Belonging, participation and engagement

— development of inclusive group activities for pupils with PMLD

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Teacher Kathrine stands in front of the pupils wearing a colourful dress, with a tambourine in her hand and a purple wig on her head. She leans forward toward the eight individuals sitting in a semi-circle in front of her: four pupils and four staff members. "Now the story about the Fox's Widow will begin!" says Kathrine, while she shakes the tambourine, dims the lights and captures the attention of the pupils. "New hair for everyone!" she shouts, and her assistants pull out wigs for each pupil from the prop boxes. Some of the pupils lean forward toward their wigs, intrigued. The stage is set for a fairy tale experience where a sense of community is at the centre of the activity and where everyone participates in their own way

What we are witnessing here is a hypothetical example of practice. Later in this chapter, we will elaborate on this example and elucidate what is our overarching research question: What is required to develop well-functioning group activities for pupils with profound and multiple learning disabilities (PMLD), and by what criteria should their quality be evaluated?

Before proceeding to the practice example, we will clarify what special challenges pupils with PMLD face in term of social participation. We will also include a general description of strategies that can be employed when group activities are to be planned, and how pupils' engagement can be used to assess educational quality. In addition, we will briefly discuss two educational approaches that may offer inspiration when activities are being developed and implemented: multi-sensory storytelling and developmental drama.

The group of pupils

The pupils in question have challenges concerning understanding, moving and sensing. They have profound or severe developmental disabilities and therefore often struggle to find order and meaning in things they observe or things that happen to them. Many are able to see, but due to cerebral visual impairment (CVI) they have difficulties understanding what they see. Motor skills disorders often make them unable to explore their surroundings and all kinds of objects. These pupils have a weaker basis than other children for understanding social codes and participating in social interactions. They risk experiencing isolation and ostracism. These are pupils who, due to their disabilities, challenge the schools' efforts to create inclusive communities (Horgen, 2006, p. 34; Lorentzen, 2013, Ch. 7). When we assess the capacity of each individual pupil for social interaction with other pupils, we see that there are at least three factors at play.

The first factor concerns the pupil's capacity to perceive, interpret and respond to signals from other pupils, as well as the capacity to not be distracted or frightened by noises or movements that may occur when humans interact. Certain pupils will have social vulnerabilities entailing that they are only able to benefit socially in small, regulated groups.

The second factor concerns the nature of the teaching arena. Some pupils with PMLD attend special needs schools, some attend special needs classes at ordinary schools, while others attend ordinary classes (often with some separate room adaptations in this regard). How schooling is organized determines whom the pupil has the opportunity to encounter, and who can conceivably participate in group activities and be part of a social community with the pupil. In our opinion, all work relating to creating meaningful encounters between pupils can be considered forms of inclusion work. For pupils with PMLD, it is not suitable to limit the understanding of inclusion to contexts that involve 'ordinary pupils', as some might do. The essence of inclusion, irrespective of the arena, involves human encounters at the heart of which are belonging, perceived acknowledgement and active social participation.

The third factor concerns competence and attitudes in those who interact with the pupils. The pupils need teachers who see opportunities, create social arenas, and have strategies for supporting the pupils' communication and participation. The pupils' learning, in the form of e.g. increased participation and enhanced understanding of the surrounding world, is best cultivated within frameworks of social communities (Horgen, 2006, p.145–147; Horgen, 2010).

If schools are to succeed in creating inclusive group activities where pupils are able to participate and get appreciation from other pupils, planning is required. The activities must be designed based on both the pupils' individual prerequisites for social interaction and the school's opportunity space.

Four principles for design of group activities

Development of structured small-group activities may, in addition to having academic justifications, be considered a specific type of inclusion strategy. The objective is to create a social community within a creative and controlled framework. The content must be understandable and engaging for the participants and must encourage participation and communication.

Small-group activities may be appropriate in many contexts. Occasionally, they occur as activities, embedded in a larger framework, for example sequenced in the beginning or the end of the day. Sometimes they are separate activities based on an academic topic the class or school is working on. Other times it may be an activity that is designed to entertain, and which is to be performed at some type of event.

The activities we are talking about here belong to aesthetic and cultural fields of education. Creative and artistic expressions are emphasised. The overall aim is the benefit of all pupils, among other things in terms of experience and learning.

