

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:

Value and Impact

1. Spoken language does not have the same status as reading and writing because its role in learning is less well understood; it is ill-defined in the National Curriculum; there is no common agreement in the profession about how it might be taught and, because it is not tested, schools inevitably focus more on what is formally assessed. Teaching vocabulary and fluency in spoken

language would have a powerful effect on progress, standards and life chances. There is a direct link between cognitive development and spoken language. To put it simply, if students have a small vocabulary and cannot speak in sentences then they will have little knowledge and lack the ability to manipulate ideas, deepen understanding and communicate. Much of this territory was set out in the Bercow report in 2008.

2. The consequences of poor speaking and listening are well documented. For instance, vocabulary at five is a key predictor of the qualifications pupils achieve on leaving school; early spoken language difficulties are a strong predictor for later literacy problems; the gap between pupils with strong and weak language skills has a dramatic effect so that by 14 years old it widens to five years difference in reading age. If we are to narrow the gap in social disadvantage, improve behaviour and well-being, increase employability then effective teaching of spoken language is essential. Whilst there are many factors in children's lives that may militate against their success, without proficiency in spoken language, it is certain that they will struggle.

3. In the 15 'Talk for Writing' primary school training centres (7,000 students), the three year average of attainment in the SATS (Reading, Writing, Maths, Grammar/Spelling) are significantly higher than the national average despite the schools collectively serving poorer areas (7% above the national average) with significant percentages of EAL (about double the national average). The national average for combined primary attainment in year 6 SATs is 59% at the expected standard in reading, writing and maths. In the Talk for Writing centres the average is 68%. In these schools, spoken language is directly taught and its impact on standards in different subjects demonstrates that quality teaching of spoken language has a positive and dramatic impact. However, it is noticeable that the number of students with special needs in the centres is about the same as the national average

because for many children, the main barrier to learning is poor vocabulary, linked to poor knowledge, as well as fluency in talk. Because of this, in the centres, children labelled as having special needs, who might fail elsewhere, are more likely to succeed. Furthermore, children new to English accelerate their learning rapidly through direct teaching of talk.

4. Spoken language is key to learning across the curriculum. Each subject has its own vocabulary, syntax and textual structures. These can be internalised and developed through direct teaching of the spoken language needed to succeed in that subject. This has been developed through our work in different subjects in primary and secondary classes through into further education. In these instances, working from initially developing the appropriate spoken language, before moving into reading and then writing, has a powerful effect. Generally, teachers expect students to read well and write proficiently in different subjects without securing the spoken language needed to think and learn as a scientist, historian, etc. Working from the spoken into reading and then writing is more likely to ensure competency.

5. Complaints that students enter the market place without the necessary spoken and written skills can be tracked back over a century. However, given the changing face of the jobs market, literacy and oracy skills continue to be singled out as important by employers. The UK commission for Employment and Skills (2010) found that about half of employers complain that finding new employees with a reasonable level of communication skills is difficult.

6. Students want to be able to present themselves at interview and for jobs with confidence, having the literacy and oracy skills that equip them to work at an appropriate level. Much has been spoken in education about cultural capital. For many students, the inability to express themselves at an interview, collaborate in the workplace and form relationships with co-workers leaves them at a strong

disadvantage. Being fluent, confident and knowing how to communicate is an aspect of cultural capital.

7. We know that prisons hold a disproportionate amount of people who lack literacy and oracy skills. About two thirds of 14 year-olds with behaviour problems have language impairment as well as a similar percentage of young offenders. Issues with spoken language are linked to poor attendance, truancy, delinquency, drugs and low attainment.

8. All students need to be taught the ability to present themselves, propose ideas, discuss effectively and argue powerfully so that they may be able to play a part in community and public life. The ability to chat and communicate like a chameleon, shifting spoken language according to audience and purpose is a vital life skill. The ability to stand up at a meeting and argue for one's rights should not be the sole province of the fortunate few.

