Gosselin and colleagues examined the relationship between neurological signs and developmental performance. They found a relationship between minor neurological impairments and developmental outcomes such as co-ordination, language and practical reasoning. There are some problems with this approach, however. There were a range of developmental levels within each study group. Large individual differences are usual in developmental studies, but make interpreting findings difficult. Despite minor neurological signs, some children develop normally and some do not. Some children may be good at one developmental task and not at others. This is in line with developmental theories that focus on the bi-directional nature of genetic, neural, behavioural and environmental influences on individual development. The role of practice (learning) has received increased attention and, with it, the role of nurture and environmental conditioning. ‘Development’ has become closely linked with the concept of learning (practice or experience leading to changes in the ability to perform tasks). This leads us to question the relative roles of nature and nurture in acquiring different skills.

The problems in this study are standard in any group design. The study is still important. Analyses of children’s learning and motor problems have identified subgroups in what may have previously been studied as a general ‘problem group.’ There will always be children who cross the boundaries and fit into more than one category. The solution is for clinicians to consider each child as an individual. The aim of evidence-based approaches is to combine statistical data with information about individual patients to provide the best possible help for the individual. This study suggests that clinicians should be aware that minor neurological signs may be a marker of later developmental difficulties. Neurological signs indicate that further testing or ‘watchful waiting’ are needed. If we had a better idea of the likely impact on functioning and general development, this could help us plan services for these children.

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