

OSPA TODAY



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President's Message

Happy 2003! As we peer over the horizon of the New Year, we wonder what changes it will hold for us. Change is an inevitable part of life. We cannot remain static, or no progress would occur. As time marches on, change is a given. Like the ocean, change is sometimes gentle like the tide, or at other times, like crashing waves during a storm. Changes that occur whether it is your choice or not both require similar effort.

Certainly our state's current financial crisis has forced tough decisions and changes that are greatly impacting every public school district in Oklahoma. Many of the recent educational advances are being lost as districts scramble to make necessary budgetary cuts due to the lack of funding from the state. Although the State Improvement Grant for Retention, Recruitment, and Retraining has recently been providing free tuition for school psychology coursework to address the shortage of school psychologists in Oklahoma, it is in this context that, just as the first of these students are graduating, school districts are slashing jobs and/or not filling vacancies that otherwise would have been available to these new school psychologists. There are currently 65 vacancies in the RESCs alone, but due to insufficient funding, these are not being filled. It is important to realize how essential school psychologists are to students, parents, teachers, administrators, other educational professionals, and school districts as a whole, to providing mental health services to improve the lives and learning of children and youth, and to advocate for them and for our profession during these critical times.

One change that is long overdue is the restructuring of the Regional Educational Services Centers (RESCs). Created by legislation in the 1970s, the RESCs have provided valuable educational services to Oklahoma's public schools, particularly rural and suburban school districts that do not have their own school psychologists. As IDEA and its 1997 Amendments added increasingly more requirements to the school psychological services that public schools must provide, such as functional behavioral assessments, behavior intervention plans, manifestation determinations, and individual and group counseling; it became ever more difficult for the already overburdened RESCs to meet these additional demands. Complicating this dilemma were decreasing resources provided to support the RESCs, as well as related continuing internal issues such as RESCs' policy of recognizing only psychometrists, although many of their own employees were certified school psychologists, and limiting their job description, pay, and duties to psychometry services. This policy not only did not recognize the education, certification, and training that these school psychologists already earned, thus not compensating them monetarily for this, but also had the unintended negative consequences of thus forcing these rural and smaller suburban school districts without their own school psychology staff to contract with outside agencies and/or private practitioners for assessments for students whose suspected disabilities included emotional disturbance, and for individual and group counseling for their students. Thereby these school districts spent additional resources for these services, and also lost Medicaid reimbursement they would have received had these services been provided by their own school psychologists; instead, the outside agency or private

practitioners collected the Medicaid reimbursement monies. (Sidebar: A bit of history: During the 1970s and 1980s, state guidance centers frequently provided individual and group counseling to many public schools' students; however, the guidance centers changed their mission to providing baby wellness clinics and other early childhood services, and the counseling they formerly provided was discontinued. For a short time, private companies appeared almost overnight to woo schools to refer students to them for insurance monies--a child who had never had counseling or any interventions to address their problem behavior could suddenly be placed in residential treatment, the most restrictive placement short of long term institutionalization, which drastically changed after the Hissom lawsuit. When the State addressed this problem by putting into place a gatekeeping system for mental health services, most of these private companies disappeared. The Oklahoma Youth Center, which formerly provided necessary mental health services for the most disturbed children in the state, was forced to dramatically cut back its staff, services and number of beds for children and youth. Hence, there is a dearth of mental health services for children and youth today, giving even more importance to those which school psychologists provide.)

As part of the State Improvement Grant, the School Psychology Task Force met regularly during 2001 to discuss critical issues affecting retention, recruitment, and retraining of school psychologists in Oklahoma. The Task Force was comprised of trainers from OSU, UCO, ECU and NEOSU: Dr. Judy Oehler-Stinnett, Dr. Peggy Kerr, Dr. Rich Putnam, and Dr. Mary Sweetdarter; and Tom Bell of OSDE, who oversees the RESCs; and school psychologists in the field: Joyce Lowrey, Dr. Andrew Glenn, Jeanne Millican, Dr. Angie Love, and myself. At times Blueprint Committee members Dr. Roberta Clark and Dr. Terry Stinnett also attended as ex-officio members. Together we had many frank discussions as we developed our Strategic Action Plan, which was submitted to the Blueprint Committee in November 2001. (Subsequently, OSPA adopted many of the same goals for OSPA's Strategic Action Plan.) Some suggestions which came out of this School Psychology Task Force were the recommendations that the RESCs be empowered to provide a full school psychological services delivery model as required by IDEA and its Amendments, that RESCs recognize their employees who are school psychologists (monetarily as well as job duties), and that RESCs explore Medicaid reimbursement as allowed for services provided by school psychologists.