Provision and Access

1. High quality oracy education is a complex issue, partly because spoken language development is less obvious than reading or writing. However, it does not just happen by chance, leaving children to play without adult support or without direct teaching. It is characterised by assessment of spoken language and listening, considering the language learning opportunities provided in the curriculum and becoming skilled at language learning interactions and interventions between teachers and children. Much of this territory has been set out by Jean Gross in her book 'Time to Talk' as well as the work carried out by the Cambridge Oracy Project and others such as Neil Mercer.

Talk for Writing has added a cumulative language curriculum and developed a new aspect to language learning that has not been sufficiently considered before and that is the oral learning of whole stories and nonfiction texts so that children can retell stories, instructions, information, discussions, persuasion. The retelling of a carefully selected text leads into reading the text. Loitering with a spoken text in this way helps the child internalise the language patterns so that children make dramatic progress as their linguistic competency directly grows. The spoken patterns are quite naturally innovated on to produce new utterances. We have transcripts of children entering school with no words of the English language but a year later able to retell a whole story such as 'The Three Bears' in clear, standard English sentences. The direct teaching of sentence structures to support learning as well as whole text patterns has a dramatic impact on spoken language competency, gives confidence, helps children gain a sense of success and feel happy! The Talk for Writing and Reading processes hinge around the key role of acquiring the spoken language needed to succeed. Our website contains further information as well as the four core texts, 'Talk for writing across the curriculum', 'Creating storytellers and writers', 'Talk for writing in the early Years' and 'Talk for Writing in secondary schools'. I am happy to attend any further meeting to flesh this out further.

2. Talk for Writing has been influential across the primary sector and increasingly into secondary schools and around the world. We have 20 years experience of working with schools, 15 trainers and 15 training centres in this country. Although initiatives such as the Cambridge Oracy project and the work of Jean Gross and Neil Mercer have been influential, a more concerted national effort could harness the considerable knowledge that there is about spoken language development to create something which over five to ten years would

have an effect on spoken language and standards across the board with a projected impact onto GCSE, A levels, etc and life chances.

3. There is considerable interest in oracy education as virtually every school recognises that more children are arriving in school with language delay. However, schools are less confident about how this might be addressed. Since the support that was provided through the National Strategies, schools have only received help with teaching phonics. There is a thirst for something that will support oracy. Schools do their best but many have been unable to adapt their practice to meet the needs of language delay, increases in students new to English alongside other issues such as weaker, early literacy experiences and lack of ability to work at tasks, collaborate and try hard.

4. You can see Talk for Writing in action, by visiting any of our our training centres which are listed on our website. I would suggest visiting St Matthews C of E Primary School in Birmingham which has 86% pupil premium, serves a very challenging area and yet has standards in the top range of primary schools. St George's Primary school in Battersea also serves a disadvantaged community as well as Penn Wood Primary school in Slough which has about 98% EAL students. By contrast, Warren Road Primary in Orpington serves a more privileged area but has tremendously high standards.
<https://www.talk4writing.co.uk/training-centres/>

5. One of the blights on our educational system has been the received wisdom that children from poor backgrounds are almost certain to fail. Teachers working in disadvantaged areas need to raise expectations and become more proficient at developing spoken language from the Early Years onwards. The issue for so many schools is not that the children cannot learn. It is that the School has yet to discover how to teach the children. There is a culture of low expectation in many disadvantaged areas. Furthermore, the label of 'special needs'

creates low expectations and needs reconsidering. The main issue is found on the bleak estates where poverty of expectation, experience and language is rife. First, we should develop local hubs to support those schools, families and communities. Secondly, we should establish a proper state system for nursery provision with an entitlement for all children to attend a nursery with trained teachers. The discrepancy of provision maintains the current situation whereby those who already have advantage attend playgroups or nurseries and too many children who desperately need to attend a nursery do not or cannot. Nursery education should be run by the state to a higher standard.

6. There is no need to vary approaches according to region because how children learn spoken language does not vary according to where they live or to whom they have been born. We all learn language in the same way. However, strategies for supporting children new to English should be developed further and made accessible to all schools.