In order for small group activities to function well, their design must take several matters into consideration.

First, the content of the activities must be centred around one or more themes. The themes may be diverse, they may for example come from culture or history. They may also be connected to news and local events or to nature and the local community. The theme can create a context that pupils, teachers and a possible audience can recognise.

Second, the content of the activities must be adapted to the pupils' cognitive, motor and sensory skills and abilities. Since different pupils are involved, several considerations must be made in the design of the group activity. A good activity is characterised by the pupils displaying engagement and participating. Participation is about involvement and influence. There are many ways to participate in an activity. Even bodily expressions that are not intentional, such as sounds or movements that indicate excitement or joy, can be understood as forms of participation. Through participation, the pupil influences classmates, adults and the content and direction of the activity.

Third, activities function the best when they correspond with the pupils' individual interests. The activity must be designed with this in mind – with visual, auditory and action-based components that capture the pupils' attention and fascination. When activities are created, it will therefore be important to identify what captivates and excites the individual pupil. Sometimes such identification can be done by way of structured forms of preference assessment (Dalen, 2017).

Fourth, activities must be given content and structure that create opportunities for communication – to understand and to be understood. The pupil's experience of being understood is the responsibility of adults. Opportunities for contact and interaction with adults and classmates largely depend on the adults' competence as interpreters and communication partners (Evensen 2018, Horgen 2006, Lorentzen, 2013).

To summarise, these four principles for design of group activities can be said to represent a foundation for creating meaningful content for pupils:

1. thematic choice
2. adaptation to cognitive, motor, and sensory abilities
3. adaptation to preferences
4. adaptation to communicative functioning

However, if group activities are to be meaningful or give rise to learning and well-being, more is required in terms of planning and evaluation of the activities: the pupils` engagement must be taken into consideration.
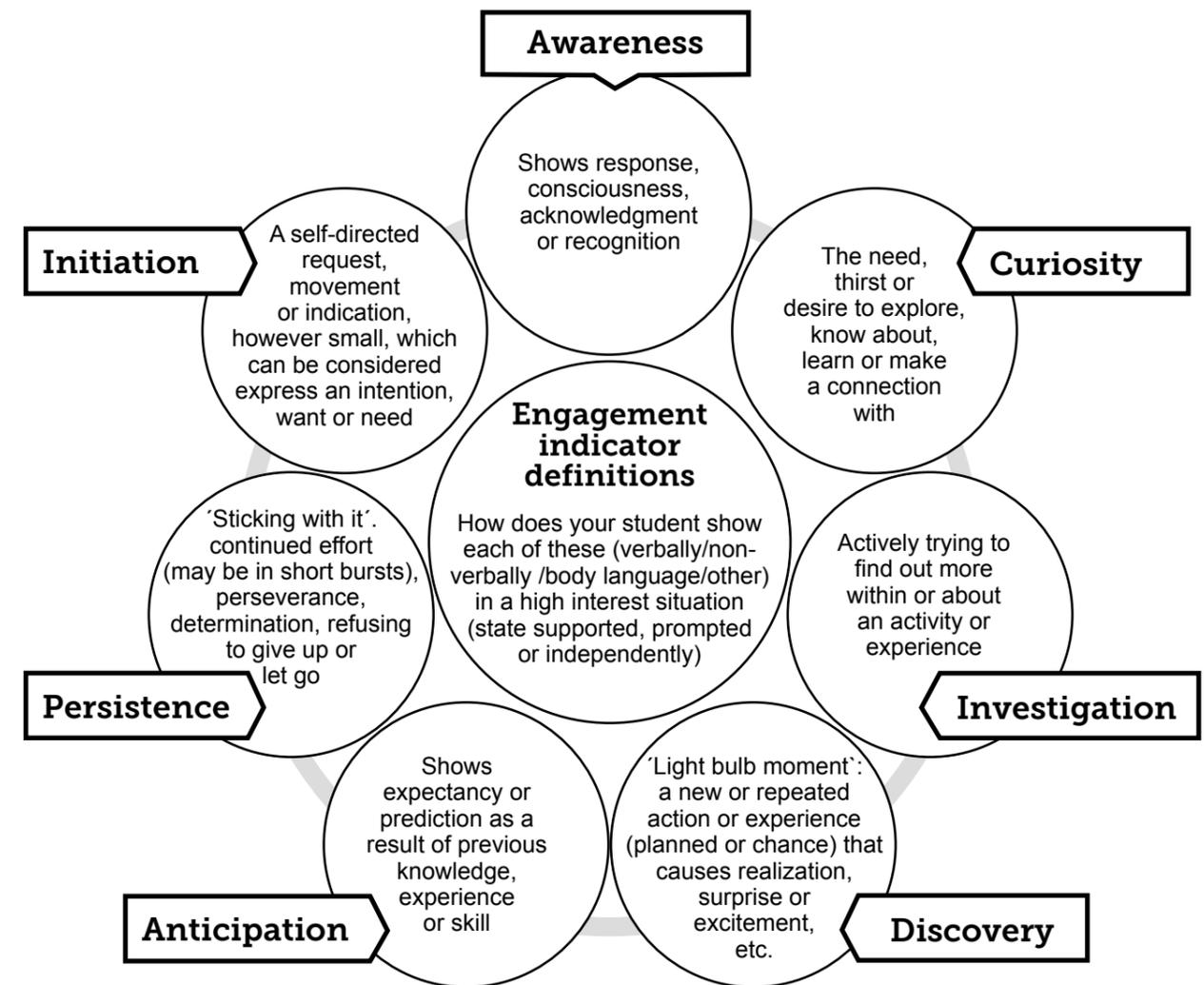
Seven factors of engagement