At a recent meeting of the Oklahoma Directors of Special Services, OSDE's Tom Bell spoke about a plan to revamp the RESCs. It is my understanding that part of the emphasis was on streamlining and consolidating to save money, and part of the emphasis was on the aforementioned suggestions from the School Psychology Task Force, to update the RESC model to provide full school psychological services. It was in this context that Tom Bell erroneously stated that OSPA is in favor of closing the RESCs—this assumption was incorrectly made from an e-mail of brief, uncorrected, incomplete minutes from an OSPA Board Meeting to which he was invited but did not attend, and thus did not hear the related discussion. This discussion involved the dual concerns of new school psychology graduates facing such a financial situation

statewide that there would be very few jobs available to them, and secondly, that there were 65 job vacancies not being filled in the RESCs, that were affecting all the school districts they served, resulting in a huge lack of services for those students. The discussion ensued that, instead of continuing to provide free tuition money for school psychology courses, to which the graduates would have no jobs, perhaps grant money or flow-through monies would be better spent in matching funds for school districts to hire school psychologists in new positions in these areas affected by the reduction of RESC services due to staff vacancies and insufficient funding, as well as for schools which have never had a school psychologist on staff, and for those districts who do but wish to add more positions to their existing special services staffs. Let me assure you that OSPA recognizes the valuable services that RESCs have provided and continue to provide to public school students, that OSPA supports Tom Bell's proposal to restructure the RESCs to update their school psychological service delivery model to current 2003 standards as required by IDEA, and that OSPA would be thrilled to have those 65 RESC vacancies filled by the hiring of school psychologists as well as recognizing the school psychologists that are already working for the RESCs. OSPA realizes that Oklahoma continues to have a critical shortage, resulting in a ratio of one school psychologist per 8000 students, while NASP recommends one school psychologist per 1000 students. It is unfortunate that our state's financial crisis is having such a negative impact on our school districts, the OSDE and RESCs, and on our profession—now is the time to advocate together by contacting our legislators, by collaborating with other educational professional organizations, and by supporting each other during these stressful times.

As John F. Kennedy said, "When written in Chinese, the word *crisis* is composed of two characters. One represents danger and the other represents opportunity." Change is upon us. What we can control is how we respond to it.

**All the best to you and your loved ones in 2003—
Candis Hogan, President**

In Memory of Judith Dwyer

Judith Dwyer passed away on November 21, 2002. She was survived by her son and daughter and three grandchildren. Judith worked as a school psychologist for Oklahoma City schools for two years and for Broken Arrow schools for 13 years. She completed a doctoral degree at OSU. Judith planned to retire this year and spend more time with her grandchildren and work with her horses. Judith was 56.

Letter from Tom Bell

To: Dr. Mary Stevens and The ODSS Executive Board,

Thank you for allowing me to speak on issues of the RESCs at your Winter Conference. It was great seeing all of you and I enjoyed being there.

I would like to clarify something I brought up during my talk. I stated that the OSPA Executive Board is wanting to close down the RESCs. In my remarks, I was referring to their current Goals and Objectives under Goal 1, Objective 3, Activity 9, where they stated the following: "work with SDE to promote SDE funding for flow through monies to school districts to hire full-time school psychologists to replace RESC services and provide full service delivery."

Candis Hogan, President of OSPA, phoned me and said that their intent was to "replace the school psychological services to those school districts that have been affected by RESC staff vacancies and insufficient funding." She further stated that the OSPA Executive Board supports the RESCs, wants to help them update to a full school psychological services delivery model, as required by IDEA and its amendments, and to regain FTEs (full-time employee positions) and funding in order to provide these vital services to the children and youth across Oklahoma.

Hope this helps clarify this issue and I am sorry for any confusion my confusion may have caused.

Sincerely,

*Thomas E. Bell, Associate Director
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2500 N. Lincoln Blvd.
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Hilldale Project Reduces Bullying

The National Association of School Psychologists studies show that 1 in 7 students have been bullied or are bullies.

