

Development of learning and strategies to express and understand intentions in young deaf children with deaf parents.

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The study presented here is an ongoing project funded by The Swedish Research Council. The 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.

Mentalizing ability is the understanding that all people have thoughts, beliefs and feelings which also govern their 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 the early interaction between parents and children. Previous studies, mainly from other countries in Europe and Australia, show that deaf children of deaf parents do not show a similar delay in their ability to mentalize. 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 will have on children's learning and later mentalizing abilities.

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