If pupils with PMLD are to take part in shared activities, the team that works with the pupils must create content that engages each individual pupil. Engaging activities are a source of joy and a good indicator of successful learning outcomes (Martins, 2017).

The British research project Complex Learning Difficulties and Disabilities – CLDD has argued in favour of developing education where the pupils' engagement takes centre stage (Carpenter et al., 2015). The British school system has established this approach as a standard for the educational work with pupils with severe disabilities (Rochford, 2016; Standards & Testing Agency, 2020).

Engagement is about passion, motivation, and action. This can be concretised in seven different forms of engagement: awareness, curiosity, investigation, discovery, anticipation, persistence and initiation (Carpenter et al., 2015).

Awareness
Shows response, consciousness, acknowledgment or recognition

Curiosity
The need, thirst or desire to explore, know about, learn or make a connection with

Initiation
A self-directed request, movement or indication, however small, which can be considered express an intention, want or need

Engagement indicator definitions
How does your student show each of these (verbally/non-verbally /body language/other) in a high interest situation (state supported, prompted or independently)

Investigation
Actively trying to find out more within or about an activity or experience

Persistence
´Sticking with it´. continued effort (may be in short bursts), perseverance, determination, refusing to give up or let go

Discovery
´Light bulb moment`: a new or repeated action or experience (planned or chance) that causes realization, surprise or excitement, etc.

Anticipation
Shows expectancy or prediction as a result of previous knowledge, experience or skill

In order to design activities that engage pupils, we need to know how these seven forms of engagement can be expressed by each individual pupil. Pupils with PMLD exhibit considerable variation in their styles of participation and communication. For example, some pupils may display curiosity by waving their arms and trying to grasp objects. Others may convey curiosity by intense stares or special sounds.

An important reason why pupils' engagement is expressed in such diverse ways is their different motor prerequisites. Their ability to voluntarily control movement varies. For some motor control is very difficult and it may appear as if limbs have a life of their own. Strong muscle contractions (spasms) or weak muscle tone are contributing factors in this regard.

Pupils` abilities to relate and respond are often limited. Difficulties regarding sight and hearing limits how the world around him or her can be perceived and understood. If activities are to generate engagement, they must have components that are understand-able and interesting for the pupil. They should preferably be of such a nature that the pupil can influence the activity through their own engagement.

When social group activities are developed, the team working with each individual pupil must have a shrewd sense of what may trigger engagement in the pupil and how different forms of engagement may be expressed.

Inspiration from multi-sensory storytelling and developmental drama

Many have experienced that pupils with PMLD to a greater extent than others require activities where various sensory experiences have a prominent place. This is not surprising, since linguistic and abstract elements are not particularly intelligible for these children, and individual perceptions of the world largely revolve around direct experiences via sight, hearing, taste, smell, touch or movement.