Schools have been the setting for violent acts that have shaken our nation. In examining the events, we have discovered that several of the perpetrators had been bullied at school. These events have led to a greater awareness of the harm that individuals experience from bullying.

The first governments to launch anti-bullying campaigns were Sweden and Japan, after a number of their youths killed themselves. After the shootings at Columbine, Colorado was the first state to have a law regarding bullying. Now Oklahoma joins the ranks of 10 other states that have passed bullying prevention laws, with SB992 (The Bullying Prevention Act).

Bullying is a serious problem that can dramatically affect the ability of students to progress academically and socially. We know that bullying is a learned behavior; and the earlier a school intervenes with students, the better the results. There are no simple solutions for dealing with bullying problems or for making our schools safe. Each school has its own unique challenges and resources to address these important issues. However, students, who attend schools that take on the challenge, benefit greatly when staff members are committed to intervening in bullying incidents.

Since most incidents of bullying occur in areas where there is little adult supervision, we must rely on student reports. By reviewing every report, we look for patterns of behavior to emerge. The composite picture gives the school psychologist, counselor, teacher, and principle a basis for action, even when the school staff didn't witness all of the events.

As we look at the profile of perpetrators, the majority were first victims. A rash of shootings at schools show that an alarming number of students use violence as a panacea for the difficulties riddling their lives. Most studies show that attacker's ages range from eleven to seventeen.

Since the majority of problems are caused by a small percentage of students, it is essential to track, monitor, and closely supervise these students to discourage this type of behavior. Findings show that, as soon as students who bully others realized they are being carefully monitored, they tend to change their behavior, because attention and help is what violent kids were after all along.

Students are the ones who know what happens at school everyday. They know the things we are doing right. We need to ask them to bring us suggestions for changes, which will help us improve our schools.

This program at Hilldale is in its 4th year. It began with students who saw a need and wanted to make a difference. Following the shootings at Columbine, the Student Council (STUCO) officers asked students to take a “No Taunting Pledge” which encouraged respect for others and peaceful resolution of conflicts. It was a first proactive step. The STUCO President also asked students to complete an anonymous questionnaire that asked students about their experiences in school, and the results were posted. Following the shooting at Ft. Gibson, the STUCO established a Safety Task Force (SSTF) open to all students to help reduce bullying, taunting, and harassment and promote school safety. SSTF is divided into teams with Captains and Co-Captains to help with training other students. At meetings, students learn the effects of bullying, work to increase empathy among the student body, and encourage witnesses of bullying to report the problem to school staff. Members also learn responses to use when they witness or are confronted with bullying behaviors. STUCO officers also hand out surveys to parents at Open House asking for their observations and concerns. Working in partnership, school personnel, parents, and community members can create a safe environment for young people. To encourage involvement of the parents, a letter is sent to homes at the beginning of the school year regarding the Bullying Prevention Policy and stating the school’s commitment to nonviolence.

Safe schools can only exist within safe communities. Everyone has a vested interest in violence prevention, and schools can provide leadership to bring about a safer environment. Students want safe schools, and we can’t have safe schools without student involvement. Students are more likely to witness bullying, so it is crucial for them to learn the importance of reporting bullying incidents to staff. Moreover, when students report bullying behaviors, it is crucial that the staff responds appropriately. Furthermore, educators must be diligent in protecting those who report incidents of bullying.

The project at Hilldale has shown a reduction of bully/victim problems--a decrease of 21% in students who have been bullied and a decrease of 13% in students who have bullied others. The program has increased students’ perceptions of school safety. 92% of students graded the school’s safety program as C or better, with 71% giving an A or B. Moreover, students expressed “more positive social relationships and more positive attitudes to school work and school”. The peer mediation program has been expanded to involve more students, and it is now an elective class. The membership in the SSTF reached over 200 this year.

Students should have a vested interest in making school a safe place. Involving students results in safer and better schools. A comprehensive intervention plan that involves all students, parents, and school staff ensures that all students can learn in a safe and fear free environment. The involvement and support of all students is the key to school safety.

