The effectiveness of the COCP intervention programme for youngsters with severe intellectual disabilities

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**Background**

The COCP programme (Communicative Ontwikkeling van niet-sprekende personen en hun Communicatiepartners – Communicative Development of nonspeaking individuals and their Communication Partners) was developed in the nineties within the area of child rehabilitation. The main goal is to optimise communication between nonspeaking children and significant others in daily social interactions (parents, caregivers, teachers, therapists). These communication partners receive individual and group instruction and coaching in order to optimise the adult-child interaction and to create a sound basis for the communicative and linguistic development. The ultimate goal is to teach the child to communicate clearly and effectively in different situations and with various conversation partners.

Ten years ago, the implementation of the COCP-programme was extensively evaluated in two rehabilitation centres (Heim & Jonker, 1996) and the effects of the programme on the communicative development and language acquisition of three nonspeaking children were studied longitudinally (Heim, 2001). The COCP-programme is currently being used in about ten different institutions for child rehabilitation all over the Netherlands. Based on ten years of practical experiences, the original COCP manual (Heim & Jonker, 1997) has been revised in 2006 (Heim, Jonker & Veen, 2006).

In the period 2002 – 2004 a pilot study was carried out in which the COCP programme was implemented in an institution for people with intellectual disabilities in order to investigate the applicability and effectiveness of the COCP programme within this setting and population (Jonker et al, 2006). Based on the results of this pilot study a follow-up project is currently being carried out in order to develop an adapted version of the COCP programme for Dutch institutions for people with intellectual disabilities.

The current study examines the effects of the adapted COCP intervention programme longitudinally in a group of ten clients with intellectual disabilities. These clients show mainly pre-intentional behaviours, but seem to be able to make the transition of intentional communicative behaviour.

**Methodology**

The effect study employs a within-subject design. All ten participants (ages 5-23) are youngsters with severe intellectual disabilities and require AAC (i.e., their speech is not adequate for functional communication).

The COCP intervention involves three essential components:

1. developing appropriate personalised communication systems;
2. implementing adaptations in the physical environment to stimulate communication;
3. teaching communication partners how to facilitate communication (i.e., the expression of communicative functions through AAC) within daily activities.

Preceding, during and after the intervention, the participants are videotaped in naturally occurring interactions, each participant with two different communication partners, during typical daily routines.

All participants will be followed longitudinally for about one year. Prior to intervention, each dyad is videotaped three times in a period of two weeks. During the intervention period of between eight and ten months each dyad is videotaped four times. After this period, intervention will be (temporarily) stopped in order to investigate to which extent changes will sustain. In a follow-up period of two months, each dyad will be videotaped again three times. At the end, there will be a total of twenty measurements for each participant.

From each videotaped interaction five minutes are reviewed and coded for the following behaviours of the client and his/her communication partner:

1. turn taking patterns;
2. initiating patterns;
3. partner’s use of stimulating strategies (pausing, responsiveness, creating opportunities, modelling AAC-modes);
4. client’s use of communicative functions;
(5) client's use of communication modes; Data collected during the intervention phase and during the follow-up period are evaluated in comparison to baseline data to determine treatment effects.

Presentation of preliminary results
In this session we will present the adapted version of the COCP programme and report the preliminary results of the effect study. Videotapes will be shown to illustrate the interventions and to demonstrate their effects over time.

References