Togetherness in Play and Learning

Special Needs Education in Mainstream Settings

Support for participation

3.1

3.1

Support for participation

From a sociocultural perspective, children's learning and development occurs through building relationships and interaction with others, both adults and peers. Vygotsky uses the term 'zone of proximal development' to describe what the child can master with the help from a more 'competent' individuals, which could be other children or adults in kindergartens and schools. The following five chapters provide examples of practice that adapts in order for children with special needs to be able to participate in inclusive learning communities with their peers.

Anne-Merete Kleppenes:

Communities in different arenas

Based on a discussion of Imanuel, aged 14, and some of his communication partners, Anne-Merethe highlights why it is so important that individuals who use augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) have the opportunity to communicate with different individuals in different arenas.

Communication in different arenas

In this chapter, I will demonstrate why it is important that individuals who use augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) have the opportunity to communicate with different people in different arenas.

Anne-Merete Kleppenes

To elucidate this position, I will base the following discussion on 14-year-old Imanuel and some of his communication partners from three different arenas. I have become acquainted with Imanuel through my work at Statped, where I have worked as an adviser in the field of AAC for a number of years. Imanuel is largely unable to communicate using spoken language. He is able to voice a few sounds and words, e.g., he is able to say 'yes', 'no', 'mama' and some letter sounds. He shouts when he is happy. He also knows some hand signals and has a well-developed body language. The problem is that he is largely unable to convey what he has done or is thinking about through body language. Three years ago, he received a means of communication, a Minspeak speech generating device, and with the aid of this device he is able to express himself more accurately.

A few months after Imanuel received his means of communication, he attended a check-up at the hospital. He had been to the doctor in question many times, but they had never before had a conversation. This was now possible, and the doctor enquired, among other things, about what Imanuel enjoys and what he would be doing later.

At the end of the check-up, the doctor eagerly stated: "Imanuel, this is fantastic! You can speak with me! You know, I'm a doctor and a professor, and I have students, many students. They must meet you. Would you accompany me to a lecture so that you can speak with them?" Imanuel pressed his speech generating device, followed by: "No thank you!"

To me, this is what inclusive community is about. That Imanuel, or others, are able to set their own boundaries, be heard and belong, regardless of who they are with. To participate and influence, irrespective of arena. Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of Child enshrines that all children should have the opportunity to express their views and be heard. This includes at school with teachers and classmates or at home with parents and siblings. It also includes during leisure time and the activities in which the children participate. Even if children do not always get their way, they should be allowed to express themselves (Norwegian Government, 2003).

I have spoken with some of the people with whom Imanuel enjoys communicating, and who enjoy communicating with him. They are two friends and an social worker

at the school, a doctor and a barber. I have been put in touch with these communication partners through Imanuel's mother. Both they and Imanuel are aware that the time I have spent with them, the interviews, and the conversations we have had, are used as a basis for the content in this chapter. The informants and Imanuel's family have been offered the chance to read this chapter and have been given the opportunity to provide input to the text.

This chapter consist of two parts. The first is a theory section which clarifies the meaning of AAC, and elucidates how communication, language and language environment and communication partners are important for development, learning and participation. Thereafter, I will introduce Imanuel and discuss what I have done to obtain information which will be presented toward the end. Extracts from the interviews have been included to highlight the potential significance of being able to participate in various arenas for individuals who use AAC.

Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC)

Individuals like Imanuel, who are without functional speech, require access to, and training in, augmentative and alternative communication (AAC), in order to be able to express their views, thoughts and feelings. Some individuals will require AAC across their lifespan, while others will need it for a limited period of time or in specific situations. Common to all those who require AAC is that spoken language is insufficient during face-to-face communication (Tetzchner & Martinsen, 2002). Most individuals who use AAC understand Norwegian but are dependent on having an alternative way of expressing themselves. Alternatives to spoken language include hand signals, graphic symbols or writing. Individuals who require AAC should be given access to it as early as possible after the need has been identified (Eberhart et al., 2017).

