

RCSLT DLD research priorities Current member research and quality improvement projects

Dr Michelle St Clair, Senior Lecturer, University of Bath

Project title: Engage with Developmental Language Disorder

Addressing research priorities:

1. Outcomes for individuals with DLD across settings (e.g. language provision, mainstream school), in relation to curriculum access, language development and social skills
2. Impact of SLT interventions for adolescents and adults with DLD, on wider functional outcomes (e.g. quality of life, access to the curriculum, social inclusion and mental health)
3. Effective ways of teaching self-help strategies to children and young people with DLD

However, all research priorities may benefit if researchers take advantage of the E-DLD project for recruitment into more specific projects focused on the remaining research priorities.

Outline of project: Engage with Developmental Language Disorder (or E-DLD) is a new project which aims to bring the science of DLD to parents and individuals with DLD. We have two aims. The first is to make scientific research about the causes, consequences, and treatment of DLD more accessible to those who are most interested, specifically parents of children with DLD and individuals with DLD. The second is to help facilitate DLD research by providing a platform to link researchers with E-DLD members. Parents of children with DLD and individuals with DLD can choose to sign up to a centralised database. E-DLD members will be given details of project summaries with researcher's contact details. It is up to each E-DLD member to contact the researcher if they wish to participate. We hope this project will help engage the public in DLD research, both as consumers as well as participants.

Implications for clinical practice: By helping facilitate research, better treatments and understanding of DLD could emerge over time. By better informing parents about DLD research, parents may have a better understanding and be better able to support the clinical work of SLTs.

Patient and Public Involvement: There is a large public engagement element of this project. It is public facing and will only work with engagement from parents of children with DLD and individuals with DLD.

Contact to find out more: E-DLD@bath.ac.uk www.engage-dld.com

Follow on twitter: @Engage_DLD @michellestclair, @botting_nikki, @DrJennyG

Kate Shobbrook, Senior Teaching Fellow and PhD student, UCL

Project title: Investigating interventions for linguistic comprehension in pre-school children with language disorder

Addressing research priorities:

1. Specific characteristics of evidence-based DLD interventions which facilitate progress towards the goals of an individual with DLD
2. Effective interventions targeting receptive language for individuals with DLD

Outline of project: My research investigates intervention for pre-school children with difficulties affecting their understanding of spoken language. Whilst children are not often diagnosed with DLD at this age, comprehension problems are a significant barrier to everyday functioning and a 'red flag' for persistent difficulties and subsequent diagnosis of DLD. Despite SLTs frequently delivering intervention that targets receptive language, there is a lack of published research into the effectiveness of such intervention. My research therefore examines clinical practice, the evidence-base, and the interaction between the two.

My work is guided by the following questions:

- 1) what interventions do SLTs deliver to develop receptive language and what factors guide their decision making?
- 2) what does the research literature tell us about intervention for receptive language in pre-school children with language disorders?
- 3) how can we support the implementation of research evidence to everyday practice?

Implications for clinical practice: By investigating existing research evidence and current clinical practice, I aim to support the implementation of research to clinical practice, ultimately to improve the quality of intervention and outcomes for children with receptive language difficulties.

Contact to find out more: k.shobbrook@ucl.ac.uk

Follow on twitter: @KateShobbrook

Annabel Sheard, Clinical Academic Speech and Language Therapist NIHR Research Fellow

Project title: Communication impairment and psychosocial wellbeing: An investigation into intervention by Speech and Language Therapists and Mental Health and Psychotherapists.

Addressing research priorities:

2. Specific characteristics of evidence-based DLD interventions which facilitate progress towards the goals of an individual with DLD
5. Impact of including speech, language and communication needs (SLCN)/ developmental language disorder (DLD) in teacher training course curriculums on referral rates and level of support for children with DLD
6. Impact of SLT interventions for adolescents and adults with DLD, on wider functional outcomes (e.g. quality of life, access to the curriculum, social inclusion and mental health)
7. Implementation of SLT recommendations in the classroom by teaching staff: confidence levels, capacity, capability and levels of success
8. Effective ways of teaching self-help strategies to children and young people with DLD

Outline of project: The relationship between Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) and psychosocial wellbeing poses problems for Speech and Language Therapists (SLTs), and psychotherapists alike, to diagnose and treat. This complex relationship lacks research. For example, it is uncertain whether communication impairment leads to mental health problems or whether they exist independently (Georgiades et al., 2010). Important questions remain about how to treat this population successfully as documented in research priorities by Bercow (2018) and Hollo et al. (2014). My study will aim to answer the following research questions:

- 1) How do clinicians experience delivering therapies to children and adolescents with Speech Language and Communication Needs and mental health difficulties?
- 2) What treatments are thought to be clinically useful with this population?

