

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

Birgitta Spjut Janson

Department of Psychology

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Avhandling för avläggande av filosofie doktorsexamen i psykologi som med vederbörligt tillstånd av samhällsvetenskapliga fakulteten vid Göteborgs Universitet kommer att offentligens 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:

- I Spjut Jansson, B., Miniscalco, C., Westerlund, J., Kantzer, A-K., Fernell, E., & Gillberg, C. (2016). Children who screen positive for autism at 2.5 years and receive early intervention: prospective naturalistic two-year outcome study. *Neuropsychiatric Disease and Treatment*, *12*, 2255-2263. doi:10.2147/NDT.S108899
- 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

Spjut Jansson, B. (2017). *Effects of Intensive Behavioural Treatment and a focused Imitation Intervention for young Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. One plus One means More*

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

Birgitta Spjut Jansson, Department of Psychology, University of Gothenburg, P.O. Box 500, 405 30 Gothenburg, Sweden, e-mail: birgitta.spjut@vregion.se

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