Both the individual who requires AAC and the community around them require training in the use of AAC. How such training should be implemented depends on both individual and environmental circumstances. The objective is to make it possible for the individual to have a means of contacting others, and for the individual to be able to express what he or she wants. Communication is important for autonomy, social participation, learning and development, education and employment and for inclusion purposes (Vartun, 2018). Inclusion is not merely an ideological goal. It is also a tool to promote development. This is based on a belief that participation in different social and cultural activities promotes language development (Dahl Rasmussen, 2015).

Language is a key to learning. Through language, we gain access to knowledge and are able to show what we are capable of. We strengthen social relations and develop both socially and psychologically through the use of language. Participation in daily activities and interactions with peers, on the playground, during recess or in the classroom, provides access to language but also linguistic models and opportunities to practice communication (Vartun, 2018). Communication with the aid of AAC and training in the use is a task assigned to the schools (Norwegian Education Act, 1998, Section 2-16). However, it is also a task for other arenas. We learn language in all natural settings and learning in different arenas has been shown to be key to good development (Lund & Light, 2007, Eberhart et al., 2017, Sennot et al., 2016).

Communication using AAC

When assessing how we can support an individual who uses AAC as their form of expression, we must always emphasise finding forms of expression which to the greatest extent support the individual's current communication but also provides

the individual with an opportunity for continuing development. This is important as language is essential to interaction, learning and participation in all arenas (www.regjeringen. no). Individuals with significant communication disabilities are characterised by their communication being difficult to recognise and that it is unfamiliar to others (Blackstone & Berg, 2003). Use of alternative means of communication alters the flow, slows the pace, and influences the dynamics of the interaction (Beukelman & Mirenda, 2013).

Many individuals with communication disabilities and limited speech rarely initiate conversations, may struggle to respond to initiatives from others and rarely pose questions (de Bortoli et al., 2010). Therefore, it is not easy to be the person speaking with individuals who require an alternative means of expressing themselves. Low expectations harboured by conversation partners cause many to become communicative under-achievers (Tetzchner & Martinsen, 2002). The most common pitfalls are either avoiding contact and communication or becoming overly dominant in the conversation. This can be avoided through knowledge and competence (Bottegaard Næss, 2015). Bottegaard Næss describes a good communication partner as someone who is patient, motivated and interested. Patience is a particularly important skill; it takes time to communicate with the aid of AAC.

Language environment should provide opportunities for communication

The language environment should provide experience in communicating, access to new words and new ways of using them. A good language environment stimulates linguistic activity and is important for everyone (Østvik, 2008).

Østvik has developed a model with multiple components in a language environment that must be present in order for an individual to be able to learn and develop their communication using AAC. Language development is entirely dependent on those close to the individual having positive attitudes toward AAC, and that they understand and recognise that the individual achieves a higher quality of life and greater independence by using AAC. This requires a belief in that the individual has something he or she wants to say. A good language environment also emphasises the physical surroundings, having interesting and exciting topics of conversation and having ways of discussing them.

Even if an individual receives a suitable alternative means of communication, he or she will require specific training and practice in using this form of expression over an extended period of time in order for the communication to function. Often, access to an alternative form of expression arrives too late, entailing that the individual may have gone years without sufficient communication training and practice. It has been documented that children with typical language development at 18 months of age have been exposed to spoken language for 4380 hours (Korsten, 2011). Research has shown that children with a typical language development hear 125,000 words a week of spoken language. In comparison, children who require AAC see or hear 24,000 words a week (Sennot et al., 2016). This tells us that we communicate less with children who require AAC, both in terms of spoken language and their alternative form of expression. One of the reasons for this is that children who use AAC encounter fewer people and are present in fewer arenas.