Barriers

1. The key barriers are: a lack of understanding about the role of talk in learning; lack of knowledge about the specific vocabulary; syntax and textual patterns in different subjects and how this might be taught effectively to equip children with the linguistic competency to succeed. The barriers come down to: a lack of teachers' subject knowledge about oracy; confusion and lack of confidence about how this is taught and schools having weak (if any) systems for developing spoken language effectively as part of a whole school, systematic and cumulative curriculum.

One barrier to overcome is the myth that children from disadvantaged backgrounds cannot be taught to the same level

as those from privileged backgrounds. Teachers need to be confident that with the right teaching and strong curriculum, almost all students can achieve. Just because students come from a poor estate does not mean they cannot attain or develop spoken language. Indeed, as the child's brain is geared up for learning language naturally, a focussed and purposeful curriculum with oracy as a key element can make a genuine and lasting difference. However, Early Years providers need to become proficient at assessment of early language development and use targeted teaching to secure language growth through modelling, extending and recasting talk alongside a rich vein of repetitive reading, storytelling, rhymes and rich experiences with targeted language. This has to be planned and directly taught.

2. Teachers could be provided with relevant support through professional development. This would have to include written materials to provide subject knowledge, film clips of effective teaching and in-school or cluster programmes of development. Much of this could be made accessible through a national 'portal' on the web.
3. There is no genuine accountability, other than the fact that poor vocabulary and inarticulate students are bound to struggle in exams, fail in education and find it hard to form relationships, get jobs and be able to live a happy, fulfilling life.
4. 'Testing' oracy would probably have unfortunate unintended consequences. However, if spoken language was assessed as part of GCSE, despite the challenges this may present, then schools would be more inclined to focus time on this element. In primary schools, schools might be asked to track spoken language development using something simple like the Cambridge oracy skills framework and assessment toolkit, alongside tracking the development of spoken narrative

5. Clear guidelines for assessing and tracking development in oracy, including different subjects, might help teachers to target students more effectively for support.
6. The current curriculum for spoken language needs revisiting and strengthening, perhaps by providing an addendum to the National Curriculum. There is a lack of understanding that direct teaching and formal learning of spoken language can accelerate linguistic capacity. National guidelines for the Early Years, completely underestimates what is possible both in spoken and written language.
7. We would suggest that a nationwide development project might have the best chance of success. This would focus on the development of 'storytelling' throughout EYFS, Key stages 1, 2 and 3. Our experience is that the very desire to tell stories is a powerful and natural beginning to language acquisition so that children increasingly begin to 'talk like a book', acquiring written structures into their linguistic competency. This would also have the benefit of appealing to teachers' sense of enjoyment, creativity and developing the imagination and abstract thought as well as rapidly improving language development. This strand would run alongside learning and adapting spoken language to instruct, explain, discuss, persuade, inform and recount events, helping children to internalise different modes of language that underpin proficiency in the spoken word. The third element would be applying the processes of learning language into different subjects so that children are effectively taught the vocabulary, syntax and text patterns required. The fourth strand would be the development of dialogic teaching so that children grow in confidence in their ability to use spoken language to collaborate, think and deepen understanding.

8. The National Strategies had a powerful impact on teaching in primary schools and its effect is still within the system.

However, a more appealing approach might be for schools to form clusters of interested institutions who bid to become part of a national storytelling and language learning project. We need something that will grab the imagination of teachers, will be seen as something positive and enjoyable as well as having a dramatic impact on children's learning and lives.

I am happy to provide further evidence such as transcripts, recordings or film evidence of progress in spoken language development. I am also happy to attend any committee meetings or discussions.

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

5. What should high quality oracy education look like?
6. 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?
7. What are the views of teachers, school leaders and educational bodies regarding the current provision of oracy education?
8. Where can we identify good practice and can you give examples?
9. What factors create unequal access to oracy education (i.e. socio-economic, region, type of school, special needs)? How can these factors be overcome?
10. 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?