In the academic literature we find theories regarding sensory-oriented activities in areas such as developmental drama (Booker, 2011) and multi-sensory storytelling (Lambe & Young, 2011).

Developmental drama, as Booker (2011) refers to it, is a dramatized story consisting of a frame story, supported by rituals, repetitions, rhythm and physical adaptations. Through these measures stories are made accessible and meaningful. This is an approach that emphasises imaginative content, sensory adaptations, and personal involvement of participants. The activities aim at offering interesting experiences to the participants, with a high degree of intrinsic value and potential for personal development and learning.

In England the theatre company Bamboozle has developed something similar, sensory-oriented theatre performances for young people with PMLD. Some of the stories are available as inspiration to others on YouTube (Bamboozle Theatre Company, 2011a, 2011b, 2013).

Multi-sensory storytelling is an umbrella term for told stories – fictional or non-fictional – where colours, sounds, materials and other sensory elements have a prominent role both as sources of experiences and as carriers of information. The 'Stories in a Box' concept is a type of multi-sensory storytelling (Lambe & Young, 2011). This is an attempt to personalise stories, where props in boxes are elements that guide the participants through the story. The props are selected based on the criterion that they are to provide information and evoke memories and associations. Research suggests that participation in multi-sensory activities over time reduces vulnerability to impressions that may be difficult to handle (Fenwick, Lambe, Hogg & Young, 2011).

In the Norwegian context, 'music and drama week' at Skogmo upper secondary school is an example of how multi-sensory storytelling and activities can be planned and implemented. These activities are discussed in a pamphlet of ideas published by the Telemark Habilitation Services (Schulerud, 2000).

The Fox's Widow – a practice story

We will now return to the group activity that introduced this chapter: the dramatized fairy tale of The Fox's Widow. The pupils participating are Kristian, Mia, Nina and Allan. They are of primary and lower secondary school age and belong to a separate group at the school. They are pupils with complex disabilities, and they require customised and highly individualised educational facilities (Norwegian Official Report (NOU), 2019; Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2015).

Just as other pupils, they each have their own personality and individual interests. None of the pupils are able to speak or communicate by pointing to symbols but are nevertheless making themselves understood through movements and sounds.

Kristian has good hearing and loves music and movement, action and fun. He has cerebral visual impairment, and it is unclear how much he is able to see. He is affected by spasticity and has difficulties making his body move the way he wants.

Mia has good vision but requires a hearing aid to be able to hear. It is difficult for her to manage visual and auditory impressions at the same time. She enjoys baby songs and baby sounds, and she enjoys being pushed on the swing and rocked.

Nina both sees and hears well and is excited by music and movement. She displays consid-erable social interest. She has many vocal sounds that she uses to express herself.

Allan is a quiet boy. He understands little of what he sees but it is possible to make eye contact with him when the room is quiet, and he is given time. His frequent epileptic seizures necessitate that he takes short naps during activities. His body relaxes when he is feeling good. When he feels uncomfortable, his muscles become tense and stiff.

The differences in these four pupils yield different challenges in adapting group activities. Although the activities to a great extent must be managed by adults, they should as far as possible be adapted to the children. The fairy tale we previewed in the introduction was developed with both the group and each individual pupil in mind. The story was created because the school was organising a Culture Week, and the team working with the pupils thought a drama project would be suitable. They wanted to create something that was exciting for the pupils to participate in.

The team working with the group of pupils knew that in order to create a story that appealed to the pupils, they would have to take into consideration what each individual child was capable of understanding and what sensory experiences could evoke particular interest. In this work the team could draw upon previous assessments they had made regarding the pupils' areas of interest.

The performance was rehearsed during circle time a few times during the spring semester. The rehearsals were of great importance to the staff members as well. They had to learn how they could appropriately assist the actors. The goal was a school performance during the Culture Week in June. There would be an additional performance at the summer assembly before the holidays, and siblings, parents and grandparents would be invited.