Tracy H. Fenton
OSPA President-Elect

Cindie Milford Serves on Executive Board

Cindie Milford holds the office of treasurer-elect for OSPA. She received her Bachelor's degree from the University of Arkansas in May 1993, majoring in Psychology. Upon graduation, she moved to Tulsa and began graduate work at Oklahoma State University. In December 1995, she obtained her Master's degree in Applied Behavioral Studies with an emphasis in Psychometry. Cindie furthered her education again in recent years at Oklahoma State University. She completed her Specialist in Education degree in 2001. She was certified as a School Psychologist in the state of Oklahoma at that time. Additionally, she became a Nationally Certified School Psychologist in the same year.

Cindie's career in the field of psychology began with work under the supervision of a Clinical Psychologist specializing in neuropsychology. In this position, Cindie was able to work with both children and adults in inpatient and outpatient settings. After several years in the private practice setting, Cindie felt that she would be able to better serve children in the school setting. She began work at Jenks Public Schools in August 1998 in the capacity of a Psychometrist, but later became a Psychologist. She left Jenks Public Schools at the end of the 2000-2001 school year to celebrate the birth of her first child, Braden. Cindie now works part-time as a School Psychologist in the Tulsa area. In addition to her duties as a School Psychologist, Cindie also teaches parenting classes through the Parent Care Center at Jenks Public Schools.

Cindie resides in Tulsa with her Aaron, her husband of six years, and 18 month-old son, Braden. She spends her free time traveling, scrapbooking, and hiking.

CALL FOR 2003-2004 OSPA NOMINATIONS

OSPA is currently seeking nominations for the 2003 Spring election. OSPA members may nominate themselves or other members. All nominees will be contacted to determine if they are interesting in seeking the office. Only REGULAR members may hold elected office. Please complete a separate form for each nomination.

Name of Nominee _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Telephone (W) _____ (H) _____

Nominated for

President-Elect Secretary Treasurer-Elect NE Representative NW
Representative Central Representative SE Representative SW Representative

This is your opportunity to become involved within the Executive Board of OSPA and to provide professional services to your colleagues. Please send your nomination to:

Tracy Fenton
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Muskogee, OK 74403
W: (918) 683-0763
H: (918) 682-6474
Fenton@oknet1.net

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

The NASP 2003 Annual Convention

Putting the Pieces Together
Enhancing Outcomes for All Children
April 8-12, 2003
Sheraton Centre
Toronto, ON, Canada

Looking Ahead to NASP Conventions

2004 March 30-April 3	Adams Mark, Dallas, TX
2005 March 29-April 2	Marriott Marquis, Atlanta, GA
2006 March 28-April 1	Hilton Anaheim and Anaheim Marriott Hotels, Anaheim, CA

Members Attend Governor's Safe Schools Summit

OSPA members recently participated in the Governor's Safe Schools Summit in Oklahoma City. Members involved were: **Amy Gardner, Sharon Mitchell, Tamara Mitchell, Judy Oehler-Stinnett, Tracy Fenton and Joyce Lowrey**. More than 8,000 students, teachers and administrators participated. Presentations included many health topics with one of our own presenting. Dr. Scott Poland, School Psychologist and former NASP president, from Cypress-Fairbanks School District in Texas was a keynote speaker. Students seemed especially interested in the topic of smoking prevention and driving safety. More than 100 exhibitors were present. It was an excellent opportunity for school personnel to become familiar with school psychology as a possible future profession and for teachers and administrators to become familiar with the full service model of school psychology. If you would like to participate in future conferences or as a member of the PR/PI committee please contact Joyce Lowrey at clowrey@cox.net. 405-521-4858



Amy Gardener and Tamara Mitchell are shown with OSPA's poster.

NASP Delegate Report

The NASP Central Meeting was held on November 22-24, 2002, at the Adams Mark Hotel in Columbus, OH. States representing the Central Region include: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South and North Dakota, Wisconsin and Oklahoma. Candis Hogan, President of OSPA and I represented Oklahoma. States completed surveys pertaining to demographics of regional membership along with organizational policies and procedures, e.g. number of board meetings/conferences held, standing committees, dues schedules, certification/licensure requirements, etc. At this meeting each state reported on their annual action plans, which is essentially an "IEP" of each organization's goals and objectives in developing and promoting the profession of school psychology. As the membership is aware, Oklahoma's action plan is based upon that of the Oklahoma State Improvement Grant for the Recruitment, Retention, and Retraining Initiative. These plans are then revised for the following year.

