Effects of Intensive Behavioural Treatment and a focused Imitation Intervention for young Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder - One plus One means More

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Avhandling för avläggande av filosofie doktorsexamen i psykologi som med vederbörligt tillstånd av samhällsvetenskapliga fakulteten vid Göteborgs Universitet kommer att offentligen försvaras fredagen den 19 maj 2017 kl. 14.00 i sal F1, Psykologiska institutionen, Haraldsgatan 1, Göteborg

Opponent: Professor Sven Bölte, CAP; Karolinska Institute/KIND,

This thesis is based on the following scientific papers, referred to by Roman numerals:


II Spjut Janson, B., Heimann, M., & Tjus, T. Comparing one brief and one comprehensive early intervention program for children with an autism spectrum disorder. Submitted manuscript.

III Spjut Janson, B., Koch, F-S., Tjus, T., & Heimann, M. Being Imitated improves joint attention in young children with ASD receiving IBT. Manuscript in preparation.
Abstract


The general aim of this thesis was to investigate the effectiveness of interventions offered to children with autism attending the Habilitation services. Another aim was to investigate the efficacy of a new intervention within the setting of Swedish Habilitation services, namely Imitation Responding.

In Study I the aim was to investigate if habilitation services, after early screening, showed a positive outcome. The interventions were Intensive Behavior Treatment (IBT), and Eclectic Interventions encompassing a selection of methods based on TEACCH or communication methods such as ComeAlong. Although the mean adaptive composite score did not change significantly between start of intervention and follow-up, the variance increased significantly.

In study II the aim was to explore if an intervention based on imitation, Imitation Responding (IR), could function as a complement to a comprehensive IL/IBT, which is treatment as usual at the Habilitation services. Results showed a significant increase in 6 out of 7 subscales for both intervention groups but no significant difference was noted in any of the subscales when comparing the groups. Only the IR group had a significant gain on the measure of interpersonal relations. We interpret the findings as support for IR to be used as a complementary intervention strategy alongside comprehensive programs such as IL/IBT.

In Study III the aim was to examine if generalized joint attention had been developed in the group of children with autism that received IR followed by IL/IBT and the group of children with autism that received IL/IBT only. Our results indicate that IR with the Being Imitated strategy might be useful if implemented early as a “start-up” – intervention, which is followed by an IL/IBT treatment.

One conclusion is that supporting newly diagnosed children with ASD is probably more effective when IL and IBT are combined.

Keywords: Autism, Interventions, Preschool Children, Imitation, IL, IBT