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Teacher-Student Relationships and Learning: Focus on Neurodevelopmental Disorders

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**”Nobody copes with me in
the long run”**

”Johan” 12 years old

Teacher-student relationship (TSR)

- Teachers as significant adults
- TSR as a prerequisite for students learning
- TSR as a protective factor for at-risk students
- Strained TSR as an increased risk for peer rejection

(e.g., Ansari et al., 2020; Ewe & Fjelkner Pihl, 2024; Pianta, 1999)

Teacher-student relationship (TSR)

As teachers, we hold a unique position, a significant responsibility, one that must be managed with diligence and care...

(Ewe, 2024)

Relationship-building

- A challenging part of the teacher assignment
- Feelings of loneliness

(Skibsted & Matthiessen, 2016; Strachan, 2020)

TSR and students with NDD

- Limited research
- Strained TSR
- Focusing the state of the relationship

(Blacher et al. 2014; Ewe, 2019).

Teachers' perspective

- More conflicts
- Less emotional closeness
- Less cooperation
- Easier to accept boys' behavior
- Less focus on teaching content
- More negative remarks

(e.g., Blacher et al., 2014; Ewe, 2019; Rogers et al., 2015; Nucifora and Walker 2021)

Students' perspective

- Feelings of rejection - trigger
- Gender-specific differences
- Values teachers who understand both their disability and their individual needs
- Desire for teachers to understand that they often do not act out on purpose



(e.g., Ewe 2019; DeShazer et al., 2023; Gwernan-Jones et al. 2016)

What distinguishes skilled teachers?

- Leadership competence
- Didactic competence
- Relational competence

(Nordenbo et al., 2008)

How can teachers' relational competence be understood?

The Relational Competence Model (RCM)

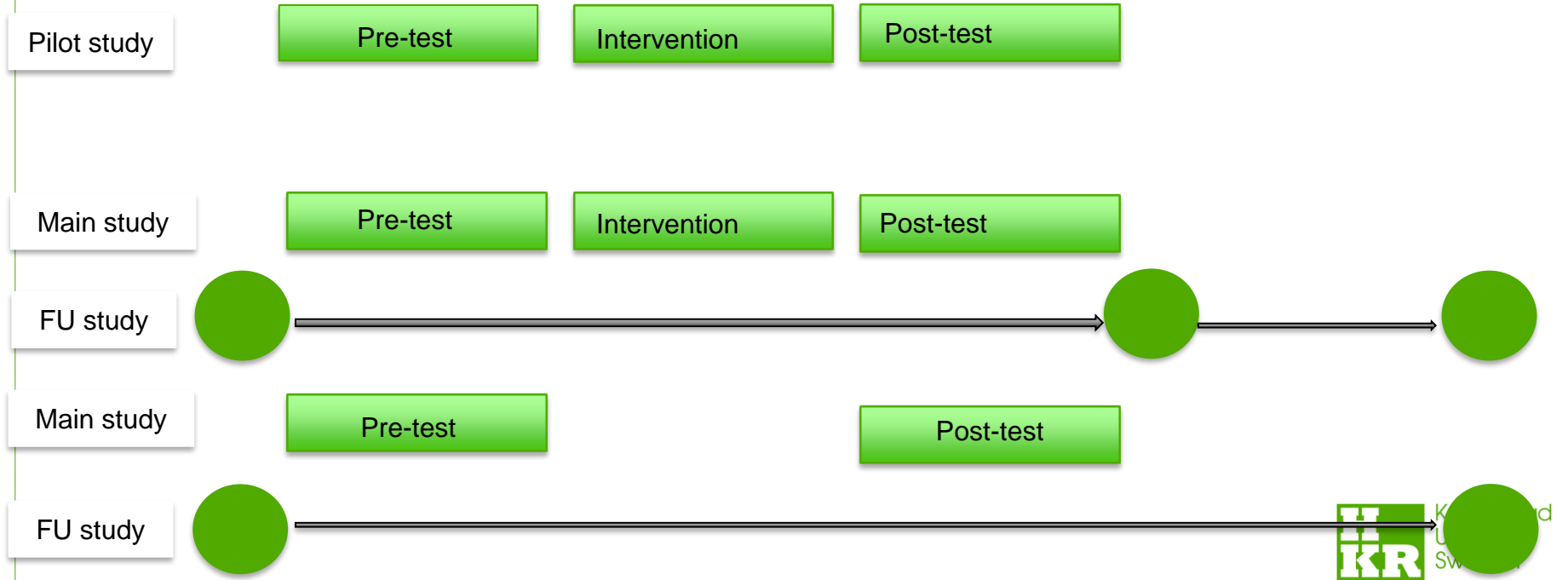
- Communicative competence
- Differentiation competence
- Socioemotional competence

