

# **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

| <b>Child name<sup>1</sup>, gender, birth</b> | <b>Hearing status</b> | <b>Parents</b>                            |
|--|-----------------------|---|
| Laura, girl, Nov 2007                        | Severe hearing loss   | Mother severe hearing loss<br>Father deaf |
| Neal, boy, Jan 2008                          | Deaf                  | Mother deaf<br>Father deaf                |
| Ally, girl, Apr 2008                         | Deaf                  | Mother deaf<br>Father deaf                |
| Kalin, boy, May 2008                         | Deaf                  | Mother severe hearing loss<br>Father deaf |
| Lilly, girl, Dec 2008                        | Deaf                  | Mother deaf<br>Father deaf                |
| Amy, girl, Dec 2008                          | Deaf                  | Mother deaf<br>Father deaf                |
| Ashlee, girl, Jan 2009                       | Deaf                  | Mother deaf<br>Father deaf                |
| Miles, boy, Feb 2009                         | Severe hearing loss   | Mother severe hearing loss<br>Father deaf |
| Eva, girl, Feb 2010                          | deaf                  | Mother deaf<br>Father deaf                |
| Emmy, girl, March 2010                       | deaf                  | Mother severe hearing loss<br>Father deaf |
| Leonard, boy, April 2010                     | not diagnosed yet     | Mother deaf<br>Father deaf                |

<sup>1</sup> Names are fictitious