Communication partners

Communication partners is a particularly important component of the overall language environment. The individual attitudes and skills of communication partners are key in order for the individual who uses AAC to have the opportunity to communicate, participate and show who they are. Regarding communicating with the use of AAC, it is said that this is not an intuitive skill. Rather, it is something we must learn (The Norwegian Directorate for Learning and Training, 2020). Attitudes are expressed through the ways we think, act and feel. Attitudes are easy to discuss but may be difficult to concretise in skills. Østvik (2008) writes the following regarding working with AAC:

Attitudes can be a double-edged sword; they open for possibilities while at the same time they may prevent development. Our attitudes toward how an individual communicates and what aspects are important in an individual's communication will be decisive for the development of a good language environment.

My experience is that the combination of positive attitudes and practical skills form a good foundation in individuals I consider to be good communication partners.

Different arenas and communication experiences

We discuss, and are interested in, different topics in different situations. We also experience different requirements, both in terms of the input we are expected to contribute and how we express ourselves. Therefore, all arenas contribute in different ways. Different arenas and different communication partners provide us with a varied base of experiences, topics, encounters, words and ways of communicating. To an extent, we speak in different ways with different people. Those who interact with Imanuel, or others who express themselves with the aid of AAC and are tasked with getting him or others to speak, have to be good communication partners. They must also provide access to a language environment in which Imanuel and others receive support to express what they want or receive answers to their enquiries. The Speech-Language & Audiology Association of Canada (SAC) states that individuals who use AAC have a considerable potential for language development if they have positive experiences of using their form of expression. Thereby, they will be able to communicate more, develop a more complex language and learn more communicative strategies. In turn, this will increase the likelihood of more experiences and contribute to them becoming better users of AAC (SAC, 2014).

If an individual is approached as someone with abilities, it will result in greater social acceptance and inclusion, improved self-confidence, and greater motivation to participate (SAC, 2014). Expecting competence is not a matter of believing that the individual knows everything immediately but instead that he or she is capable of learning (Davison-Hoult & Ward, 2018). It is common for those close to and who work with individuals who use AAC to set the bar low in terms of expectations for both participation and learning. "When we know that many individuals with communication disabilities have little belief in their own abilities, and if they also view themselves with the same low expectations others have of them, this naturally affects their self-image." (Vartun, 2018)

Social competence

Everyone has a need to develop their social competence. For an individual who uses AAC, this can be challenging. This is because social competence is closely related to language skills. Language development only occurs when we use language together with other people. Communicative competence is the ability to communicate functionally in natural settings and in daily activities and the ability to meet daily communication needs (Light & McNaugthon, 2014). Most are able to do this. For individuals who express themselves through AAC, this requires access to a form of expression with a vocabulary that can be utilised in different arenas, receiving training in the use thereof and an environment that has both time and ambitions to contribute to this development.

For most people, small talk is important in social interaction. We shoot the breeze, discussing various topics that interest us. This is not always particularly informative but plays an important role in terms of establishing and maintaining social interactions, and thereby provides us with more language experiences. Adults who use AAC report that social situations are challenging for them and they especially find that a lack of experience with small talk is significant. It is challenging to engage in small talk (Beukelman & Mirenda, 2013). The optimal outcome of interactions in which a communication device is utilised is not the use of symbols or the device itself. Rather, it is the ability to exchange opinions and be an active participant in various life situations (ASHA, 2004).

Considering that individuals who use AAC receive fewer communicative challenges, I am making a point in this chapter of speaking with communication partners who interact with Imanuel in arenas other than school. Visibility is important in terms of inclusion and participation. Through encounters with different people in different arenas, such as the school. hospital and barbershop, Imanuel receives different and varied experiences with words and the use thereof in different types of conversations. He also gains experience with different communicative intentions, such as highlighting thoughts, ideas and desires, and he is able to describe, enquire, quarrel and joke. This contributes to communicative and language development and thereby academic and social development. I will discuss this in greater detail. First, however, I will introduce Imanuel.