President Diane Smallwood presented a very informative Powerpoint presentation regarding current issues in school psychology. She also disseminated a Draft Copy regarding "NASP Recommendations on LD Eligibility and Identification for IDEA Reauthorization". Based upon these recommendations, it is very likely that the familiar psychometric paradigm of "referral, test, and place" will be cast aside.

While the paper calls for maintaining the current definition of LD, eligibility guidelines will be completely restructured. It calls for the elimination of the "scientifically unsupported ability-achievement discrepancy requirement" and replaced with a "dual-discrepancy" model where a student must exhibit: 1) low achievement and 2) insufficient responsiveness to intervention. These intervention are to reflect high caliber research, administered within general education and lack of responsiveness is not due to low effort or non-attendance. In addition, it calls for a multi-tiered model that includes 1) "curriculum-based assessment and targeted interventions to ensure acquisition of literacy skills during the primary grades, and 2) a systematic problem-solving process." "Multidisciplinary teams conducts educational evaluations as a final step, or tier, for purposes of eligibility determination and, if needed, IEP development. Evaluation consists of: 1) Design (or re-design) and implementation of individualized interventions, charting progress on specific academic skills relative to peers in the same educational setting, and 2) Individual assessments as needed, to identify strengths and weaknesses in relevant skills areas and to rule out other disabilities or non-cognitive factors as the primary cause of low achievement."

Inasmuch as reauthorization will likely redefine our roles as school psychologists, it will be important for leadership in the OSPA and the SDE to examine these recommendations and change its service delivery model accordingly in line with federal guidelines. Interested parties who would like a complete copy of this draft may contact me at magwiscdr@msn.com. With every good wish.

Marshall Andrew Glenn, Ph.D.

PETER - Pictorial Evaluation of TEST Reactions

Created & Developed by Dr. Yosi Toubiana, Senior Clinical Psychologist



PETER is an International Psychological Measure, used to evaluate Stress Reactions and Active Coping among students from age 9 and up, and for adults. Following extensive cross-cultural research, PETER was found to be a valid and reliable measure. PETER's norms have been established in the USA, based upon a representative **ethnic, gender** and **age** sample of over 4,000 subjects - most of them from Elementary, Junior-High & High Schools. PETER was validated against well-known verbal anxiety self reports, such as: Spielberger's TAI; Sarason's RTT; Reynolds Anxiety Scale; Pintrich - Test anxiety sub-scale, etc.

Findings from the cross-cultural research will be published as a chapter entitled "Cross-Cultural Evaluation Of Test Anxiety Using PETER: Pictorial Evaluation of TEST Reactions " (Toubiana, Y.H.), in Spielberger, R.S. & Sarason, I, (Eds.) **Stress & Emotions, Vol. XVII.**

Description: PETER's Scale includes 20 clear, vivid, modern and humorous pictures for each gender. The pictures were drawn by "Ze'ev" - a well known cartoonist and journalist from Israel, who has a prestigious reputation.

How to use PETER's Testing System?

To access the On-Line PETER's Scale, please enter Zahav's Clinic web site:

www.m-zahav.com

(If possible, please use Microsoft Explorer Browser when logging on to the site.)

A. The steps for using PETER on-line to produce **an individual report** are as following:

1. Click on "ENTER THE SITE"
2. Click on "Educational Users"
3. Read the instructions and then click on: "Please enter the password (click here) ".
4. The Password (for your initial review) is: **ok10**
5. After following the current instructions and completing PETER's scale by reacting to the 20 pictures, the results report about the different PETER Factors will appear. Then, please click on "Test Yourself Again" (by scrolling down to the bottom right of the screen).

B. The steps for using PETER on-line to produce **a class report (or a grade or an entire school report)** regarding different issues of stress, are as following:

1. Click on "Management" and then on "Educational Users".
2. The Password is : **ok10** (for your initial review).
3. Just for a demonstration, click on "Presentation Report" and in the following screen ("To produce a Report ...") , choose "Studies/Learning" as the Major Stressor and then, click on the left side on "Failing an important exam" (as a secondary stressor).
4. On the "Class Report Generator" , choose grade 10, and enter 1 for the class number question.
5. Click on the "Produce the Report " button to produce the report.

Reports concerning specific grades and for the entire school, may be produced in the same way (as long as data was already collected on the required issues).

