

A call to action: involving adolescents with DLD in research in response to Ehren: Engaging Adolescent Language Disorders: A Critical Focus Now and in the Future

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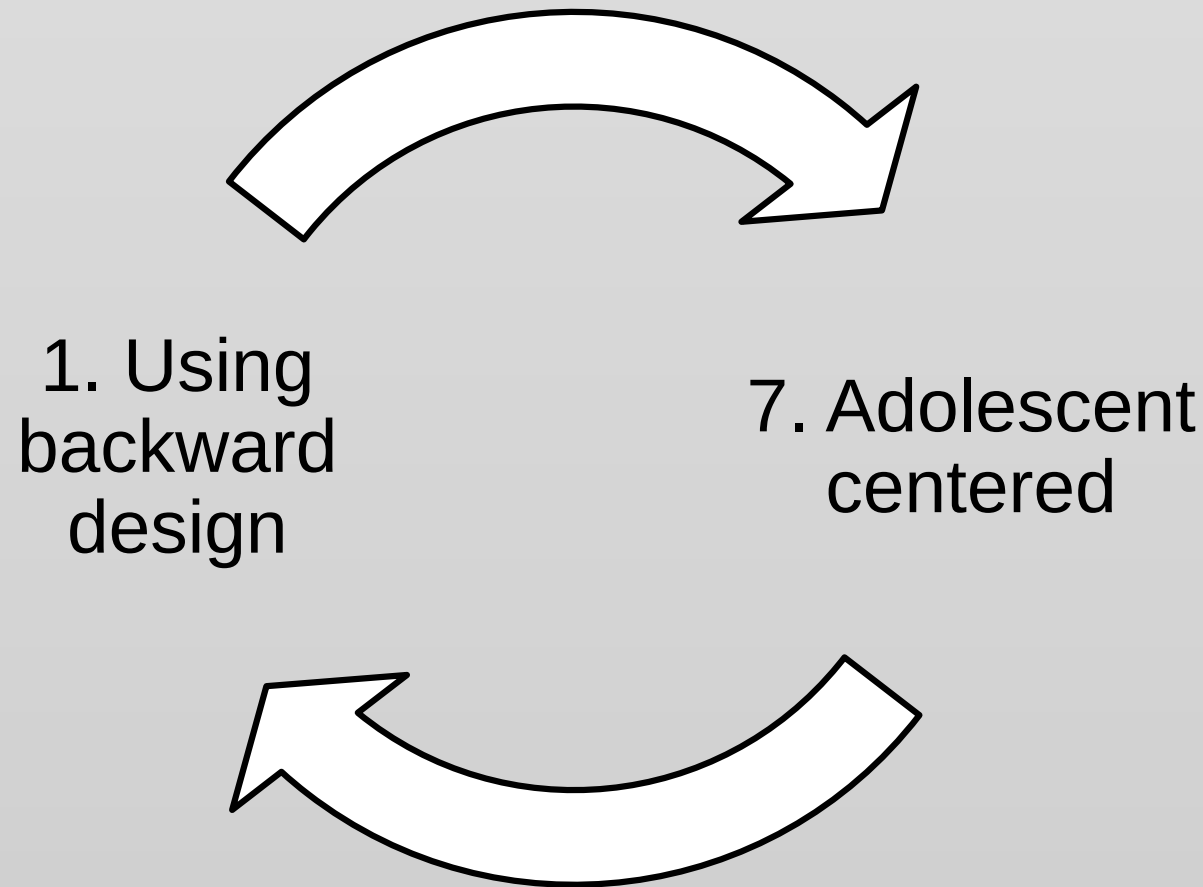


What have we learnt

- DLD is a lifelong condition
- Language underpins (almost) everything we do / engage in
- DLD impacts QoL, Mental health, Academic achievement, Vocational attainment.
- SLPs play a critical role
- 'Our' research focus is and has been on younger children
- Let's heed Ehren's call to action



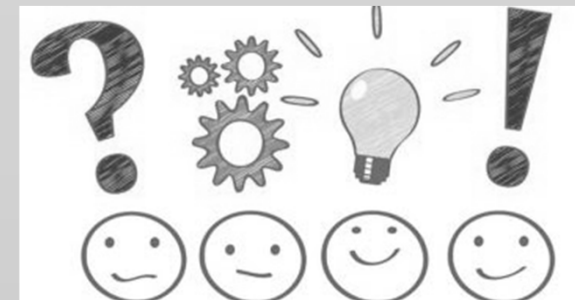
Focus on 2 action items – apply them to research:



Backward design (Wiggins & McTighe, 1998)

To define goals for research, professional learning, and services. Start with the end in mind; consider what we are preparing adolescents to do in adulthood and plan research, professional learning and services accordingly.