(Aspelin 2018; Aspelin & Jönsson, 2019)

A teachable skill?

- Can teachers' understanding of relational competence be developed through video-based interventions?
- If so, will this change teachers' perception of their relationship with their students with and without NDD?
- If so, will this change their interactions with their students with and without NDD?

Design



Teachers' pre-understanding

- Intra-personal perspective
- Relational competence as inherent in the teacher



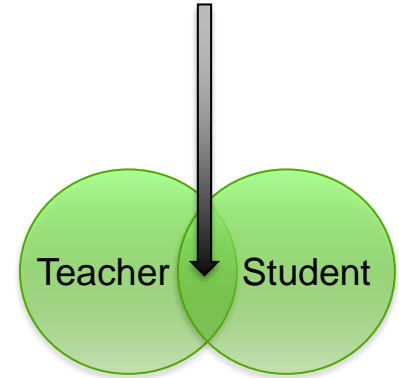
Focus

- Verbal aspects
- A general understanding of NDD

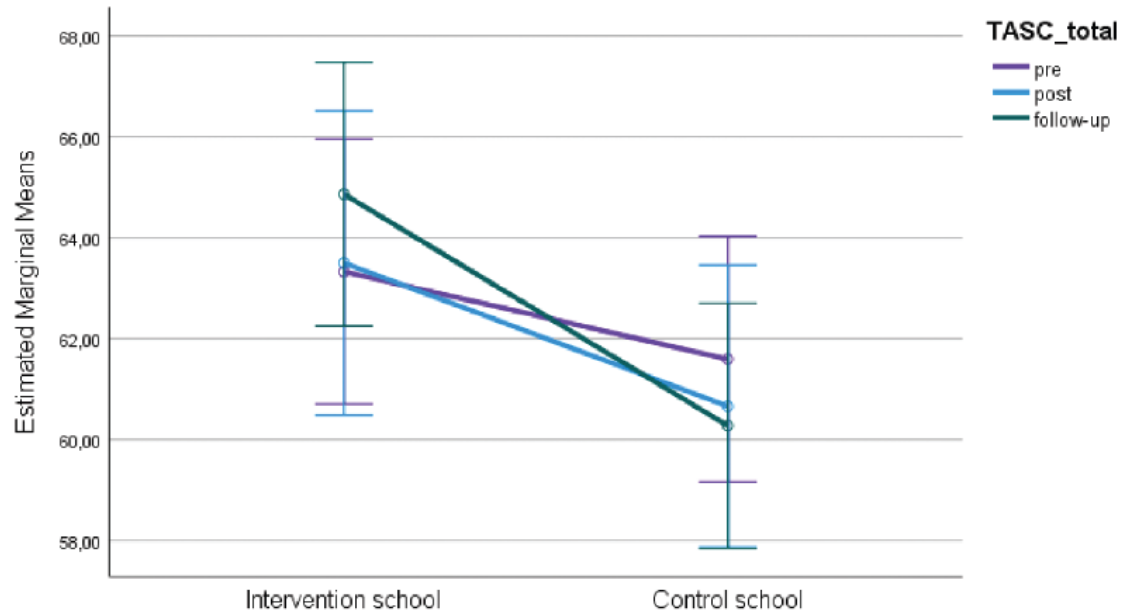
(Ewe, 2020; Ewe & Aspelin, 2021)

