

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:

The following evidence is written in a personal capacity:

- Research shows that a focus on speaking and listening skills in education can improve the social and emotional skills of our children.
- Employers rank communication as the most important skill for employees to have.
- Pupils from deprived areas are significantly behind their peers before starting school due to a lack of exposure to explicit vocabulary.
- Our children deserve to be equipped with the skills and knowledge that will set them up to become successful in an ever-evolving world.
- Current provision in the national curriculum is not significant enough to make a difference or push the importance of speaking and listening
- Some schools are putting Oracy at the forefront of their curriculum, where this is taking place, children are articulate, confident and can hold purposeful conversations.
- Schools need support such as funding, research, guidance and time to improve their Oracy provision and provide children with appropriate skills to be successful in life.

1. For as long as I can remember, the core subjects of the curriculum (maths, English and science) have always taken precedence in the classroom mainly because of the relevance to a child's skills development for life. However, I feel the main reason for this, is that these subjects are tested and therefore schools are being held accountable for this. Spoken language has only, in the last few years, become apart of the national curriculum and even now the focus isn't as strong as it should be – a mere few sentences within the English programmes of study. I strongly feel this is preventing our children from developing a good level of communication skills which are vital to enable them to succeed and thrive not only in school but as adults in an ever-evolving world. Oracy should be at the forefront of our education system, no matter how big or small, explicit teaching of speaking and listening is key for our future generation.

2. I've been a teacher within the Primary setting for 7 years now and I have seen year on year a poor level of social and communication skills amongst not only young people but adults too. Children learn from being involved in spoken dialogues, they learn how emotions and identities are expressed and how to work together to solve problems and get things done. Therefore, learning through language is at the root of how children and young people develop through life. If we aren't focusing on this enough in schools, what provision are we providing for them? Are we really equipping with the skills necessary? Many employers now rank verbal communication as the most important skill for employees, of course this makes sense, as interviews require a candidate to present themselves well and to be able to answer questions with confidence. I remember arriving for my first ever interview when I was just 16 years-old and the thought of having to sit there and speak to someone about myself and answer questions I wasn't

prepared for terrified me. However, if I had had some provision at school to enhance my speaking and listening skills this would have supported me for this stage of my life.

3. As previously mentioned, Oracy can have a huge impact on every stage of life, whether a child in their early years of development or an adult at a later stage in their life. It is necessary and vital for all. There are many adults who struggle to interact with others, struggle and feel insecure when faced with job interviews, unable to thrive in the work place because of a lack of social skills. At school, within the playground, there are many issues children face amongst their peers. There are many occasions where they are unable to come to an agreement within a discussion or even fall out and argue due to the fact that they cannot read or understand each other's body language. If they were able to understand how to work with each other, how to use and understand eye contact alongside reading and using the necessary facial expressions with the knowledge of tonal variation, discussions and any disagreements which arise on the playground have the potential to be solved or diffused amongst themselves. I have worked within schools from deprived areas and have seen first-hand how little exposure to rich conversation these children have in comparison to their peers. According to research, within these areas of deprivation, 50% of children start school with below average language skills. Therefore, they are significantly behind their peers before they've even been immersed in a talk environment. In addition to this, by the age of 3, children from privileged families hear 30 million more words than children from underprivileged backgrounds. If schools focus on a quality Oracy education, we could alleviate the language deficiency these children are having to face.
4. The wider curriculum can benefit from having an Oracy focus. Having read the work of Robin Alexander (2008), I've come to the viewpoint that creating a school with dialogue at the heart is a powerful way to sustain high quality teaching and learning. Many subjects within the national curriculum allow and will thrive from being talk based, ie in History, there are many discussions and debates that could be had around artefacts or the reliability of sources. In my current school, we take an enquiry-based curriculum for our foundation subjects. This curriculum is deep with knowledge and questions as the children are placed on a journey of discovery and curiosity throughout a unit. The final outcome for each, requires children to produce or collaborate to present their knowledge. Children are keen to showcase their work and by explaining their learning, they are embedding and extending their understanding. Children are encouraged within our lessons, to answer in full sentences and agree, build upon or challenge their peers. This not only proves that they are listening to each other but develops their communication skills and supports the articulation of their sentences. Within Maths, we follow a maths mastery

approach which has particular activities embedded that allow for talk and discussion to take place. Reasoning is a vital part of mathematics; therefore, children should be provided with opportunities to discuss their calculations or problem solving.

5. Children and young people leaving school want to be able to access their lessons at secondary school or university and be able to get involved and contribute to these. Our Year Six's wanted to be confident and ready for the next phase. They need to be able to speak for themselves, and take an active role in their own learning as they get older. They want to be able to leave us at primary being able to listen well, have a good social confidence, understand body language and eye contact are key in a conversation and be able to conduct and influence a detailed and articulate conversation. Unfortunately, without an Oracy provision, we are not allowing our children to do so. Entering employment can be a daunting task on it's own, but without the communication skills to compliment this, it can be even harder and I know all to well just how hard that can be.
6. Oracy has a strong role and impact on a key agenda such as wellbeing and mental health. Everybody needs to feel confident enough to talk and share their feelings at any given time, not just children, adults too. By providing children with scaffolds in school to support this, time to reflect on their learning with a peer or adult, time to share our thoughts and feelings with a group, we are allowing our children to do so. But again, to be able to participate and contribute to activities such as this, children need to have the skills and ability to do so – through the support of an Oracy based education this can happen and will fall naturally to a child.
7. A high quality Oracy education should be embedded with communication skills throughout and provide a range of opportunities for children to use these and apply these to different contexts. I would expect to see children challenging their peers through high-quality questions as well as building on their responses. Teachers should be encouraged to probe children's thoughts and question them, further than they would have, before using an Oracy based pedagogy. Lessons should be fully immersed with talk and provide an environment that provides children with the freedom to use their voice. There needs to be more emphasis placed on speaking and listening in the curriculum which would influence teachers to use it more.
8. I can only provide evidence of how Oracy provision is being provided within my current school setting, however I am aware that there are a high number of schools that are not providing enough or are even aware of where to begin as this is not a widely pushed agenda. We currently provide a variety of approaches to pedagogy such as talk groups, talk partners, ground rules for talk which are discussed prior to every discussion, ABC – where children agree, build upon and challenge each other's responses