Imanuel

Imanuel communicates in an alternative manner, because what he is able to say through speech is insufficient to express the language skills he possesses in his mind. He needs to express himself in a different manner.

When Imanuel was 11 years old, his application to the NAV (Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration) Assistive Technology Centre was granted and he was able to borrow a communication device; a Minspeak speech generating device. This device is a small computer with speech synthesis. Icons or symbols are combined in various ways on the monitor and read aloud using speech synthesis (Statped, 2020). With the Minspeak, Imanuel is able to express himself using both standalone words and sentences. Imanuel can also use it to write. Tetzchner and Martinsen (2002) categorise individuals who require AAC into three functional main groups: the expressive language group, the supportive language group, and the alternative language group. It is important to determine what functional main group an individual belongs to in terms of facilitation and requirements of communication partners. I would place Imanuel in the expressive language group. Imanuel understands considerably more than he is able to express with the use of spoken language. This means that when he is to learn something, you can explain it to him, and he will largely understand. A few individuals close to him are responsible for giving Imanuel access to words and teaching him how to retrieve them, technically, on the speech generating device. Thus, as his communication partner, you can speak normally to him. In order for us to understand Imanuel, he needs to use the speech generating device. Individuals in the alternative language group require AAC both in order to understand and to be able to express themselves. For such individuals, it is especially important that communication partners use AAC in the same manner as them. Imanuel does not need this, since he belongs to the expressive language group.

When Imanuel received the speech generating device and learned how to use it, he was able to demonstrate that he knew and understood a lot more than those close to him believed. For instance, it was revealed that his reading skills were much better than both the school and family were aware.

Since receiving training, he is also able to express himself using long sentences with various types of content. Here are some examples from conversations between Imanuel and his mother: "*I can decide the music in the car myself, Iron Man*", and "*I'm not going to church today. No thank you, Mamma*". He is able to convey experiences he has had, such as the following: "*I and Mamma and Pappa, and Elise travelled to London during the Christmas holidays*". Imanuel also has a delightful sense of humour, which he demonstrated when his sister asked him the following: "*What do you think I should wear to the party tomorrow, Imanuel?*" He answered: "*No clothes!*" Everyone had a good laugh and then Imanuel added: "*Just kidding!*"

The first time I met Imanuel, he had only recently received his speech generating device. Imanuel was a bit shy and was unable to tell me how he wanted me to spend time with him. Therefore, I had to draw upon my previous experiences from encounters with others who use AAC. After greeting each other, we sat down together. Imanuel quickly pressed his device and said: "*Today is 7 September and the time is 14:52.*" This is not a traditional conversation starter, but it provided quite a bit of information. This was something I perceived as being important and exciting for Imanuel to talk about. Therefore, I thought I should follow-up this topic in order for us to establish good contact. I was fortunate with the date and could respond: "*You know, 7 September is my mother's birthday. She turned 78 years old today.*" We were able to establish a good conversation around this topic. Dates, birthdays and time. He told me about what he had done and what he would be doing later that week. "*Tomorrow, I'm going to visit Grandpa*", he told me, using his speech generating device. Then, we looked at pictures and talked about them. I noticed that Imanuel liked me and I think he noticed that I liked him. Through communication, we established a relationship.

At the time of my first encounter with Imanuel, he had only recently started using his speech generating device. This resulted in me, as his communication partner, having to adjust to him. Now that Imanuel has become better at using his Minspeak device, it is natural that the communicative demands of him change and increase. However, it remains challenging for Imanuel to take on too great a responsibility in conversations. He only has three years of experience in using this form of expression, and although he understands most things, he still cannot be expected to communicate optimally. This requires more training and experience.

I will now introduce the informants, before elucidating why we need to facilitate the use of AAC in different arenas, in order to thereby contribute to an inclusive community.

