate such lessons. Spoken language should certainly have the same status, **if not more of a status**, as children are unable to move onto reading, and in particular writing, if they are unable to articulate their ideas. Oral rehearsal of what is to be written down is vital to support organization of sentence structures, vocabulary and punctuation. Children need to see the relationship between spoken and written language and have this modelled to them from a very early age.
2. If children do not receive oracy education, then they are immediately at a disadvantage. This is the first step on their literacy journey and if missed can cause huge gaps and problems when they try and record ideas in a written format.
3. From visiting a huge range of schools, from a range of different socio-economic communities, it is clear that all children benefit from oracy education. It is also clear how this is vital in those areas where English may be a second language, children may be new to the country or conversations just don't happen at home. Where the impact of oracy education has been most successful, it has been a whole school priority; it has been driven from senior leaders and it has been promoted with parents. This has been witnessed in Early years where speaking and listening has been encouraged in all areas of provision, closely matched to children's needs and abilities, inviting parents in to school to see good practice and allowing the children to see the link between oracy and written language (Helicopter stories have been a huge success in this area). Having oracy at the heart of education through school has built on this foundation developed in nursery and reception, understanding the importance for all children.
4. Oracy can be implemented across all subjects and is a valuable tool to support retaining knowledge and revising learning. Having children develop presentations after a unit of work in History, Science, Geography etc. is an engaging way of assessing children's learning and understanding; holding debates and whole class discussions on specific topics supports children learning from each other, being able to question and clarify opinions; drama, role play, green screen filming are other areas that can be used to support oracy across the curriculum.

5. Having the confidence to speak in a group of people, in front of an audience and even on a one to one basis relies on the speaker being able to structure their 'talk', choose the correct register for the audience, apply appropriate vocabulary, speak with fluency, pace and clarity. All of these skills need to be explicitly taught and then practised so that they are embedded and secure when children become adults. Employers are looking to employ candidates who show this confidence, who are able to hold eye contact and a conversation without looking uncomfortable, who are able to show that they are listening, seeking information for themselves by clarify points through questioning and can potentially stand up and deliver presentations / meet clients and speak on the telephone, assertively. Oracy education has a huge impact on these future life chances.
6. Children and young adults want to be able to communicate with others. They want to be able to feel confident in sharing ideas and thoughts. They want to be able to ask for help and support if they need it. Without oracy, it is very difficult to feel part of a group or organisation and 'fit in' socially.
7. Having the capacity to be able to communicate orally is fundamental in being able to communicate personal wants and needs. With the current key agendas involving wellbeing and mental health, it is vital that we are teaching children how to ask for help, how to voice any problems that they are facing and how important it is to share with family, friends or colleagues, issues which are effecting their mental state. It is equally important to teach children how to listen. They may be in a position at some stage in their life to help others with mental health issues. Being confident and self-assured is a crucial skill for all in meeting others, helping to be accepted in new group situations and feeling part of the wider community.
8. Having the ability to communicate effectively, can empower all young people, regardless of their background. If children are taught the skills explicitly, then they will be able to participate in any social situation. Often children feel self-conscious if they are not well informed and feel inferior to their peers. They may not feel that they can articulate their ideas in a way to make people listen, or may not have the correct vocabulary to stand out. By equipping children with these skills and allowing them to practise in different situations (debates, presentations, discussions etc), with different audiences, and monitoring, assessing and improving these skills, we are investing in active citizens for the future.

Provision and access:

9. High quality oracy education should be lead from the Head of the school, through senior leaders to all staff. It should be promoted across the curriculum giving children a plethora of opportunities to practise the skills taught. The fundamentals of oracy should be explicitly taught – giving examples and modelling by the teachers. Opportunities for assessing these skills and offering immediate and meaningful feedback will ensure that improvements and progress is made. A clear and structured, whole school plan should be developed to ensure skills are revisited and then built on year on year and that staff, children and parents are all onboard. A monitoring system should also be in place to allow

senior leaders to assess the successes and areas for development within their schools, offering continuing professional development for staff to feel comfortable and confident in its delivery.

