

Social competences of blind preschool children

Anette Ingsholt

Psychologist, ph.d

Synscenter Refsnaes, Denmark

European Conference on Psychology and Visual Impairment
Vilnius, 2010

Goal for the presentation

- To focus on social development of blind children
 - In the age of 4-6 years of age
- To discuss and find our mutual experiences
 - Not focus on scientifically research
 - More on practice
- To discuss your view and experiences of blind children's social competence?

Why focus on this theme?

- Normally, children with functional disabilities, among those blind children, have difficulty to co-act in social interaction in kindergartens with other children without any disabilities
 - Lower level, fewer friendships, more negative attitudes and negative sociometric measurements
- Few investigations focus directly on the interaction between the children
 - Few mention how to make the social situation of blind children better

(Janson et al, xxxx)

We know

- Blind children often handle the academic part of school
 - The social part is far more difficult to handle
- I believe:
 - Not sufficient to focus on the school age
- We have to look at
 - The general development of blind children in kindergarten (3-6 years of age)
 - To pinpoint the challenges at these stages of development
 - To find ways or interventions to change the challenges
 - in the future

General principles of inclusion in Denmark:

- All blind children have rights to be included in normal kinder cultures

- 1-1½ years of age: Day nurseries
 - Eventually support from personal educator or the number of staff is upgraded to the whole group

- 3 years of age: Kindergartens
 - Eventually support is reduced gradually with age and development

- 6 years of age: School
 - The year the child reaches 6 years of age

A "Mini project"

- 3 children in the age of 4½-6½ years were followed in a period of 6 months
- 4 visits
- Around 300 questions
- Videos

Goal of the project

Observations, questionnaires and videos were used to get inspiration in order to:

1. Describe the challenges blind children meet in social interaction in the years just before school
 - Especially in child-to-child interaction with sighted children
2. Pick up known knowledge about social competence
3. Use own experiences in relation to blind children
4. Get ideas about:
 - How we can strengthen blind children's social skills and interaction with other children
 - To propose interventions to strengthen social competence

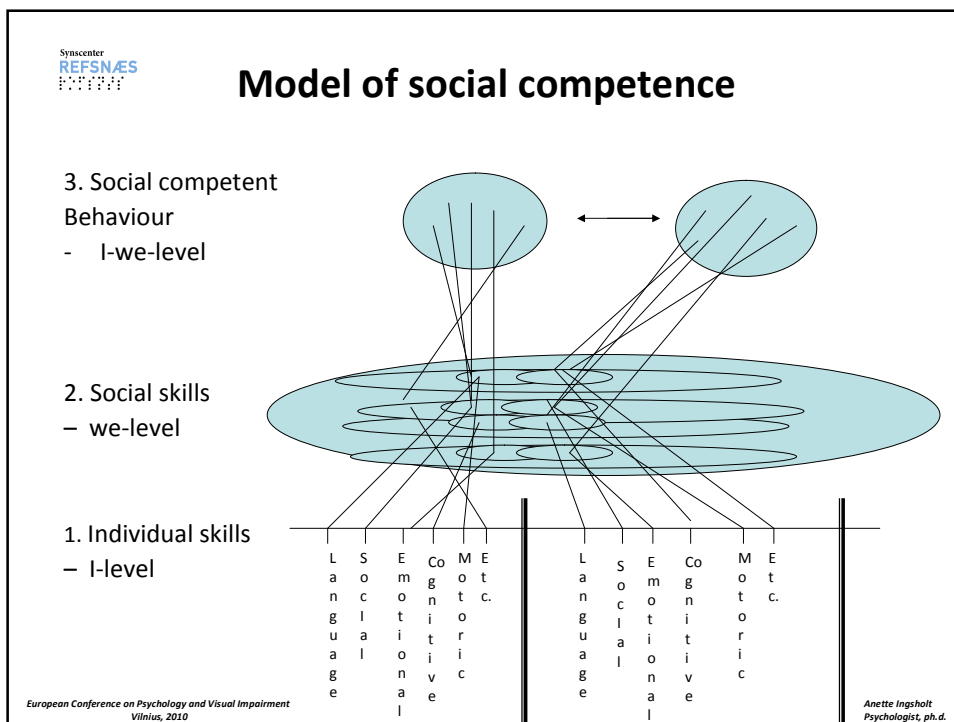
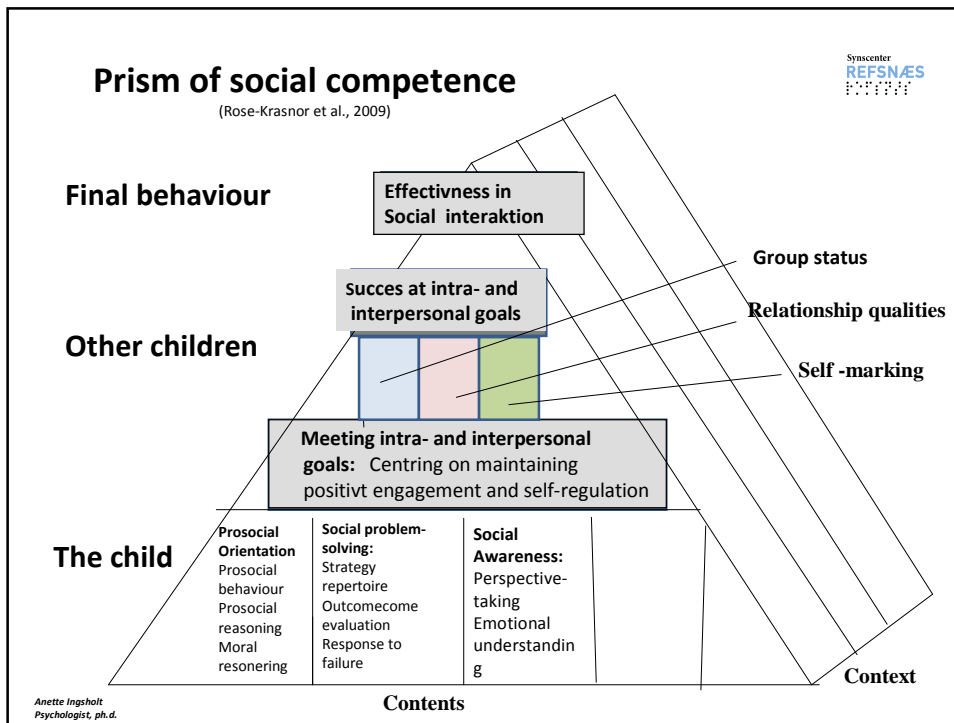
Why this age group: 4-6 years of age?

