

Visual-tactile Strategies and Support of Intersubjective Communication in Deaf Families with Deaf Toddlers

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The study presented here is part of an ongoing 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, in particular the development of strategies for expressing and understanding intentions. However the aim of this particular and ongoing 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 others behavior. The specific aim for this presentation is to describe the patterns of interaction underpinning symbolic intersubjectivity and thus learning.

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 (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, caregiver and infant (Green et al., 2010, Meins, 1997; Trevarthen, 1979). There is also a few studies conducted identifying the behaviour of deaf mothers with deaf children (Harris, 2001; Loots & Devisé, 2003, 2005) but only dealing with deaf infants older 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 since it reports on children younger than 18 months.

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 18 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 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 is the focus of the presentation; What can be learned from deaf dyads, parent-child interaction?

Keywords: Deaf education, mentalizing ability, intersubjectivity, Sign Language.

* Carin Roos will present the study