



Language and Working Memory Lab

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SCHOOL OF COMMUNICATION SCIENCES AND DISORDERS AT WESTERN UNIVERSITY

IDENTIFYING DEVELOPMENTAL LANGUAGE DISORDER IN CHILDREN

~ Alyssa Kuiack, M.Cl.Sc/PhD Candidate

Children experiencing difficulty in language development have been described by professionals for many years, but until now, we haven't had a consistent term to identify these difficulties. In 2016-2017, an international group of experts published a consensus to use the term developmental language disorder (DLD) to describe children with a persistent language problem having a functional impact on their communication or learning. Around that time, we wanted to understand how Canadian speech-language pathologists (SLPs) used labels to identify children experiencing language difficulties, so we asked them to complete a survey.

We found that informative labels were used inconsistently by SLPs. Nevertheless, the SLPs agreed that having a consistent label would provide better advocacy and support for children. Recently, we conducted a follow-up survey. We wanted to understand when the term DLD was used by SLPs. The results of this survey will help SLPs achieve more consistency in using the term, DLD.

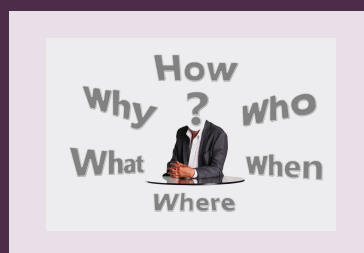


HELPING CHILDREN WITH DEVELOPMENTAL LANGUAGE DISORDER

~ Taylor Bardell, M.Cl.Sc/PhD Candidate

Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) is a difficulty learning language that doesn't go away. About 2 children in every classroom of 30 have DLD, making it 5 times more common than Autism Spectrum Disorder and 50 times more common than hearing impairment. Educators are uniquely capable of making an enormous difference for children with DLD. In our article 'Oral Language Skills and Learning Disabilities: A Review for Educators', we provide educators with an overview of oral language skills and describe links between children's oral language and their social and academic outcomes.

We also provide suggestions for ways that educators can help children who struggle with oral language. This article is in LD@School, a project of the Learning Abilities Association of Ontario. LD@School provides information and resources to educators related to teaching children with learning disabilities. They have a ton of great resources for educators!
<https://www.ldatschool.ca/oral-language-skills/>



THE GRADE 1 LANGUAGE AND LITERACY PROJECT

~Alyssa Kuiack, M.Cl.Sc/PhD Candidate

Collaborative practice in education refers to a joint effort between two or more professionals in working towards the common goal of meeting student needs and building student success. In the world of education, many professionals engage in collaborative practice including speech-language pathologists (SLPs) and educators. SLPs and educators often collaborate around language and literacy instruction. During the 2018-2019 school year, we partnered with the Toronto District School Board to help to evaluate their Grade One Language and Literacy Project. This project investigated the effects of collaboration between SLPs and grade one teachers across 21 different schools. There were 3 professional development sessions spaced across the school year covering topics such as assessment and using decodable texts in the classroom. Between these sessions, the SLP-teacher pairs engaged in co-planning and co-teaching in the classroom.

We found that a variety of factors influenced the successful collaboration of SLPs and educators during the project. Some of these factors were: 1) having enough time to work on project goals, 2) appreciating your partner, 3) participating actively in professional development sessions and 4) managing unavoidable frustration.

These results will help us build better partnerships in the future!

PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN SPEECH LANGUAGE PATHOLOGISTS AND RESEARCH

~ Meghan Vollebregt, M.Cl.Sc/PhD Candidate

We do lots of research projects in partnership with speech-language pathologists (SLPs) from various school boards. We often help SLPs gather evidence about the work they do in their specific school settings. These partnerships are valuable to both researchers and SLPs. We want to understand how to make the best partnerships we can!

We worked with SLPs from the Durham District School Board to understand more about a kindergarten assessment tool. We also wanted to understand the SLPs' opinions about how the partnership worked. To do this, we first asked the SLPs to talk about what worked or didn't work in our partnership. We also asked some of the SLPs to take part in an in-depth interview. So far, we have learned that on-going communication, administrative support, and shared goals between researchers and SLPs are important. We're proud of each of the partnerships we've created. We extend our thanks to the SLPs for their continued efforts in these partnerships.

HOW TO HELP STUDENTS WITH WORKING MEMORY DIFFICULTIES

~ Theresa Pham, M.Cl.Sc/PhD Candidate

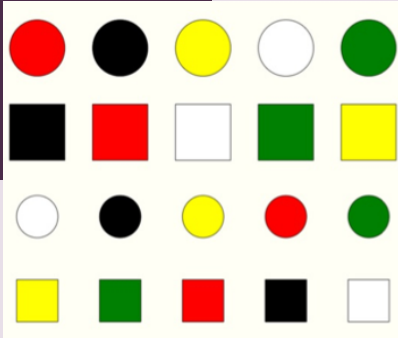
Working memory is the ability to hold information you need in your current focus of attention. Many activities in the classroom involve working memory – like the ability to add 15 and 33 in your head or understand what you hear or read. There are two parts to working memory: (1) storage, the ability to 'store' or hold information in mind, and (2) processing, the ability to do some thinking task with that information. Some students have poor working memory skills, and this puts them at a disadvantage in the classroom. They will have to work harder than other students to learn and perform well in school. There are strategies that can help support working memory. Educators can repeat instructions or demonstrate how to do a task. Students can make notes or repeat information to themselves. In a recent article, we outline strategies that teachers and parents can use to help students with working memory difficulties succeed in school. Students can also implement the strategies themselves, and find the ones that work best for them! Helping students overcome working memory difficulties will help them reach their full academic potential at school! Read our full article here: <https://www.ldatschool.ca/working-memory-overload/>

THE TOKEN TEST AS A PROMISING TOOL FOR SPEECH-LANGUAGE PATHOLOGISTS

~ Theresa Pham, M.CI.Sc/PhD Candidate

When speech-language pathologists (SLPs) assess and treat children who struggle to learn language, they need to understand how working memory skills – like the ability to understand a long sentence – and linguistic abilities – like the ability to understand the rules of language and word order – influence performance. One tool that might help SLPs do this is called the Token Test. In the Token Test, children need to follow instructions that get longer and longer! And harder too! Take a look at the picture to see some examples.

In this study, we are learning whether the Token Test can help us understand a child's working memory and language skills. We found that understanding long, easy sentences is related to working memory skills, and understanding long, hard sentences is related to language skills. This is a promising tool that SLPs can use to help them understand a child's strengths and weaknesses.



1. Children see all these different objects in front of them

2. And then might be asked to:

Easy (short and easy): Touch a circle

Medium (long and easy): Touch the red circle and the green square

Hardest (long and hard): Put the red circle between the yellow square and the green square



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Follow this link to find out more about our work
Our past newsletters: <https://www.uwo.ca/fhs/lwm/research/newsletter.html>
List of our published papers can be found at the lab website:
<https://www.uwo.ca/fhs/lwm/publications/index.html>
Language and Working Memory Lab: 519-661-2111 ext. 89053

OUR SINCERE THANKS!

Thank you to all of the school personnel, parents, and children who make our studies possible. Thank you also to the talented graduate students working on these research projects!

Thank you to all of the parents who have indicated that they would like to be contacted for future studies. As we continue working on our research projects, we greatly appreciate your continued participation.