Planning of theme and content

The team began with a brainstorming session to decide on the content and format of a possible story. They wanted to create an activity that offered the pupils engagement, an experience of belonging and opportunities for participation. This was a creative endeavour, where everyone could contribute ideas, and everyone could showcase their talents. Various ideas were pitched, and the possible content in all ideas was assessed based on what Allan, Kristian, Mia and Nina could understand, participate in and be excited by.

Should they create a mini story inspired by existing stories such as Captain Sabertooth, Christmas in Blue Mountain or one of the classic folktales? Or should they take inspiration from animals in nature? Perhaps the starting point could be a story from the Viking age? Or how about a shared experience, such as the boat trip last summer?

The team finally settled on the folktale The Fox's Widow. The story had a simplicity that made it easy to understand and to participate. Moreover, it had a suitable number of roles and it contained animals with which some of the pupils were already familiar. The fairy tale is about an attractive fox's widow, a cat (Korse) who chases away dubious suitors (a bear and a wolf) and a hero (a fox) who appears toward the end.

When the team was developing the story, they wanted to stay true to the fairy tale format. The narrator of the play would begin with "Once upon a time …" and then proceed to tell the story. The fairy tale would have to end with "and they lived happily ever after …", as all fairy tales do. This would allow the pupils to recognise the format from fairy tales they had heard or participated in the dramatizing. Words and phrases are repeated, again and again. "Let him go, let him go", says the fox's widow. Even though the words and actions do not immediately evoke associations in the pupils with their everyday lives, they are transported into the world of the fox's widow, where everything revolves around rejecting suitors who arrive at her door. When a suitor with a red coat, like her deceased husband, appears, the story reaches a turning point. With a slow and steady pace and dramatic effects, created with the aid of rhythmic instruments, the group is guided through the short story. The instruments selected are easy to use for pupils and adults.

The lines are delivered with the aid of single message communication devices containing pre-recorded lines. When the device is pressed, the line is delivered. The lines are in the form of rhymes and are accompanied by various instruments. When the dark-clad bear appears, a heavy, rhythmic drum noise is heard. When the red fox finally appears, he is accompanied by a harmony so flattering that it becomes apparent to all that the chosen suitor has *finally* arrived.

Strategies for communication and support

As mentioned, the team must consider each individual pupil when developing the various components of The Fox's Widow. The activity will not succeed if the pupils become passive or bored. The content and support strategies must be developed in such a manner that the activity promotes communication and engagement. The adults must assume a role in which they explain, motivate, guide and model. This way, they can help the pupil take on a good participant role in the drama.

To provide the pupils with the best possible support, it is necessary for the adults to interact with the pupils on the basis of partner-perceived communication (Siegel & Cress, 2002). The partners must have the ability to interpret and attribute meaning to the pupils' actions, and they must themselves act in a manner that makes sense to the pupil. Each individual pupil communicates using their own non-verbal language or variations of the same non-verbal language. This language has no words but is expressed through actions, movements, mimicry and breathing. Sometimes the language is expressed using sounds and, less often, looks (Evensen, 2018; Lorentzen, 2013). The adults must learn the pupils' idiosyncratic language and communicate with them in this language. As a part of the communication adults will also use ordinary words (Eldorado, 2020; Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust, 2013).

During the fairy tale it is first and foremost the staff members who are tasked with ensuring that the pupils are able to communicate and participate. In her book *Developmental Drama,* Mary Booker refers to such helpers as 'support actors' (Booker, 2011), a term we adopt.

In order to make the story of The Fox's Widow comprehensible, sensory and interesting for all the pupils, a separate prop box was devised for each of them. These boxes were filled with items that would be used during the story. The fox's widow's red-brown silk scarf was placed in Nina's box together with a single message communication device containing pre-recorded lines. Kathrine had recorded the fox's widow's voice, while the bear's booming vocals had been enthusiastically recorded by a burly supporting actor with a baritone voice. Allan had a chime-like musical instrument in his box, in addition to costumes and single message communication devices. The chimes were fitted to his hand movements, allowing him to master this instrument. The instrument provided a suitable sound effect to introduce the fox's widow's lines. The sound indicated that 'the fox's widow is about to take stage'. The use of a prop box was inspired by the 'Stories in a Box' concept, which is an individually adapted storytelling format in which specific items are incorporated (Whinnett & Bell, 2010).

