

Obituary

A tribute to Professor James Law OBE, Professor of Speech and Language Sciences at Newcastle University, UK, who passed away October 2021

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James Law is a name that will be familiar to all speech and language therapists who have an interest in developmental disorders of language and communication. His contribution to our understanding of the nature and prevalence of these disorders not only expanded our knowledge base in this area, but also highlighted the importance and value of paying equal attention to *how* we know what we know. The scientific rigour he brought to his work, combined with his ambition to generate robust and substantial data sets that could be exploited to demonstrate the compatibility of science and practice set a benchmark for the evidence base for the field of speech and language therapy. He was a powerfully positive influence ensuring that speech and language therapy aligned with and embraced developments in research methodologies and the paradigm of evidence-based practice. The systematic review of the prevalence and natural history of primary speech and language delay that he co-authored (Law, et al., 2000a) highlighted the fundamental challenges faced by researchers trying to better understand a developmental disorder that changed over time and about which there was little agreement on what label to use or what assessment measures to apply. This paper, along with his seminal Cochrane review of speech and language therapy interventions for children with primary speech and language delay or disorder (Law, Garrett & Nye, 2003), will have been required reading for most, if not all, speech and language therapy students for the best part of a decade.

His interest was not only in the individual child with language needs, but the responsibility of the profession of speech and language therapy to meet those needs effectively, efficiently and meaningfully. He shone a light on models of practice (e.g., Law et al., 2000b; Law et al., 2002) and challenged the inequities in society that are associated with communication impairments. Across his extraordinarily prolific career, he constantly pushed us as a field to raise our ambitions above the needs of each individual, unique child and young person, to build a robust evidence base for how best to support all individuals and to drive changes in public health policy for the benefit of all those at risk of communication disadvantage.

One of his gifts was his ability to present his work in language that was accessible so that even those new to the profession could benefit with ease from his research. His legacy is immense.

Suaímhneas síoraí dó

References

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