As you may notice, PETER is a user friendly measure that can facilitate the school psychologist daily work. It may help to evaluate the student's levels of anxiety and active coping regarding different stress issues. The PETER's Testing System can generate an online individual report as well as producing class\grade and even an entire school report on different stress issues.

Along with his/her professional school team, the psychologist may assist the students on an individual basis or in class/group sessions to cope better with the problems and then re-evaluate them to find which improvement have been achieved due to the

intervention. Furthermore, especially in large schools, since the PETER system can quickly and easily identify which class or grade is in fact experiencing more stress, and which of the students is asking for assistance - the Psychologist can quickly and easily decide upon the priorities of the interventions.

Contact information:

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Israel**

OKCPS Participates in Consortium

Oklahoma City Public schools has been fortunate to participate in the Oklahoma Health Care Consortium. Members besides OKCPS include; Integris Hospital's Jim Thorpe Rehabilitation Center, Oklahoma University's Goddard Health Center, Community Mental Health, Bethesda Mental Health Center, Child Study Center and others. The interns who participate in the Consortium are from all over the United States and come to Oklahoma to participate. All OKCPS participants are School Psychologist students and must be supervised by a Licensed School Psychologist or a Licensed Educational Psychologist. Dr. Walter Davis has served in that capacity for the last three years. All students are working through an American Psychological Association approved program and selected through the APA process to work in the Consortium. Students have been from Iowa, Indiana, Texas and Oklahoma. This is an excellent opportunity for both the intern and the OKCPS to utilize cutting edge services offered by the Consortium. The services by the interns have been provided at a middle school, elementary school and an alternative high school.

The State Department of Education has been very supportive and provided a start-up grant the first year. Another benefit of the Consortium is training opportunities for the regular staff by the residents and the licensed psychologists who participate in a supervisory role. This has resulted in a positive relationship between the different members of the Consortium. OKCPS's first intern, Elaine Frissell, currently works for OKCPS as a school psychologist. The interns have provided a full range of services, including group and individual counseling, consultation, and assistance with behavior management in classrooms for students with emotional disturbance. They also have worked with anger management, transition planning, problem solving techniques, and the Second Step Bullying prevention curriculum. Other experiences have included mentoring and tutoring with individual students.

From the Consortium, the interns leave with a wealth of valuable experience. Whether they return to the school setting, go to a clinical setting, or private practice, they will have a background in education that will better serve the children they serve. The interns from the Consortium have presented at the APA national meeting, the National Association of School Psychologist annual meeting, and at local conferences. This program is one of only eleven in the United States with a school partner. OKCPS is fortunate to be a participant in this worthwhile endeavor.

Joyce Lowrey
Public Relations and Information

Let's Show Our Logo

The PR/PI Committee has been working on several promotional items for the members of OSPA. We currently have Rosewood Ink Pens available for sale for \$5.00, Coffee Cups for \$5.00 and Denim Shirts with a personal school logo or the OSPA Logo. Price is dependent on what pattern you choose. Look for more information regarding the Denim Shirts at future conferences.

Nonverbal Learning Disabilities: A Review of the Concept

Mary Dixon, Ph.D.

What is a Nonverbal Learning Disability?

The nonverbal learning disability (NLD) syndrome and model were first proposed by Byron Rourke in 1989. Rourke's studies began as a general approach to the neuropsychology of learning disabilities. He developed the NLD model by incorporating neuropsychological theory and research, Piaget's theory of cognitive development (especially as it relates to the sensorimotor stage) and Goldberg and Costa's model of hemispheric differences. A summary of Rourke's (1989) findings lists neuropsychological, academic, and socioemotional features demonstrated by the NLD syndrome in children. The manifestation and severity of the symptoms are reliant on developmental stages. These features are as follows:

1. Deficits in touch and perception on both sides of the body, usually more pronounced on the left side of the body.
2. Psychomotor coordination deficiencies on both sides of the body, often more pronounced on the left side of the body.
3. Outstanding deficiencies in visual-spatial-organizational abilities.
4. Marked deficits in nonverbal problem solving, concept formation, testing ideas, and the ability to benefit from positive and negative informational feedback in unusual or complex situation. Included are significant difficulties in dealing with cause-effect relationships and pronounced deficiencies in the appreciation of incongruities (e.g., age-appropriate sensitivity to humor).
5. Very well developed rote verbal capacities, including extremely well developed rote verbal memory skills.
6. Extreme difficulty in adapting to novel and complex situations. An overreliance on rote (and, in consequence, sometimes inappropriate) behaviors in such situations.
7. Outstanding relative deficiencies in mechanical arithmetic as compared to proficiencies in reading (word recognition) and spelling.
8. Verbal output is of a repetitive, straightforward, rote nature. Content disorders of language characterized by very poor knowledge of interactive conversation (e.g., "cocktail party" speech). Misspellings are almost always phonetically accurate. There is little or no speech prosody. Language is relied on as a principal means for social relating, information gathering, and relief from anxiety.
9. Significant deficits in social perception, social judgment, and social interaction skills, e.g. attention to facial expression, gestures, etc. A marked tendency toward social withdrawal and even social isolation as age increases. Such children are very much at risk for the development of socioemotional disturbance, especially "internalized" forms of psychopathology.

Prognosis and intervention for students with NLD syndrome are based on neuropsychological strengths and weaknesses. Thus, over time it is predicted that verbal skills, reading (word recognition), spelling and simple motor skills will be relatively stable. However, declines in visual-spatial-organizational, math calculation, and complex psychomotor skills are predicted. In the social-emotional realm, it is predicted that internalized types of psychopathology will increase.

How Does a School Psychologist Identify NLD?

What does this mean for the everyday practicing school psychologist? How would a professional begin to suspect this type of learning disability? And how would the severe discrepancy question be addressed? Most of us have not been trained as neuropsychologists so how are we to address the neuropsychological aspects of this syndrome?

There are certain hallmarks of this syndrome which are more pronounced in some students than in others. One of the most evident indicators is a large difference between Verbal and Performance Scale scores on the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children-III, with Verbal being significantly higher than Performance. An analysis of the Performance subtests of the WISC-III provides insight into visual-spatial-organizational abilities and nonverbal problem solving. Verbal subtest scores on the WISC-III will provide information about verbal memory and rote verbal capacities.

Since this type of learning disabilities relates to mechanical arithmetic, one would expect math calculation scores on standardized achievement tests to be low. However, math reasoning may be higher as the NLD student, particularly at younger ages, may be able to solve these problems verbally. An error analysis of calculation problems may reflect difficulty with shifting sets in serial arithmetic problem solving: "forgetting to remember" to borrow or carry (e.g. understanding the concept but not knowing when to apply it); making procedural errors (e.g. missing or adding a step to a specific procedure; applying a learned rule for one mechanical arithmetic procedure to a dissimilar procedure); misaligning numbers in columns and problems involving directionality (such as subtracting the minuend from the subtrahend in a subtraction question); misreading the mathematical sign; failure to include required visual detail in a problem such as a decimal point or a dollar sign; attempting questions beyond their current level of functioning or unreasonable solutions to problems.

In the area of verbal abilities, NLD students may often have a steady flow of verbalization, especially in familiar situations when accustomed to the task requirement. However the verbalization may be repetitive and may contain "catch" phrases or idioms. Jargon tends to be overused in unstructured situation. No difficulty with language syntax is found and vocabulary is well developed. However, what is said may not be related to the topic at hand. Run-on sentences are used both in talking and in writing. Adult language is imitated in both structure and form. Facial expressions are somewhat limited and speech is lacking in intonation. Language is used for the relief of anxiety. Generally the type of speech and the language characteristics used by NLD students tend to socially isolate them from other students.

Motorically, NLD students appear clumsy and do not perform well in sports. However, they may have overlearned a particular gross motor skill, such as shooting baskets, and be good at it. They are also poor in art and in physical education. Poor posture and awkwardness additionally are noted. Those who deal with these students may comment that they have difficulty finding their way from one place to another or that they may become upset by changes in physical markers (e.g. changing the furniture in a room). It is almost as if the student is blind since the visual perception component of cognitive functioning is impaired. In addition, these students may be able to perform some motor activities if they can verbalize the steps first and then use verbalization to guide them through the physical process.