Post intervention

- Interpersonal perspective
- Relational competence as situated in the interaction
- Understanding that knowledge about the disability is important but cannot “stand on its own”
- Sensitively perceive and respond to students’ signals
- Identifying one’s own emotional reactions
- Oscillating focus



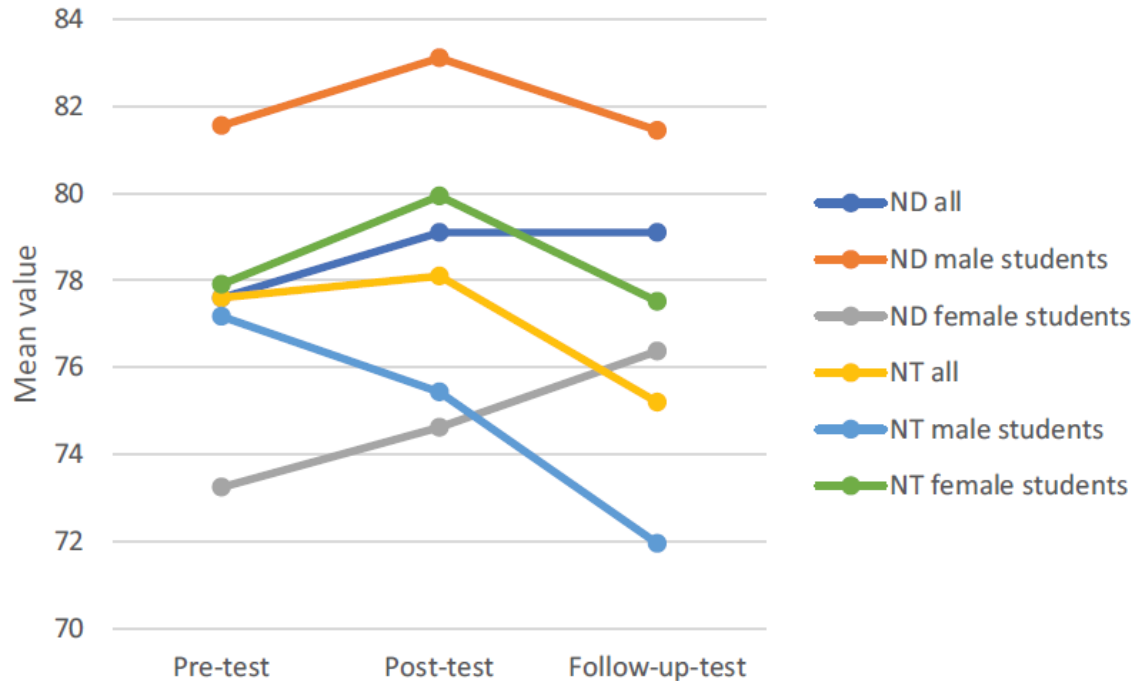
Does a changed understanding lead to change in practice?



Error bars: 95% CI

(Ewe et al., 2023)

Does a changed understanding lead to change in practice?



(Ewe et al., 2023)

Conclusion

- Teachers' understanding of relational competence is not merely a personal attribute but can be enhanced through intentional efforts.
- An increased understanding of relational competence can alter teachers' perspectives on their relationships with students
- A shift in teachers' perceptions on their relationships with students can lead to changes in their interactions with students in practice

Relational preparedness

- General understanding of the disability
- Specific understanding of the student as a unique individual in relation to the teacher
- Sensitively perceive and respond to students' signals and needs
- Identification of one's own emotional reactions
- Oscillating focus

Developing relational preparedness

- Establish a practice of relational language within the school faculty
- Allocate dedicated time for collaborative discussion of authentic relational events
- Facilitate constructive discussions about emotions, encouraging openness and removing the stigma

Developing relational preparedness

- Establish a practice of relational language within the school faculty
- Allocate dedicated time for collaborative discussion of authentic relational events
- Facilitate constructive discussions about emotions, encouraging openness and removing the stigma
- Utilize video reflection as a foundation for context-specific relational learning opportunities
- Implement observation and feedback mechanisms among teacher colleagues
- Use each other as relational bridges

Thank you!
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