ABSTRACT

DISSERTATION: Validation of a Preliminary Screening Procedure for the Identification of Nonverbal Learning Disabilities (NLD) in Schools: A Parent Rating Scale

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The purpose of this study was to construct and validate a parent rating scale to screen for individuals with nonverbal learning disabilities (NLD). Scale construction began with extensive literature review and concluded with the adoption of Rourke’s conceptualization of the NLD syndrome. The behavioral manifestations in the areas of language, academics, adaptive and socioemotional functioning of Rourke’s model were deduced to be reasonable NLD constructs for the parent rating scale. An Asperger’s Syndrome (AS) group was used to test the sensitivity of the parent rating scale in differentiating NLD from AS in view of their several shared characteristics. The literature supported the presence of “unusual, restricted, repetitive and stereotyped patterns of behavior, interests and activities” that typically are seen in AS but not seen in NLD as one probable differentiating factor. Hence, Likert scale items were written for 5 constructs - Language Assets and Deficits, Academic Assets and Deficits, Adaptive Deficits, Socioemotional Deficits, and Restricted Interests and Repetitive Behavior.

Validation of the NLD parent rating scale began with data collection from the AS, NLD and Control groups. The NLD and AS groups consisted of parents of children
who had been diagnosed in a clinical setting. The Control group children had never been evaluated for special education services by the school system or clinically diagnosed.

Subjects were 14 in the AS group, 45 NLD, and 46 Control group. Discriminant groups validity test indicated that the AS, NLD and Control groups were significantly different from one another on the 4 extracted factors i.e., Socio-Conceptual, Asperger’s Syndrome, Adaptive and Learning Style. Thus, it may be concluded that the parent rating scale is discriminating in screening for individuals with NLD. The construct that most differentiates NLD from Control is the Socio-Conceptual deficits factor, which demonstrates the significant difficulty of individuals with NLD in interpreting the subtleties and nuances in social interactions and in understanding concepts. The NLD and AS groups were significantly different on the Learning Style factor but could not be differentiated on the other three factors, thus supporting literature that NLD and AS have overlapping characteristics and yet are distinctive disorders.