

ORACY

Emerging Narrative 2017

EMERGENT NARRATIVE ON ORACY

1.1 Definition

Oracy refers to talking well, and learning well through talk, whether in education or in life. Talking well involves being a confident, sensitive and effective communicator. Learning well through talk means growing personally, academically, and socially through verbal interactions with other people.

1.2 Why should we focus on oracy?

- Around 50% of pupils from areas of socio-economic deprivation enter schools with language skills below those expected for their age,¹ and the language development of those from especially deprived backgrounds lags seventeen months behind their more affluent peers by the time they start school.²
- 57% of teachers say they have not received any training in oracy in the last three years and 53% would not know where to look for more information if they wanted it.³
- 50% employers say they are 'not satisfied' with school leavers' skills in communication.⁴ One report estimates that by 2020 over half a million UK workers will be held back by soft skills deficits, including communication and interpersonal skills.⁵
- Oracy underpins many non-cognitive skills, and a review of the long-term impact of 'non-cognitive skills rival IQ in predicting educational attainment, labour market success, health and criminality.'⁶
- Over 75% of people with mental health disorders have communication difficulties,⁷ and 10% of children under the age of 16 known to have a clinically significant mental health illness, nearly half of these are likely to have Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN).⁸
- 60% of young offenders⁹ and two thirds of pupils at risk of exclusion from school have been found to have SLCN.¹⁰ Spoken language disorders are also

¹ ICAN. (2006). The cost to the nation of children's poor communication.

² Save the Children (2014) How reading can help children escape poverty. London: Save the Children

³ Save the Children (2014) How (2016) *The State of Speaking in Our Schools*, London: Voice 21.

⁴ Millard, W. and Menzies, L. (2016) *The State of Speaking in Our Schools*, London: Voice 21.

⁵ CBI/Pearson (2016) *The Right Combination: CBI/Pearson Education and Skills Survey 2016*, London: CBI.

⁶ McDonald's (2015) *The Value of Soft Skills to the UK Economy*, London: Development Economics.

⁷ Kautz, T., Heckman, J. J., Diris, R., Ter Weel, B., & Borghans, L. (2014). Fostering and measuring skills: Improving cognitive and non-cognitive skills to promote lifetime success. National Bureau of Economic Research.

⁸ The All Party Parliamentary Group on Speech and Language Difficulties; Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists, 2014

⁹ <http://www.ican.org.uk/What-we-do/Monthly%20Theme%20-%20Mental%20Health.aspx>

¹⁰ Davies 2013 Annual Report of the Chief Medical Officer 2012: Our Children Deserve Better: prevention pays

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/255237/2901304_CMO_complete_low_res_accessible.pdf

extremely common amongst young people and adults in the criminal justice system.¹¹

- In the last four elections, only around 40% of 18-24 year olds voted. The gap in participation between younger and older voters has doubled in the last twenty years. This gap is particularly large in the UK compared to other countries^{12, 13}, and pupils are less likely to engage in political discussions in school if the school is in an urban setting or has an immigrant population.¹⁴

1.3 Improving oracy could:

- Help improve attainment and outcomes for all children, but in particular those with delayed language development.
- Reduce the attainment gap between more and less advantaged children.
- Mean that all pupils, including the most disadvantaged, would learn to talk well.
- Boost teachers' confidence and expertise in using spoken language, and ensure they give it the time they believe it deserves.
- Help disadvantaged pupils perform more confidently in interviews and at assessment centres, widening access to further and higher education.
- Give school-leavers the spoken communication skills they need to transition into the world of work, and help employers recruit highly articulate school-leavers and graduates.
- Boost young people's self-esteem, confidence, collaboration and teamwork.
- Help reduce the incidence of youth mental health problems.
- Reduce repeat exclusions from school, and initial youth offending and reoffending.
- Reduce the costs of remedial action - including incarceration - further down the line.
- Boost discussion of controversial or political issues by people from different communities, and political participation by young people.
- Help young people build happier and more fulfilling relationships with loved ones, including partners and family members, both during adolescence and later life, and more constructive professional relationships.

¹⁰ Gross (2011) https://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/media/9683/nwm_final_jean_gross_two_years_on_report.pdf

¹¹ Cross, M. 2007 *Language and social exclusion*. ICAN Talk Series Vol 4. Available at:

<http://www.ican.org.uk/~media/ican2/Whats%20the%20Issue/Evidence/4%20Language%20and%20Social%20Exclusion%20pdf.ashx>

¹² <http://www.democraticaudit.com/2016/05/06/how-to-reverse-the-civic-empowerment-gap-of-young-people-teach-them-about-politics-in-school/>

¹³ Detailed recent statistics on political engagement broken down by gender, age, socio-economic status, and ethnicity can be found here: <http://www.auditofpoliticalengagement.org/assets/media/reports/Audit-of-Political-Engagement-13-2016.pdf>

¹⁴ Conover and Searing, 2000, A Political Socialization Perspective (summary available here

<http://pol250jennings.blogspot.co.uk/2008/05/conover-searing-2000-political.html>)

1.4 Where are the key gaps?

The key gaps in oracy provision for young people are in:

- **The Early Years**, because while there are a wide range of interventions and resources currently on offer to support young children's oracy, provision remains patchy during this crucial phase in their development.
- **Schools**, because while Voice 21 and other organisations are making ground in creating a mindset shift towards oracy, many teachers are still not able to give oracy the time they feel it deserves, or access oracy training and resources.
- **Mental health**, where there is a chronic shortage of speech and language services available for young people and affordable support for schools.
- **Supporting healthy relationships**, where the resource (including time) to teach young people about importance of communication in developing positive relationships is often very limited.
- **Social exclusion**, where very little system-wide proactive work takes place to target and address vulnerable young people's SLCN or oracy more broadly.
- **Citizenship and democracy engagement**, where access to interventions (such as a quality Citizenship or personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) curriculum, or other opportunities to discuss key issues) is patchy.

1.5 Some remaining questions

- How can we address a lack of consistency in Early Years support for parents, children and professionals across different parts of the country?
- Is it possible to persuade schools with a history of low engagement in oracy to change their attitude?
- Should developing high quality spoken communication for the workplace be a primary goal, or should we focus on ensuring students have great subject knowledge and acquire work-relevant spoken communication skills indirectly through interactions - about subject content - in school?
- How can we improve access to mental health support for 18-25 year olds, in Higher Education, work, or who are unemployed?
- Is it possible to join up different agencies and organisations so that, for example, third sector organisations with expertise in prisons can work with primary age pupils at risk of exclusion?
- What role could social workers play in developing oracy among young people at risk of social exclusion?
- Would impact in oracy best be achieved using the existing vehicle of Citizenship education or through other educational programmes?

- Should we focus explicitly on improving oracy *for relationships*, or on oracy in general, which will drip feed into improved communication in relationships?

1.6 Call to action

Oracy has a unique potential to leverage positive change for all young people, irrespective of their circumstances, age or background. Oracy is a set of processes *and* outcomes, giving pupils the skills in spoken communication they need to flourish academically and throughout their lives. Building young people's oracy can help us create a happier, fairer and more productive society.