

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:

Key recommendations

1. Ensure that the development of oracy education is grounded in evidence about what constitutes effective skills.
2. Ensure that the assessment of oracy is scrutinized properly, especially the live practices through which it occurs.
3. Teachers need some basic training in conversation analysis, which provides the most rigorous approach to understanding real talk.

Why am I giving evidence?

4. I am a professor of social interaction at Loughborough University and have, for the past 25 years, studied people talking. As a conversation analyst, I collect (or am often provided with) and analyse recordings of real talk 'in the wild' – not simulated talk or talk produced as part of an experiment.
5. Like other conversation analysts, my research has identified what constitutes effective and less effective communicative practices across diverse settings including university tutorials, police-suspect interviews, doctor-patient interaction, commercial sales and their prospective clients, mediation, suicide crisis negotiation, and first dates.
6. Conversation analysts are well-placed to provide evidence for what counts as effective oracy, as well as harness their findings to educate the educators. My training approach (CARM: the Conversation Analytic Role-play Method – www.carmtraining.org) applies research findings about effective talk to train practitioners.
7. I have worked with many non-academic stakeholders to examine communication in their organization. My expertise has been sought by Government, NHS, Metropolitan Police, ACAS, and hundreds of individual organizations, including in schools, where I am currently involved in a large Norwegian research project called CAITE: 'Conversation Analysis in Teacher Education'.
8. Although I work mainly with adults, the issues I raise in my evidence generalize to all ages and settings when it comes to educating people about oracy; deciding what constitutes high quality oracy education, and how to identify good practice.

The problem with oracy

9. Our ideas about what constitutes good oracy skills often suffer from a problem that affects our understanding of communication more generally. For example, compare *talk* – a phenomenon unique to human beings – to something like *black holes* – a phenomenon of the physically world. *Black holes* do not exist in the first place to be understood by humans. *Talk* exists only for humans to understand each other and get daily life done. While a physicist's job will sometimes involve explaining complex science to lay

audiences, my job involves the opposite problem, at least when it comes to impacting non-experts' understanding of communication.

10. Our understanding of talk is often shaped by stereotypes, communication myths, and ideas from pop psychology that have, over the years, solidified as facts. Oracy, communication, and language more generally are often the subject of moral panics about skills being negatively impacted by smartphones, or social media. Researchers who study natural language in use tend to resist these panics and focus on what people are actually doing when they talk. Research also tends to yield results that are at odds with our intuitions of, or memories of, how talk works.

How conversation analysts can help

11. Research has shown that people may fail communication skills tasks because they are not doing what the training, or assessment schedule, mandates as good practice.
12. Communication guidance often trains people to say the wrong thing because it is based in assumptions about what is effective, not what actually is effective, based on evidence.
13. When being assessed, people often say and do things that they would not do in non-assessment settings. The talk produced does not look much like real talk in a different, naturally occurring setting.
14. In assessing oracy and communication skills more generally, research has shown that the 'initiating' party (e.g., the teacher) may or may not create appropriate interactional conditions for assessing oracy/communication skills.
15. We tend to think that we are testing the oracy/communication skills of the responder, but we need to look at what the initiator is doing.
16. Conversation analysts have shown that what counts as effective or skilful oracy can be identified from studying talk 'in the wild', exposing the tacit expertise many people have for communicating with others – but cannot remember later.
17. Finally, we know that when the assessment of oracy relies on a fair and valid method for eliciting children's' (or anybody's) skills. Elicitations are usually verbally produced too – by teachers, examiners, trainers, and so on. Conversation analysts have shown that elicitations (questions, requests, etc.) often vary dramatically, regardless of what is written on a script or guidance. And researchers from many disciplines have shown that even very subtle wording differences in questions impact the content, quality and quantity of responses.

Reference

Stokoe, E. (2018). *Talk: The Science of Conversation*. London: Little, Brown.