- What do adolescents want (to do / focus on)?
- How do we embed the voices of adolescents in research?
- How do we involve them as co-creators in research?
- How do we engage them in research (motivation)?



What do adolescents want? using qualitative research to inform practice

“Much of the published research is “on” rather than “with” children and young people with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN)”

What are some of the systemic barriers to involvement:
Are young people with language disorders trustworthy?

- Adults may act as proxies
- Involvement may become tokenistic

Qualitative research may be the key.

Children have many ways of communicating and researchers need to do more to provide all children with opportunities and means to express their voice by being innovative

Priority setting partnerships

A project to develop the top priorities for new research in speech and language therapy, using a priority setting partnership (PSP). PSPs enable clinicians, patients and carers to work together to identify and prioritise evidence uncertainties, that could be answered by research.

One key clinical area is DLD

DLD – Top 10 research priorities



1. Outcomes across settings, in relation to curriculum areas, language devt and social skills
2. Characteristics of evidence-based DLD interventions
3. Effectiveness of F2F vs indirect approach
4. Effective interventions for receptive language
5. Impact of 'DLD training' in teacher training course curricula on support for children with DLD
6. Impact of SLT intervention (for adolescents and adults) on wider functional outcomes
7. Implementation of SLT recommendations in the classroom by teaching staff
8. Effective ways of teaching self-help strategies to children and young people with DLD
9. Impact of targeted vocabulary interventions on curriculum access for individuals w. DLD
10. Impact of teacher training on academic attainment in adolescents with DLD in secondary schools

3 Key areas

1. Developing effective interventions with meaningful outcomes
2. Developing our understanding of DLD in older children and adults
3. Developing understanding of and support for children and young people with DLD amongst professionals working in education.

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Gathering adolescents' perspectives is critical

So how do we do this?

- Explain the terminology
- Ask concrete questions
- Pair oral language with written language
- Use visual supports (illustrations, photography, walk and talk)
- Pilot the questions / supports with adolescents with language disorder.
- Using ethnographic approaches – e.g., observations

E.g. Ziegenfusz et al., 2025; see also Carroll and Twomey (2021) for a scoping review

Example questions:

- Are there things you enjoy or like doing at school?
- What are some of the things that you think would help you at school?

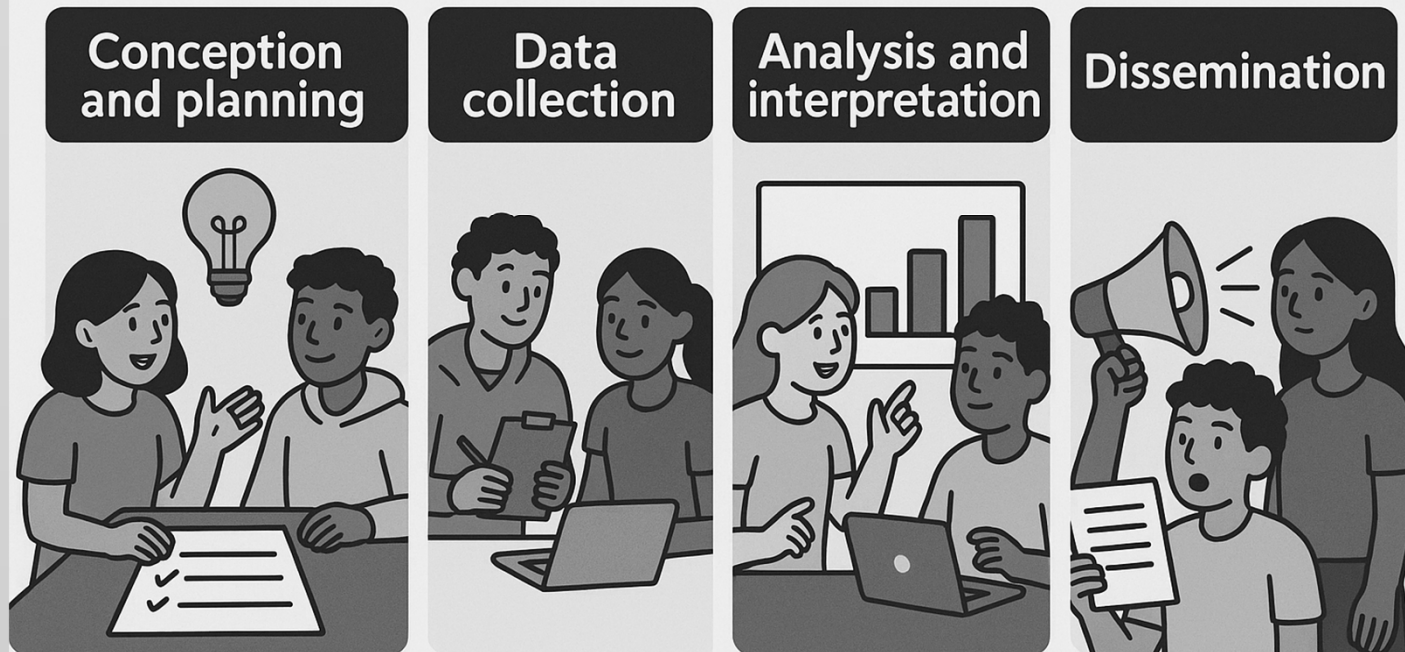
How do you find doing these things at school?