Communicative development in different arenas

In early January, I met with all of my informants. They had received information about the book and this chapter, and they had received an overview of the topics I would be interviewing them about. I made recordings of the interviews and subsequently transcribed them. At the school, I first interviewed two classmates who have known Imanuel for many years, followed by a social worker who has worked with Imanuel in Grade 8th. Then, I accompanied Imanuel and his mother to the barbershop. I interviewed the barber while he gave Imanuel a haircut. Now and then, Imanuel would remark on our conversation. Then, we drove to the hospital together, where we met with his doctor.

The interviews lasted between 30 minutes to an hour.

Arena: School

Imanuel attends Grade 8th. I met with two classmates of his and the social worker, six months into the school year.

Before Imanuel started lower secondary school, staff members received information about the way Imanuel communicates. Some from his primary school, but mostly from his family. Among other things, the school received a film which his mother and older sister had made. As a school, they learned a lot from this film, the social worker explained. The social worker continued the work of sharing information with the team that works most closely with Imanuel and also with other personnel. The social worker stated that, for her, it is important to show respect in relation to both Imanuel and his family by seeking to familiarise herself with Imanuel's situation. As an example of this, she stated that she has emphasised and worked on showing that Imanuel's speech generating device is his voice. She stated as follows:

Minspeak is a part of Imanuel. In fact, it is his voice. I would not interrupt you if you struggled to complete your thoughts. Occasionally, I hear "Let's just continue, and you can speak when you are ready". What kind of signal does this send?

She emphasised that those in his language environment need different follow-up depending on what role they have in relation to Imanuel. Some require more knowledge than others, but they all need to know enough to understand. They have been concerned both with how they themselves speak and interact with Imanuel and others, and also how Imanuel communicates and behaves.

The importance of understanding Imanuel is also something his two friends have experienced. They have known Imanuel for many years and are together with him a lot in their leisure time. In early autumn, they gave a presentation to their class. They spoke about Imanuel, what he likes and how he communicates. Imanuel did not attend the presentation as he felt this would be difficult. They had prepared the content of their presentation in cooperation with Imanuel and his mother. One of his friends stated as follows:

I try to show others what Imanuel is like, for them to be able to understand him. I have brought friends home or to the movies together with him and others. I must say, when you meet new people, he does shout quite a bit, but he shouts for joy, you know? It's odd but also nice, because this is his way of showing he's happy, you know? Nowadays, no one bats an eyelid when he makes those noises.

The experience of his friends and the social worker is that the understanding this generated gave the other pupils courage to speak with Imanuel. In turn, they learned how they should speak with him. For instance, not using baby language. "The others just need to know that he's just like everyone else, both brilliant and ordinary, the only thing is that he can't speak! If you speak with him, speak normally and don't use baby language."

This information was important for the acceptance and involvement of Imanuel in the class. These perspectives regarding learning outcomes and development are shared by several parties. It is not only Imanuel who benefits from this, the social worker informed. Imanuel's classmates, both the two classmates I interviewed, and the rest of the class, and, according to the social worker, the entire school, has learned a lot about communication this semester. The value of being able to express yourself clearly. Both as individuals and for the school as a community. This has resulted in greater social acceptance and Imanuel is actively participating at the school and in class. His self-confidence has improved, and he interacts with the world differently than before. This is the experience of both his friends and the social worker. He is given greater opportunities to stand up for himself, influence and participate. Through accessing language, Imanuel is able to actively take part in the community.

In addition to receiving information, the class is also involved in the continuing development of Imanuel's Minspeak content. Among other things, his classmates have been tasked with creating a list of teen slang he should have on his speech generating device. Examples of words entered into Imanuel's speech generating device are 'snitch' (tattling), 'chilling' (relaxing, taking it easy), and 'irr' (irritating). These are important words, socially. Moreover, it is important that the school contributes with a vocabulary that enables Imanuel to participate in academic conversations.

