

Visual Interaction and Support of Intersubjective Communication in Deaf Families with Deaf Infants - Implications for Educators

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General description and aim

The study presented here is part of an on-going project funded by The Swedish Research Council. The overall aim of the project is to study social and communicative interaction between young deaf children and their deaf parents, focusing on factors assumed to be prerequisites for later mentalizing abilities and learning (Falkman, Roos & Hjelmqvist, 2007), in particular the development of strategies for expressing and understanding intentions. However the aim of this particular study is to explore different ways in which interaction is shaped and develops between deaf parents and their deaf infants (birth to 24 months). Focus is on the reciprocal interaction where the child and parent influence each other's behavior. The specific aim is to describe the patterns of interaction underpinning symbolic intersubjectivity later in development.

Theory

Intersubjectivity refers to the shared involvement in another person, sharing thoughts and seeing the other as a subject with intentions and feelings, and at the same time experiencing own intentions and the ability to share those (Loots & Devisé, 2003). In hearing infants this development begins early in life (Trevarthen, 1979, 1993) and continues in mutual interchange where the child has the possibility to perceptualize what is happening in the interaction (Akhtar & Tomasello, 1998). A considerable amount of research has been conducted regarding the importance of early interaction between caregiver and infant (Green et al., 2010; Meins, 1997; Trevarthen, 1979). There is also research identifying the behaviour of deaf mothers with deaf children (Harris, 2001; Loots & Devisé, 2003, 2005) as well as the impact these behaviours have on the dyadic interaction, both regarding the on-going interaction and the infant's later development, i.e. regarding the development of intersubjectivity. Even though there is a large amount of previous research in this field, only a few studies have been reported dealing with deaf infants younger than 18 months. This is also true for studies reporting on the development of intersubjectivity in deaf dyads. The present study is therefore an important contribution to this field of research.

Method

The study has been carried out using video observations of natural interactive situations between parents and children. Twelve children have been observed from 2 months to 24 months of age. These twelve children is to our knowledge the whole population of deaf children with deaf parents born 2008 - 2010 in Sweden. The data has been collected every 8-10 weeks and the total hours of video-recordings is approximately 7 - 9 hours for each child, and for the group as a whole 88 hours of recordings.

The analysis in this study with deaf dyads has taken its departure in Loots & Devisé (2003, 2005) proposed model of intersubjective development presented in their study on deaf children. Every session for each child between the age of 1-3 months, 6-8 months, 11-13 months, and 16-18 months was included in the analysis, and the mid 10 minutes of each session were analysed in depth.

The results of the study are presumed to have implications for the understanding of learning and mentalizing development in deaf children of deaf parents. The study may also be of great importance to educators working with deaf children of hearing parents. Results will thus be discussed in relation to what can be learned from deaf families' interaction for educators in early intervention programs and in preschools. Results will also be discussed in relation to theories on development of intersubjectivity reported in previous research on hearing dyads.

The results will be published in peer-reviewed journals specifically reporting on research in deaf education and deaf studies but also in journals reporting on child development generally.

Keywords

deaf families, interaction, intersubjectivity, early education, early intervention program

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