Implications for clinical practice: Findings from the study will provide an overview of the current problems faced by professionals when treating this population and will contribute to the evidence base. It is hoped that findings from this research will facilitate a larger scale study at doctoral level, in which an

exploration of the use of psychological therapies and techniques in children with SLCN will be undertaken. The overarching goal of the doctoral-level research is to design a training programme or intervention for SLTs and psychotherapists to use, which will promote access to psychological therapies for children with SLCN in addition to enhancing wellbeing, and increasing communication.

Follow on twitter: @AnnabelSheard

Instagram: @Annabel_Sheard

Emma Baker, Specialist Speech and Language Therapist – DLD

Project title: A qualitative investigation of parent views and experiences at a specialist Early Years language centre for children with developmental language disorder

Addressing research priorities:

1. Outcomes for individuals with DLD across settings (e.g. language provision, mainstream school), in relation to curriculum access, language development and social skills

Outline of project: This study investigated the concerns and experiences of parents whose children attended a specialist language centre for pre-school children with DLD. These children receive a DLD diagnosis as they have substantial difficulties, unlikely to resolve by school age. 5 semi-structured parent interviews were carried out. 3 themes and 7 subthemes were generated using thematic analysis:

1. The far-reaching impact of DLD:

DLD has a significant impact on children's emotional well-being, friendships and life experiences, and family life.

2. The importance of understanding and diagnosing DLD

Parents valued the DLD diagnosis and felt empowered by the information provided at the centre. A lack of recognition of DLD created barriers to provision and led to feelings of isolation.

3. The aspects of provision valued by parents:

Parents valued the language centre, reporting their children made significant progress. Parent groups provided valued information and gave opportunities for peer-to-peer support. Outreach work improved support for children in their mainstream school/nursery.

Implications for clinical practice:

- SLT outcomes for children with DLD must be developed in partnership with parents and address a broad range of variables
- Timely diagnosis with information and support to parents can mitigate some negative impacts of DLD
- Need for a formalised and evidence-based process of DLD diagnosis and disclosure to parents/ carers in SLT services.
- Post-diagnosis support and information for parents is needed
- Awareness raising of DLD is crucial to ensure that children receive the correct referrals, intervention and support, and to reduce the sense of isolation that families experience.
- Early Years Language Centre provision produces positive outcomes for children with DLD and their families and is highly valued by parents.
- Successful intervention for young children needs to include specialist support for the child, family and educational setting.
- Children with DLD and their parents benefit from opportunities for peer-to-peer support. Consider SLT role in facilitating this.

Contact to find out more: Emma.baker14@nhs.net

Follow on twitter: @EmmaBakerSLT

Lucy Rodgers, Early Years SLT and NIHR PCAF Fellow

Project title: The development of a novel intervention for pre-school children with co-occurring speech and language difficulties within a DLD profile

Addressing research priorities:

1. Outcomes for individuals with DLD across settings (e.g. language provision, mainstream school), in relation to curriculum access, language development and social skills

Outline of project: The long-term aim of this research project is to co-create a novel intervention which targets both speech production and language outcomes in pre-schoolers who have a DLD profile. This is because children with this dual profile are at an increased risk of long-term literacy and speech difficulties (1,2), however, current interventions tend to target speech and language separately (3). I was successfully awarded PCAF funding to develop a PhD research proposal for this. My work at PCAF and PhD level will be based on the EBP model: current evidence- e.g. formal scoping review, to be published as a part of my PCAF; parent preferences e.g. co-creation of therapy resources, feedback on intervention delivery, setting of priorities; Clinician expertise- e.g. consensus on key intervention components.

Implications for clinical practice:

- Improvement in child outcomes across both speech and language. Potential for reducing long term impact on speech/literacy.
- SLT access to an evidence-based intervention which targets both speech and language outcomes
- Support for parents in how to develop their child's speech and language with access to parent developed guiding materials

Patient and Public Involvement:

- Phase 1 parent PPI (spring 20): Survey - 100% of parents surveyed reported that initially their child was supported for their language, not speech, when accessing early years' services. 80% suggested that EY services should aim to support both, with one parent commenting that therapy should "target speech, as well as language"
- Phase 2 parent PPI (winter 20/21): I will use patient involvement funding (awarded through my local RDS) to consult with parents during my PCAF. Their input will include refining the research question, shaping the research proposal, suggestions/plans for parental involvement at PhD level.
- SLT engagement 1 (November 19): Workshop/feedback from London SSD CEN. Feedback from 37 members was collated into common themes. Common challenges raised include:
 - Little evidence for combined SSD/DLD interventions: "lack of therapy approaches which target both"
 - Little guidance as to the impact of targeting speech/language simultaneously on the child's overall outcomes: "what area should we prioritise for these children for the best outcomes e.g. language or speech vs combined approach"
- SLT engagement 2 (August 20): A survey was sent to clinicians asking them about what research they would most like to see being carried out for this group:
 - Clinical features of this group- 60%
 - Target identification/prioritisation- 67%
 - Assessment- 33%
 - Terminology and differential diagnosis- 40%
 - Models of speech/language development (e.g. communication pyramid)- 20%
 - Combined interventions for speech and language- 87%
- SLT engagement 3 (autumn/winter 20/21): Update to London SSD CEN/collate further feedback for my PhD research proposal. Online workshops with various NHS early years teams nationwide.
- SLT engagement 4 (winter 20/ongoing): Launch researcher blog and SLT clinical forum, funded by a RCSLT minor grant

Follow on twitter: @lucy_r_slt

Kathryn Fradley, PhD Researcher at Manchester Metropolitan University

Project title: Developmental Language Disorder: A secondary analysis investigating risk and resilience for mental health difficulties

Addressing research priorities:

6. Impact of SLT interventions for adolescents and adults with DLD, on wider functional outcomes (e.g. quality of life, access to the curriculum, social inclusion and mental health)

Outline of project: Using the data collected by the Millennium Cohort Study, risk and resilience for mental health difficulties in early adolescence (at age fourteen) were investigated in young people at risk of DLD at age five. The first study identifies early risk factors for general mental health difficulties, internalising and externalising problems. Early risk factors included, but were not limited to, high reports of parent-child conflict. The second study determined that the identified early risk factors operate in a linear cumulative fashion. The final study identified school age factors that increased the likelihood of resilience for general mental health difficulties, as well as internalising and externalising problems. These school age factors that encouraged resilience included, but were not limited to, high reports of prosocial behavior. These school-age factors are likely to have a promotive, rather than protective, mechanism for encouraging resilience for adverse mental health outcomes.

Implications for clinical practice:

The findings from the current project has identified factors that increase the risk of and promote resilience for mental health difficulties (including internalising and externalising problems) within young people at risk of DLD. Future research could develop upon the current project's findings to inform identification of young people at high, or further risk of adverse mental health outcomes in early adolescence. Also, intervention-based research could determine if any of the identified promotive factors could be incorporated into practice to reduce the likelihood of adverse mental health outcomes in early adolescence. As for now, professionals should be aware of how the identified factors might influence the development of mental health difficulties within these young people.

Follow on twitter: @KathFradley

Vanessa Lloyd-Esenkaya, PhD Candidate, University of Bath

Project title: The social side of Developmental Language Disorder: Peer interaction skills during childhood

Addressing research priorities:

1. Outcomes for individuals with DLD across settings (e.g. language provision, mainstream school), in relation to curriculum access, language development and social skills

With links to 2, 6, 8.

Outline of project:

This doctoral research has focused on the following aims:

- 1) To understand the strengths and challenges primary school children with DLD experience when interacting with peers.
- 2) To identify predictors of social competence among children with DLD.

Our systematic review documents what the research to date has shown about the social interaction strengths and challenges experienced by children with DLD. We asked school staff and parents of children with Language Disorders attending specialist schools what they thought about possible reasons for the children's social behaviours in a qualitative study. We invented two new psychometric tasks which are suited to children with language difficulties. We used these to explore whether emotional functioning and

conflict resolution styles predict the social skills of children with DLD. We used a population cohort to explore whether birth order, or school placement type predicts the social skills of children at risk of DLD.

Implications for clinical practice: This PhD uncovers some of the intricacies underlying the complex relationship between language difficulties and social interaction challenges. Overall, our findings show children with DLD are likely to experience peer problems. Clinicians should support skills associated with social development, such as emotional functioning, as well as language skills when working with children with DLD. This PhD research provides a foundation from which to design new social skills interventions for primary school children with DLD.

Patient and Public Involvement: We conducted a qualitative focus group study at the start of the project to ensure the research questions which followed were based on the views of parents, and teaching staff who supported children with Language Disorders.

Follow on twitter: @vanessa123lloyd