The social worker expressed that 'respect', in her opinion, is interrelated with 'familiarising yourself with the other's situation'. Imanuel's class has tried various types of role play. They have learned hand signals, communicated by pointing and using communication boards, and have had conversations two by two together, where only one of them was allowed to answer 'yes' or 'no'. One comment from the class was: "Imanuel is incredibly good at this!!" Through the experience with the class, and subsequent conversations, the social worker found that it generated greater understanding and respect for Imanuel: "It's easy to underestimate him, so it's important to show what he's capable of. This earns him respect." One experience that arose in the class discussions was the importance of taking time and waiting until the other person has expressed themselves. As everyone became better acquainted, staff members at the school discovered that Imanuel in fact did not stand out so much from the other teenagers. He enjoys rock music, exciting movies, cool clothes and hairstyles, and he enjoys being challenged in terms of learning. Therefore, others see him as a person.

For Imanuel, it is not particularly important that many in his language environment are able to use his specific means of communication, since he belongs to the expressive language group (Tetzchner & Martinsen, 2002). However, being skilled in forms of communication other than speech is useful for everyone. This allows you to experience how long time it takes to express yourself using the device, and what you are able to say. Many will experience that they reduce the scope of what they say, because the experience of occupying others' time is so impactful. It may contribute to illuminating skills such as displaying patience, waiting and listening (Beukelman & Mirenda, 2013). The understanding of individuals who use AAC may be enhanced.

The fact that classmates are involved in Imanuel's communication is especially important for the class environment, the social worker expressed: She conveyed this as follows: "Teenagers value and have a natural relationship with differentness. It is acceptable to be different, or unlike others."

There is a body of research documenting that this is not always the case, and there are varying degrees of acceptance and recognition. In any case, the experiences of the three representatives from the school are positive. The social worker also highlighted a key issue by stating:

I think there is a fear of not approaching this appropriately and many are apprehensive. But you must dare to ask questions! Personally, I think this is great fun. This is my experience, but we're all different, after all. Not everyone will say: "I love AAC!"

The social worker stated that she has become more aware of her own communication after getting to know Imanuel. "What I say has to correspond with my actions." She explained that she now consciously uses gestures, body language and mimicry. "I show that I'm interested, through my body language, by leaning forward toward the person I'm with. Through deliberately showing interest and enthusiasm, I'm reinforcing what is happening between us."

At school, Imanuel encounters various communication partners who have varying degrees of knowledge about him and the manner in which he communicates. This can potentially provide him with both social and educational development. This requires that the school takes responsibility, as the linguistic, social and academic learning arena for Imanuel and the other pupils. The benefits for the participating parties at the school can to a lesser extent than in the other arenas be based on chance. This requires deliberate and purposeful efforts in terms of communication, language and participation from the school.

Arena: Hospital

Imanuel's doctor knew him before he received the Minspeak device. He has met many individuals who communicate in alternative ways, and has found that the focus in encounters with this group has changed in recent years to emphasise how the words is used in communication:

In the past, we were concerned with learning words, but you have to be able to communicate. And to do that, you must use what you have. After all, communication is everything. Communication comes first. It won't help possessing the words if you can't use them.

In our conversation, the doctor highlighted an attitude we should have when encountering others, and especially in his role as a doctor in relation to patients: "If you are wondering whether a person you are speaking with has a reduced intellectual capacity, you should assume that they don't. Approach them on this basis. Assume that their competence is good." The doctor stated that he experiences that some patients are shocked when they encounter expectations. Furthermore, he noted: "This is extremely important! Especially for good language comprehension, it is extremely important to facilitate the possibility to express yourself." We also discussed how you should avoid picking easier topics or believing that the person you are speaking with does not understand you. This spoils the interaction, because the other person 'exposes' you. If your assumptions were incorrect and you approached the other person with too high expectations, this can easily be addressed. The doctor expressed that something happens if you approach others with low expectations, as he or she may think: 'Yet another person who doesn't see me.'

