

Development of Learning and Strategies to Express and Understand Intentions in Young Deaf children with Deaf parents

Researchers

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Research topic/aim: The aim of the project is to study social and communicative interaction between young deaf children and their deaf parents (Dd children). Focus is on factors assumed to be prerequisites for later mentalizing abilities and learning, in particular the development of strategies for expressing and understanding intentions.

Participants: 11 Dd children, aged 0-2 years. This is to the best of our knowledge more or less the total population of Dd children born 2008-2010 in Sweden.

Theoretical framework: Mentalizing ability refers to the child's understanding that all people have thoughts, beliefs and feelings, that these might differ from the child's own and that they also govern people's behaviour. Typically developing children acquire this understanding at a mental age of about 4 years. Earlier research has shown that deaf children of hearing parents are severely delayed in their development of mentalizing ability. One possible explanation is the lack of a common language for very early interaction between parents and children. Previous studies show that deaf children of deaf parents, however, do not show a similar delay in their ability to mentalize. Despite this very little has been described in the research literature regarding early communicative strategies used by deaf children of deaf parents. The focus of the present research project is on early communicative strategies used by this group and the impact these may have on children's learning and later mentalizing abilities.

Research design: The study will be carried out using video observations of spontaneous, as well as structured, interactive situations between parents and children. The structured situations will be based on the Early Social Communication Scale (ESCS) (Mundy, et.al., 2003).

Expected implications: The results of the study are presumed to have implications for the understanding of learning and mentalizing development in deaf children of deaf parents, but also on early intervention programs for deaf children of hearing parents. This line of research will also hopefully help shed new light on development of mentalizing and learning more generally.

Table 1 The participants of the study

Child name¹, gender, birth	Hearing status	Parents
Laura, girl, Nov 2007	Severe hearing loss	Mother severe hearing loss Father deaf
Neal, boy, Jan 2008	Deaf	Mother deaf Father deaf
Ally, girl, Apr 2008	Deaf	Mother deaf Father deaf
Kalin, boy, May 2008	Deaf	Mother severe hearing loss Father deaf
Lilly, girl, Dec 2008	Deaf	Mother deaf Father deaf
Amy, girl, Dec 2008	Deaf	Mother deaf Father deaf
Ashlee, girl, Jan 2009	Deaf	Mother deaf Father deaf
Miles, boy, Feb 2009	Severe hearing loss	Mother severe hearing loss Father deaf
Eva, girl, Feb 2010	deaf	Mother deaf Father deaf
Emmy, girl, March 2010	deaf	Mother severe hearing loss Father deaf
Leonard, boy, April 2010	not diagnosed yet	Mother deaf Father deaf

¹ Names are fictitious