and discussion roles. With regards to extra-curricular provision, we have class assemblies where children present their learning and practise their speaking and listening skills, a school choir who perform in a variety of shows throughout the year, a school radio which is being launched this year, prefects and head boy/girl, school council who regularly meet with our governors, SLT and even interview our new staff.

9. There are lots of schools that are providing good practice and most share their ideas through social media platforms such as twitter. There are some good examples at my current school, where teachers are making a conscious effort to become the facilitators within the classroom and let the children become the leaders of their learning. Our practitioners are encouraged to provide more time for their pupils to respond to their questions and allow a longer pause than usual. We are also making some changes to our current curriculum and making sure that Oracy is at the forefront with as many opportunities as possible throughout. I would suggest visiting schools who are promoting Oracy within, to see first-hand the hard work which is taking place and in contrast visit schools which are not to see the significant difference.

10. There are many barriers that teachers are facing in providing a quality education with Oracy in depth. Firstly, a lot of professionals do not know what Oracy even means so they are lacking a lot of knowledge and understanding of the topic before they even start to implement it into their practice. It would require sending many staff members on courses so that they can be fully embedded into the research and statistics however this costs money and lots of it which unfortunately 21st century schools cannot afford. Secondly, there are the statutory requirements of schools in the modern-day society – SATs, if these were not as rigorous and taxing as they are, it would provide teachers with the freedom to explore and teach the real requirements that pupils and young adults need for life such as speaking and listening skills. Students do need to be able to use the passive voice in life, but they do need to be able to hold a conversation at a job interview. Lastly, the workload of a teacher is at it's highest point in history, most teachers spend their evenings marking books, assessments or planning lessons. However, if this wasn't a requirement of their schools, they could be using this time to research and invest into relevant topics and pedagogies such as Oracy.

11. Teachers and school leaders need a lot of support to be able to improve the delivery of an Oracy education: funding, research and time to invest. There is no doubt that an Oracy education is important for children and can provide them with skills which will support them in their adult lives. As I have already mentioned, schools are losing funding by the day and now have less to provide their staff with decent CPD. I am lucky enough to be within a school that has managed to find the budget to allow me to attend a

great course with Voice21 so I can become an Oracy leader within my school and support and equip our staff with the necessary knowledge. Most schools do not have this opportunity. If the government could provide funding to allow schools to send their staff for CPD there would be an increase in the uptake of Oracy courses. If the government published research and statistics and made it compulsory to focus on speaking and listening within schools (not just a few sentences in the national curriculum) education would be pushed into the right direction. Currently, there is no accountability present in the system, therefore schools do not see this as a priority. However, by proving facts and showing them the necessary research, it would show that on Oracy education really does make a difference.

12. In my opinion, I feel there should be ongoing assessments of Oracy within schools, if teachers were constantly using assessment for learning strategies to monitor their speaking and listening skills, provision would be regularly improving in the classroom. Staff should be making a conscious effort to listen to their pupils speak regularly through activities such as debates and lots of classroom talk. There should be teacher judgements throughout the year as this would be easy for a teacher to see the progress an individual child would have made. Currently, there is nothing. Speaking and listening is not monitored or assessed so how do we know if our pupils are making improvements?
13. I have already touched upon the limited requirements of speaking and listening within the Primary national curriculum, which are not sufficient enough. The elements required are simply not pushed enough and they do not explain in detail the necessary requirements that a child actually needs to be successful. For example, the spoken language requirements are 12 bullet point areas which are for Years 1-6. There is no progression within the skills throughout Primary school, yet 'using relevant strategies to build their vocabulary' will be very different in a Year 1 classroom to a Year 6 classroom. The same can be said for 'ask relevant questions to extend their understanding and knowledge' a Year 1 child will be asking a different type of question to a Year 6 child. Within these areas, there is no specifics of information of how to teach these areas or what this might look like in a school setting. Interpretation of these strands can be taken in a variety of different ways in schools across the country and that is why we face the issue we are currently facing – with children leaving school unable to communicate or present themselves efficiently.
14. Other educational pedagogies such as Talk for Writing by Pie Corbett and Singapore Maths both incorporate talk-based provision which have proven to be successful. Both schemes, have talk at the centre of learning and is immersed in exploratory talk. Students are provided with opportunities to share their thoughts, opinions, ideas, strategies within a lesson and can

build on each other's learning. Both areas allow children to participate in dialogue which promotes learning from each other in the classroom. We can draw parallels from these, if we provide a focus of talk, discussion and dialogic teaching throughout our education system, every lesson would put talk at the heart of learning. Every child would have the chance to have their say, feel successful, and be successful. It won't be easy and won't change overnight, however these pedagogies prove it is possible and can be done. So, what's stopping us?

References

The development of Oracy skills in school-aged learners – Cambridge University Press - 2018

Speaking Frankly -The case for Oracy in the curriculum

Robin Alexander, 2008, Towards Dialogic Teaching, Rebuilding Classroom Talk

English programmes of study, The National Curriculum, 2014

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?