10. In many of the schools that we have visited, oracy is being provided albeit in an adhoc manner. Many teachers provide opportunities for paired talk, group discussion and whole class dialogue, however the majority of these schools do not explicitly teach or model the skills needed for this to be wholly successful. The skills may be mentioned as an after-thought or reminder to 'listen to each other' or 'remember to take your turn' rather than developing and embedding these skills first. The most successful practice has been identified in early years where communication and language is a real focus and a 'prime area' of their learning. In these classes both teachers and teaching assistants are more focused in holding conversations with children and promoting 'talk' throughout the day.
11. Certainly with teachers, there is a feeling that they know that oracy is important and want to develop this in the classroom but don't have ideas of how to do this. Any support in this area is always well received and an area that they are keen to get started with. Any CPD opportunities are welcomed. As part of the EYFS SSIF 3 project, Noctua staff have been heavily supporting teachers in EYFS and Year 1 in promoting staff/child interactions and giving ideas of how to do this; practical advice on how to extend children's vocabulary and understanding through 'talk' and creating a language rich environment to support children's communication and language skills. This practice is the fundamental first step for the children to develop their literacy skills and one which should be continued across all year groups. After the children are assessed against the Early Learning Goals in EYFS, there are no assessment requirements for speaking and listening/oracy at all in KS1. Why? Why is this not seen as being a more important part of their curriculum? This is certainly becoming more of a focus in schools that we are visiting and both teachers and school leaders are keen to seek advice and support.
12. As Noctua is situated on the border between Bradford and Leeds, we are in a fortunate position to be able to work with both Leeds and Bradford schools. The best practice that we have seen has been in those schools where oracy has had a real drive: it has been a whole school focus and all staff have received training and support with its delivery. Much of this training has come from Voice 21. Bradford have been leading the way with adopting this approach in many of their school and have promoted this across the city with an 'oracy' conference, for the last few years. Noctua are hoping to work with Voice 21 this year to adopt their approach and offer training to our partner schools. Some schools have begun to have Oracy Leaders as a distinct role, rather than including it as part of the English Leader's responsibilities. This immediately raises the profile of speaking and listening, having a knock on impact on how often it is discussed, developed and taught in lessons.
13. Currently some schools hold oracy as an area for development on the whole school development plan. These schools tend to be ones where there is a high proportion of children who are new to English, who hold English as an additional language or where vocabulary seems deemed to be 'poor'. Unfortunately, this does correlate with areas of social deprivation and matches research into those children from such areas being further behind their peers in their language development. However, more and more we are seeing that other areas – more affluent areas – are also seeing a decline in children coming into schools with age appropriate language and oracy skills. Educating parents is crucial.

14. We feel that oracy should be offered to all schools, irrespective of region / context. A consistent and universal approach will provide all children with the skills to develop their speaking and listening, vocabulary and confidence.

Barriers:

15. Some of the barriers that teachers and schools face include:

- having dedicated time within their already full timetables to include an explicit oracy session
- not being confident in their own ability to teach the necessary skills
- not having evidence in books of lessons that have predominately being 'talk'
- feeling nervous about allowing the children to do more of the talking and moving away from the traditional 'teacher talk' approach to teaching

I am confident that all teachers include some elements of oracy within their lessons although the explicit teaching of oracy skills and plenty of opportunities for practise are not as embedded.

16. Teachers need a whole school approach to oracy that they can follow. They need to have a clear plan of what skills to teach in explicit oracy sessions, and ideas of how this can be implemented and practised. A whole school plan should include progression of skills and a clear structure of genres / activities which support this development of skills. Continuing professional development opportunities will ensure that all staff are confident in teaching these skills. In addition, opportunities to discuss with colleagues their successes and failures and learn from each other.

17. At the moment there is no real accountability for oracy. Teachers continue to adapt their own pedagogy to incorporate their own ideas for 'talk' within their own classroom. Most schools don't have a whole school policy on oracy but it is mentioned within the English/Literacy policy to include opportunities for drama, role play and possibly book talk. By having a whole school policy to follow, this will help to ensure that it is part of their everyday teaching. By raising the profile within schools and holding regular review meetings for staff, this again will ensure it is supported across school. Another way to include accountability is to include oracy explicitly in reporting back to parents at parent's meetings and on school reports. By overcoming the barriers to providing quality oracy education, mentioned above, with having a focus within the school which is supported by senior leaders, parents and governors and clear and explicit training, I am sure teachers would welcome and embrace the idea of more oracy education.

18. The government's role in supporting the implementation of whole school oracy is to offer enough funding to allow schools to start their journey. Funding for appropriate training of all staff; funding for appropriate resources to support delivery; funding for schools to be able to release staff to fully lead this within their schools. Government have to raise the profile of oracy with head teachers and government bodies who are in contact with

schools. It needs to be seen as having the value that it should have in developing reading and writing but also developing confident and active citizens of the future.

19. Assessment of oracy should be formative to ensure progress is being made. In-the-moment, verbal feedback will have an immediate impact on children's performances and allow them to reflect and hone their skills in different activities. Any formal, or written assessment may well be unwelcome in schools as it would lead to increased workload and not necessarily improve outcomes for children.
20. In the primary National Curriculum for England (2014), the Spoken Language Programme of Study is broad - covering all ages from years 1 - 6 in primary schools. Schools are required to develop their own progression points for children across year groups, based on the 12 statements which make up the Programme of Study. It is not explicit in the skills to be taught as in other areas of English. It includes instruction for speaking and listening to be included across the curriculum, mentioning that it 'underpins the development of reading and writing'. It includes the instruction that teachers should ensure that they are developing children's confidence and competence in speaking and listening but it does not break down the skills to be taught. By offering a clear, structured, progressive list of appropriate skills to be explicitly taught would ensure that all schools can deliver a comprehensive and consistent programme of study in oracy.
21. From the evidence that we have seen, we feel that the best approach would be to have a clear, progressive programme to develop the skills required to create confident, articulate citizens. An approach similar to Voice 21 would meet these requirements.
22. From my experiences as an SLE, I have seen very impressive examples of how schools have adopted the Voice 21 approach to the teaching of oracy. This approach offers a very clear, progressive series of skills which are explicitly taught. Children are clear of the skills that they are practicing across different areas of the curriculum and in different year groups and are confident in their approaches to communicating in pairs, small groups and whole class discussions. The approach is very much dialogic across the whole school with plenty of opportunities planned for children to share their skills.

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 do 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?