The fairy tale is performed: examples of engagement

In many ways, the goal of pupil engagement guided the team's design of The Fox's Widow. The theme, content and supporting strategies were selected to make the pupils genuinely interested in the activity.

The pupils were placed close to one another so that the opportunities for communication and interaction between them would be as good as possible. The supporting actors were also seated in a manner enabling them to support each pupil. Let us examine the lead-up to the fairy tale:

The drama begins with the curtains opening.
The spotlight shines on the fox's widow, played by Nina. She has brown ears, a red coat and scarf and is made-up with whiskers and a large red snout. There is no doubt who is standing before us.

Teacher Kathrine plays blues music on the piano. Nina cries the fox's widow's tears of despair over the loss of her husband, using both her own sounds and sounds of crying from the single message communication device she is pressing. Kathrine dramatically tells the audience about the fox's widow's loss of her husband.

When Kathrine and the supporting actors play their roles in the drama, both planned and random elements are included. It is a delicate balance of improvisation and structure. There is an openness to seeing meaning and responding to all the input the actors provide during the performance. The whole time, the ambition of Kathrine and the others is that the performance will evoke the pupils' engagement.

The behaviour of Kathrine and the supporting actors is key to whether or not the pupils will be captivated by the story and become active participants, rather than "mere" spectators. The intention is to support a spectrum of different types of engagement. Let us examine a few examples.

1. Awareness
When the pupil`s sense something that evokes interest or attention, the phenomenon that occurs can be referred to as awareness. Concentrated awareness and attention over time enables new understandings.

"Who is it that comes knocking on my door?" asks Kathrine as she moves forward slowly, hunched over. The tambourine underscores the tension in the air and

Kristian begins to rock, moving his body back and forth. Kristian listens with his entire body and turns his left ear toward Kathrine.

For those not acquainted with Kristian, it may appear as if he is turning away from her, but those who know him see that he is listening intently and is fully present, and that he cannot get close enough using his ear and entire body.

2. Initiation
When the pupils experience that they can accomplish something by their own volition, it becomes easier to take initiatives to act. Initiatives met by staff in a positive way lead to influence and co-determination.

Kristian is the suitor about to arrive. He leans in the direction of Nina, as he hears her enthusiastic sounds. The supporting actor notices the initiative and helps him get closer, but Mia is standing in the way! Boom! He begins to smile as the single message communication device is placed in his lap.

Kristian's movement toward Nina is not pronounced but clear enough to the person next to him. Perhaps his initiative reveals an interest in her sounds? Perhaps it is his way of seeking contact?

3. Persistence
To try and try again when you do not succeed is often a result of good experiences. Such persistence is good to have in all of life's struggles.

Paralysis in Kristian's upper body makes it difficult for him to press the single message communication device at the right time. The supporting actor holds the device where she anticipates Kristian will move. He misses – and tries again. The device is a bit closer. He feels an arm and a hand underneath his own. The two hands move in unison. Finally, the line is delivered! "Ask her out to go, some good advice for her to know", Kristian says to Korse, loud and clear. He did it! The persistent effort makes his body tremble from the exertion.

The dialogue between the fox's widow and Korse ends with a rejection of the suitor. Kristian takes the rejection in his stride. His hand rhythmically moves in the direction of the arm rest on his wheelchair and the supporting actor places a hand on his shoulder to help stabilise his body.

Once again, Kristian has experienced that he can succeed even if he fails in his first attempt. We can assume that he experiences joy when he achieves something, and that each time he feels a sense of achievement his trust in his own abilities is strengthened.

4. Investigation
By studying and exploring, humans acquire new knowledge and experiences. Investigations makes the world more comprehensible and also more exciting.

Allan feels the wig in his hands. It has stiff, grey curls. His hands search through the curls and he becomes interested in feeling and listening. He disconnects his vision and directs his ear toward Kathrine's sounds. For a moment, he becomes stiff and has spasms, but shortly after he is back in the situation. He explores the wig once more, before letting go of the curls so that the

supporting actor and Kathrine can place it on his head. He raises his arms and stretches them toward the tambourine.

The fairy tale experience Allan is invited into in gives him the opportunity to explore new things. When he touches the wig with his fingers, perhaps he gains a better understanding of what the item in front of him is, and what it can do?

