

A New Look at NLD

**A new book by
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In this new look at nonverbal learning disorders, I draw a parallel between disorders of verbal language and impairments in nonverbal communication. Dyslexia, as an impairment in verbal language, results from difficulties in the phonological *decoding of written signs*. The ability to comprehend verbal language is generally unimpaired. Whereas, those who suffer from other types of verbal language difficulties, such as central auditory processing disorders, are impaired in the ability to *comprehend the meaning* of verbal and written communications.

Some individuals with NLD are impaired in the ability to *read social cues*, but they may have no difficulty understanding the meanings of those signs, were their ability to decode them unimpaired. The failure in decoding occurs because of the impairment in the capacity to process nonlinguistic *perceptual information* that includes visual—spatial perception. Johnson and Myklebust's (1967) designated this process as "*social imperception*." Others with NLD, in addition to their problems with "social imperception," do not have the ability *to understand the meaning of the nonverbal signs*. Even if they are capable of decoding it properly, their comprehension of the communication, that is, its salience, eludes them. Their communicative competence, which involves the pragmatic aspect of social interchanges, is impaired.

The first group is easily identified and the difficulties of those people may be remediated through a variety of interventions. The second group, however, presents more serious challenges because of the similarity of those individual's difficulties to others disorders commonly referred to as "social learning disorders." This group is often misdiagnosed as having either Asperger's Disorder or as falling within the "autistic spectrum."

In my presentation, I will clarify the diagnostic distinction between the two groups and discuss the implications of that distinction for the types of interventions we should use to alleviate their problems.