Socially NLD students have few or no close friends of the same age. Friends are usually younger or are adults. These students are highly dependent on elders for feedback and direction. They do not perform well in novel or complex situations nor do they react well to change. Situations are often misinterpreted because of difficulty with understanding nonverbal communication such as facial features, voice tone and gestures. Students with NLD are often misdiagnosed as having Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. At younger ages they are seen as hyperactive as they often get in the way of others, seem disinhibited, and bump into other persons or objects. As the NLD child grows older, the activity level lessens to a normal level and eventually to a hypoactive response style. This change in activity level is largely a result of the negative feedback that is received in response to their failure to anticipate the consequences of their actions. Unfortunately, this reduction in activity level may lead to a reduction in exploratory behavior, which may interfere with cognitive development.

Academically, there are markers to look for, as well. As mentioned above, NLD students have difficulty with math, hence their mechanical arithmetic skills are poor. Also as mentioned above, there are motor problems. Thus they will have problems copying information from the chalkboard. While NLD students are very verbal, they still have difficulty with certain aspects of the language arts areas. Reading recognition skills are good once they have “cracked the code.” However in early grades these students may have difficulty with reading until they figure out the pattern. NLD children tend to focus on the auditory-verbal aspects of words rather than the visual characteristics. This causes them to be good phonetic readers but to have more difficulty with words which are irregularly spelled. When writing, misspellings contain all the phonetic elements but the student does not attend to the visual components. In the area of reading comprehension, they have a poor understanding or overview of a paragraph or passage. However, their literal comprehension may be quite good. Again, as in the area of math calculation, an error analysis of reading skills may be useful.

Remediation: What to do?

Intervention guidelines suggested by Rourke (1989) include:

- Observing the student’s behavior by focusing on what they do rather than what they say
- Adopting a realistic attitude in looking at the importance and impact of strengths and deficits
- Using a systematic approach in teaching. Step-by-step instruction and a parts-to-whole verbal teaching method are best.
- Cultivating social awareness by encouraging children to describe in detail important events that are happening in their lives
- Teaching specific problem-solving strategies for dealing with troubling events which occur frequently
- Encouraging generalization of learned strategies and concepts
- Improving verbal skills by refining and appropriately using those skills
- Teaching students to make better use of the visual-perceptual-organizational skills
- Teaching children to interpret visual information when there is “competing” auditory information
- Teaching appropriate nonverbal behavior
- Providing structure for exploration by making those situations systematic

- Providing instruction in the use of aids such as a calculator or digital watch
- Encouraging accurate self-evaluation
- Working with all caretakers to coordinate, support and focus on the child's needs
- Encouraging the development of life skills

Generally, remediation strategies involve an emphasis on the visual aspects of tasks. As stated before, in some areas NLD students appear to be almost blind. Their visual acuity is normal but visual processing/perception is weak. Asking these students to verbalize visual tasks is critical. Thus, when presented with a map they may be asked to verbalize shapes of countries, related positions of other countries, positions of rivers, etc. This same strategy may be used in social relations. Since the visual processing of facial expressions and other nonverbal forms of communication are poor, coaching on these social aspects of communication is helpful. However, the NLD student's strength in verbal skills also is a weakness when applied to social situations. Thus, coaching related to lack of prosody and the high volume of verbal output demonstrated by NLD students is useful in forming more satisfying interpersonal relationships.

Prognosis

As student with NLD syndrome become older, they tend to have more difficulty with novel and/or complex tasks, particularly when problem-solving and concept-formation abilities are required. Academic problems become more pronounced due to increasingly complex demands in high school and beyond. Socioemotional difficulties, more often of the internalized type, will appear more frequently as the NLD student gets older. Hyperactivity and delinquency are not usually found in this group. Interpersonal relationships become more complex and the results of failure are more intense. This creates a tendency for NLD students to become socially isolated and withdrawn. Thus, the NLD student will encounter academic as well as social problems to a larger extent in later years.

Summary

NLD syndrome students present with strengths in auditory perception, rote learning, verbal memory, word decoding and spelling. Weaker areas relate to tactile and visual perception, dealing with novel situations, concept formation, mechanical arithmetic, reading comprehension, and problem solving. Information gained from assessments indicate a large verbal-performance split on the WISC-III; low scores in math calculation and reading comprehension; and graphomotor problems. Specific types of errors are found in math and in spelling when error analyses are performed. As these students get older they have increasing academic and social problems. Remediation involves heavy use of verbal teaching strategies and a rote learning process. Identification of this disability will not fall under the discrepancy rubric but it is a type of learning disability documented in research and literature.

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