

Barbara, a 2nd grade student, “doesn’t pay attention in class.” She never completes independent class work appropriately or within the given time limits, and she is often unable to fully participate when called on in class. Josh, a 6th grade student seems to read words with no difficulty but has trouble answering questions about what he has just read. Matthew, a high school sophomore, hates math. He did well with minute math, and had no difficulty learning math facts or completing computations. However, he has always struggled with word problems and algebra. Barbara’s parents can communicate their observations to her pediatrician and teachers...she will likely receive a diagnosis of ADHD. BUT, this is not the only possible explanation for her difficulties. If Josh is diagnosed with a reading disability, will he benefit from phonics training? And what’s the deal with Matthew? Is he just lazy? A neuropsychological evaluation can clarify this confusion, answer these questions, and will offer appropriate and individual specific recommendations for intervention and treatment planning at home and school.

My experiences as a neuropsychologist in training and in independent practice, as well as my work as a school psychology intern in the Philadelphia Public School System, has introduced me to too many Barbara’s, Josh’s, and Matthew. Children who have been given well meaning, but inadequate evaluations, which were not comprehensive enough to answer all the questions. What happens when Barbara is diagnosed with ADHD, prescribed an unnecessary medication, and continues to struggle? Did anyone assess Barbara’s language skills to determine if there was difficulty with expressive or receptive language? Did they assess her emotional functioning or ask if there have been any changes in her life...because Barbara could be suffering from Anxiety or Depression (yes, children get anxious and depressed). Josh, who was accurately diagnosed, may receive inappropriate interventions, as a child can have a reading disorder and exhibit difficulties in Reading Comprehension. By the way, Josh is also failing Social Studies and Science, given the strong demands for independent comprehension of the material. Appropriate interventions should focus on vocabulary development, story analysis skills, and learning to ask himself questions while he reads. And poor Matthew. He’s not lazy at all. He simply has difficulty understanding math language. He has trouble with word problems because he cannot figure out what to do or what the question is asking.