	Very hard	Quite hard	Not hard but not easy	Quite easy	Very easy
	1	2	3	4	5



Beyond the top 10 research priorities:

If we truly want to engage adolescents with DLD in research, this needs to happen across all stages

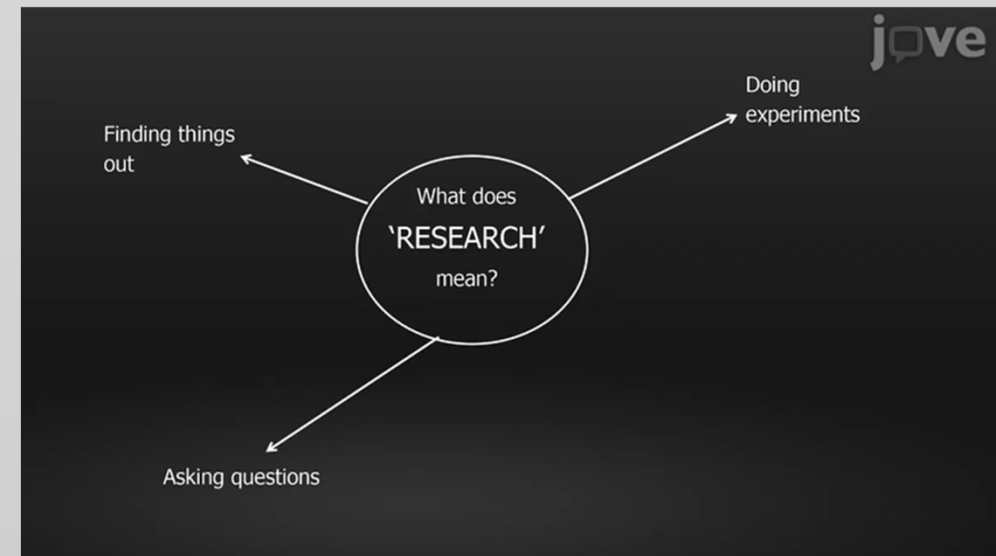


Involving adolescents with DLD as co-creators of our research studies – A protocol

- Step 1 describes a program of activities delivered by trained, specialist DLD speech and language therapists (SLTs) that prepares iDLD/ iDLDPC for involvement.
- Step 2 outlines an approach to elicit iDLD/iDLDPC's opinions on research priorities.
- Steps 3 and 4 describe methods to analyze and integrate this data at multiple stages of the research priority setting process.

Examples of step 1

- Consolidate and teach key concepts - e.g., communication, speech, language, developmental language disorder, difficulties, speech and language therapy, research, priority ...
- Discussing – is xxx a priority for you? What are priorities for you?
- What should we know more about?



What about motivation?

“Motivation declines as children reach adolescence. Poor motivation inhibits participation and engagement in language-based interventions”

Ziegenfusz experienced real difficulty engaging adolescents in his study asking about school-based tasks, educational supports, and school connectedness.

My question to you: How can we routinely involve these adolescents in the decision-making processes related to supports, interventions, and research?

Student perspectives:



*On their needs regarding school-based tasks and educational supports
(Gibbons et al., 2023; Tancredi, 2020; Ziegenfusz et al., 2025)*

*Challenges across multiple areas of learning and assessment ... numeracy tasks
and literacy tasks were rated as the most difficult ...*

Educational supports (extra time, technology, visuals) rated as most helpful.

*Reported strengths in some curriculum areas (e.g., creative arts, sport), a positive
sense of school connectedness, and most areas of social functioning.*

Peer relationships are a self-reported area potentially requiring support.

Interviewing adolescents as part of communication profiling [clinical data collection approach].

- Using interviews to obtain qualitative data about adolescents' perceptions of language and their own language skills
- Comparing their performance on standardised language assessments with their own perceptions of their language skills
- Using interviews to inform intervention

“if I learnt a lot more words I might be in higher set in English and I might get better grade that would be good for me.”

Let's learn to listen...

Children learn to understand information, become aware of choices and learn how to see alternative points of view. The process also requires adults' openness of mind to learn from the children, to engage in dialogue with them and to re-examine their own opinions and attitudes in light of what the children say. (Owen et al., 2004: 56)

Thanks

Do you have any questions?

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