5. Curiosity
When curiosity is displayed, it is a reflection of focus and energy. It is important to cultivate curiosity as it is an important factor both for learning and well-being.

Mia follows Kathrine with her gaze and stretches toward her. Kathrine sees the movement and teases Mia a bit by placing the tambourine on her hand only to move it away while they maintain eye contact and smile. Curious, Mia reaches forward. Finally, her hand reaches the tambourine, and she beats it with a satisfied look on her face. Nina looks at Mia, Mia looks back at Nina, and the two of them beat the tambourine together.

The silly and funny acting facilitated by Kathrine and the supporting actor brings out Mia's curiosity and playfulness. The silly behaviour thrills her and may entail that she will be curious as to what Kathrine has to offer next time.

6. Anticipation
Joys become bigger when you look forward to them. Anticipation brings joy in itself.

Mia, Nina and the others recognise Kathrine's counting 'one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine ...' and hear the sound of the tambourine grow louder and more intense. Whose turn is it now? Allan is rolled closer. It is his turn! His face lights up with a big expectant smile.

Kathrine counts with growing intensity. She does the same thing in all of her projects with the pupils. The pupils know that we are approaching a climax.

7. Discovery

The world becomes more comprehensible when we make discoveries. Perhaps we see connections where we once saw chaos? Perhaps we gain insight into our own possibilities?

Allan stares intently at the big red button that enters his field of vision. His body tenses and suddenly his arm moves forward in an arching motion. "Where is the fox's widow?" says a booming voice from the single message communication device when Allan presses it. Everyone is excited by Allan's line.

Teacher Kathrine, who is leading the performance, briefly thinks back on the first test of single message communication devices three weeks ago. Back then, Allan did not understand that he could say something to others by using a device. But quickly, with adaptation and trial and error, Allan discovered the connection and began using the single message communication device.

Allan discovered that he has a voice. He has understood a causal relation, whereby he, with the aid of a device, can make something happen of his own volition. He has been given a participating role in the fairy tale, making him more visible to the others. It gives him the opportunity to experience the joy of receiving recognition and positive responses.

As we have seen in these examples, engagement can manifest itself in various ways. The various forms of engagement will often overlap. Sometimes, a single act can be perceived as an expression of multiple forms of engagement.

Let us follow The Fox's Widow to its conclusion. They are nearing the climax of the piece and the pupils are bursting with anticipation. Nina, Mia, Allan and Kristian experience the synergy of the community.

One suitor after another is rejected and then Allan reappears in the light, where he encounters Mia, as Korse. This time, he has a nice red faux fur draped over his shoulders. "And what colour is his coat?" asks Nina. "Handsome, beautiful red, just as he who is dead", explains Mia, as Korse. Nina is unable to sit still in her chair. She is bouncing up and down. Both of her hands eagerly press the button, which declares "Dear, ask him in to see; his advice is good for me".

Shortly after, Kathrine is sitting by the piano. The piano tunes are more upbeat than at the beginning of the piece. "And they lived happily ever after!"

Applause erupts from the audience and the pupils receive the plaudits in their own ways. Allan has the supporting actor's arm around him to prevent his eagerness from triggering an epileptic seizure. His mouth is open, and he arches his back. Kristian smiles and is moving his arms and legs. He bumps into Nina's arm, who holds his hand and raises it together with her own to receive the applause. She is beaming to the audience and shrieks with pride. Mia applauds and looks at Allan, who is sitting next to her, and at the other children and the adults. Together, they have performed The Fox's Widow, and they have all experienced the rhythm, the rhymes, the lights and the costumes. Each pupil has found meaningful things to capture their interest during the piece, and they share the joy of having delivered a good performance.

As we have seen, the fairy tale of The Fox's Widow was developed with the pupils' engagement and participation in mind. To accomplish this, the story was designed with an overall direction that accommodated everyone, but with a considerable degree of individual adaptation in terms of communication and participation along the way. Through the pupils' joint participation and performance of tasks it was highly likely that they would experience a sense of belonging.

Good stories facilitate enhanced community

In this chapter we have discussed what is required to create good and inclusive group activities for pupils with PMLD. Participation in such activities is important for those who rarely experience contact with their classmates.