Because vertical relations change to horizontal relations

- New elements emerge:
 - E.g. role play, fantasy and abstract thinking
 - New strategies have to be developed
- New social competence are tested
 - Experiences are basis for the new social behaviour

Blind children need support at this age

- Consequences of the visual impairment disorganize the horizontal relations of blind and sighted children



Basic qualifications Language and communication

Language and communication:

- Turn-taking – to give and receive – to talk and listen
- Difficulties in:
 - Development of concepts
=> dialogue
 - Making generalisations

Social-cognition:

Skills in relation to joint attention

- To share
- To follow other's focus of attention
- To direct other's focus of attention
 - => change of themes in common play or activity
 - => longer dialogues with common themes

Basic qualifications - Cognition 1

Mental representations of objects, events and persons

Different use of senses may influence;:

- Concrete and abstract thinking – eventually delayed
- Differences in comprehension of language/concepts
 - Use of pretend play
 - Development of role-play
 - Development of fantasies
 - » Concrete, related to the blind child own experiences (tv, film etc.)
 - Comprehension of histories, adventures etc.

Use of and comprehension of own and other's intentions

=> Ability to decode and interpret signals and co-actions

- Influence e.g. development of perspective taking and empathetic skills

Basic qualifications - Cognition 2

- Selective attention
- Memory
 - Often good in blind children
 - Good verbal memory
 - E.g. shown in remembering own concrete experiences, repetition of verbal phrases
 - Important in mobility, in remembering sequences, instructions, explanations etc.
- Development of a sense of time
 - Supported by structured organisation of the child's activities e

Basic qualifications - Cognition - 3

Less information influence e.g.:

- Development of object-permanence
- Knowledge of normal situations and routines in everyday life
- Knowledge of objects and their functional properties
 - Can't perform imitation based on visual cues
- Knowledge of cause-and-effect
 - Less knowledge of possible effects of own and others behaviour

Often verbal curiosity (questions)

The combination of much time with adults and the many question

- => Specific area knowledge and verbal imitations of adults
- => "strange" adult like language

Basic qualifications - Emotions 1

Emotional signs are important:

- Interpretation of others emotions
 - Based on touch and auditory information
 - => Difficult to decode emotions
 - Social reference
 - => Difficult to Interpret and understand others emotional reactions to his own acts communicated by help of voice and touch

Basic qualifications - Emotions 2

Emotions:

- Development of empathic skills
 - Development of a growing capacity to control his own emotional reactions
- Development of a secure and basic confidence and trust in other persons
 - => Development and learning
 - => Courage and motivation for participation in activities with other children

Obs. Trust and confidence are important, but a strong relation between child-adult may result in dependency of the adult

Basic qualifications - Motoric

Basic motoric skills

=> Motivation and courage to move along by himself and follow other children in their interaction and play

Mobility:

- Acces to routes in the kindergarten
 - Have elementary tecnics to learn new routes at new places
- => master mobility skills without much help from others

Questions about accessibility have to be raised in the local institution

Basic qualifications - "Everyday practice"

"Everyday practice":

Handle routine and "everyday practices" by himself

=> Are able to follow and join other children in "everyday" and routine acts

=> Also important for participation in symbolic play with other children

Basic qualifications

- All qualifications have to be mastered in some extent in order to learn and use social skills and strategies in horizontal relations
- Delayed skills means social skills are delayed too

Questions

Is the relations between blind and sighted children horizontal?

- No, they are vertical because of lack of information
- => questions, need of help, different meaning of concepts

Are blind children included in the child culture?

- Only as long the sighted children want it.

Do other children take special considerations ?

- Other children may ignore their own interests and create room for the blind child

There are not a consciously discrimination from other children

Questions:

Do you experience similar element in your country?

Do you work especially with social skills/strategies?

What do you do and how?

Share experinces!!!!!!



Finish

*Anette Ingsholt
Psychologist, ph.d.*

*European Conference on Psychology
and Visual Impairment
Vilnius, 2010*