When pupils are gathered around stories, drama and fairy tales, it becomes a community arena that may provide opportunities for encounters and experiences that are different to those in their everyday lives. Storytelling, drama and theatre are cultural activities deeply rooted in human history.

We have used a performance of The Fox's Widow as our example of how stories can be designed in such a manner that they become meaningful for pupils with PMLD. We have stressed the importance of taking the pupils' views, interests, abilities, and sensory capacities into consideration when planning content. We have also emphasised engagement, participation, and joy as the primary objectives for each individual pupil. In order for the activity to succeed, it is crucial that those working with the pupils provide adapted support to enable contact and communication with adults and classmates.

In our story, the group of staff members chose a reflection sheet to evaluate the benefits of the activity for each individual pupil (see appendix). This helped them gain insight into the qualities of the activity. In their evaluation afterwards they reflected on what was worth keeping and what was not worth keeping.

The principles which the team employed to develop The Fox's Widow are the same as those used in other contexts. Based on the pupils' understanding and interests, they wanted to create content in the school day that evoked various forms of engagement – awareness, curiosity, investigation, discovery, anticipation, persistence,

and initiation (Carpenter et al., 2015). The pupils participated in several smaller group activities during the Culture Week held at the school, and it was particularly important to consider what might spark the interest of each individual pupil.

Learning is social and occurs in joint activities and collaboration. Together with their supporting staff, pupils like Kristian, Mia, Nina, and Allan can form a rich and accommodating environment for one another.
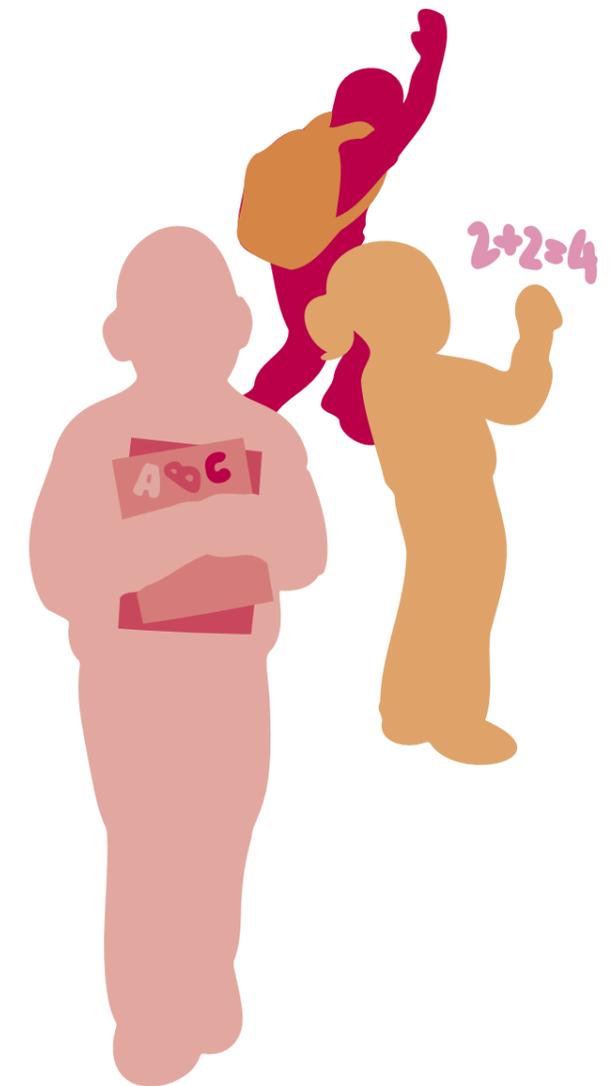
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Appendix
Reflection sheet for group activities

What did we observe in the pupil?	How was it expressed and at what point in the activity did we observe it-
Enjoyment	
Participation	
Curiosity	
Awareness	
Investigation	
Initiative	
Persistence	
Anticipation	
Discovery	
Contact and interaction with classmates	
Learning	
Overall, how do we think the activity has worked for the pupil? Should any changes be made?	
Overall, how do we think the activity has worked for the group? Should any changes be made?	

Quality assessment sheet. Based on the seven factors of engagement by Carpenter et al. (2015).