Underestimating results in low self-confidence and a lack of interest in communicating with others (Vartun, 2018). Being approached as someone with abilities, however, will result in greater social acceptance and inclusion, improved self-confidence and greater motivation to participate (SAC, 2014). Expecting competence is not a matter of believing that the individual knows everything immediately but instead that he or she is capable of learning (Davison-Hoult & Ward, 2018). An important basic attitude you can adopt in conversations with individuals who require AAC, can therefore be an expectation that he or she has the ability to communicate and learn (Østvik, 2008).

The doctor supported his claims regarding expectations as follows: "I am completely irreverent in the sense that I am not afraid of making a fool of myself!" Knowing the appropriate level of expectation is often difficult when the person you encounter does not display their competence through speech, nor perhaps through their actions. It is common for those close to and who work with individuals who use AAC to set the bar far too low in terms of expectations for both participation and learning (Tetzchner & Martinsen, 2002, Vartun, 2018).

During the encounter in the hospital, especially with this doctor, Imanuel was challenged in other types of conversations than at school. He was required to speak about how he is doing, whether anything special has happened since the last consultation, and he was challenged to influence his own treatment. In order to participate in this type of conversation, he requires other types of words and expressions than he requires at school. In the interaction, the doctor contributed by expecting that Imanuel could contribute and gave him time and opportunity to respond.

One year after Imanuel first declined accompanying the doctor to a lecture with 120 medical students, he accepted the invitation. After the lecture, the doctor stated: "It is so impressive how he could express what he wanted at lightning speed!"

I have asked Imanuel why he changed his mind but have not received an answer. My theory is that Imanuel's self-image had improved considerably. He had gained an additional year of experience, and correspondingly positive feedback from his community. Consider how important it was that the doctor understood the value of this and asked again, and that Imanuel, this time, dared to accept the invitation. The doctor summarised why he wanted the medical students to meet Imanuel as follows:

The students learned a great deal from meeting Imanuel. They will never forget their encounter with him and have understood a lot. Where to set the bar, and the importance of communication, and the level of external pressure on being able to communicate. That it should not be assumed that everyone can communicate using speech. The importance of making oneself understood is enormous!

Arena: Barbershop

Imanuel's hair is thick and grows fast. Therefore, he is often at the barbershop, and they know each other quite well. They have a relationship that has developed over time. Barbers are known for being skilled at small talk. This is also the case with Imanuel's barber. He has not received training in the use of the means of communication, but he has received an explanation from Imanuel's mother regarding how Imanuel communicates and how he, as a communication partner, can best interact with Imanuel.

The barber enthusiastically explained how he draws upon his experiences from all conversation in new encounters, including those he has had with Imanuel. This is important to the barber: "Being interested in the person you are speaking with. I have to be interested in the person sitting in this chair! Interest and expectation are perhaps two sides of the same coin?" The barber applies the same ideas in relation to all his customers: "I like it when my customers leave shaking their heads thinking 'what an odd experience'!"

I experienced this when I spent time with Imanuel and his barber. Their interaction was characterised by reciprocal interest, creativity, and tomfoolery, at the same time as the respect between them was obvious. The barber also noted the following:

I have so much self-confidence that I'm not afraid of trying. Few things are risky. That is the way it is with everyone I encounter. And things have gone 'well' so many times that I build on it. I dare to challenge myself further.

What I also observed was that the conversations between Imanuel and his barber have a different type of content than at the school and the hospital. Here, Imanuel would again use the word 'chilling', even though I did not observe this. At the barbershop, it is all about small talk and simple topics such as Imanuel's cats or the barber's dogs. Or their tastes in music. Imanuel's barber likes opera but Imanuel does not. Small talk is challenging for individuals who use AAC (Beukelman & Mirenda, 2013, SAC, 2014). At the same time, we know that small talk is of great value for everyone in terms of establishing and maintaining social relationships. Therefore, perhaps it is the linguistic competence Imanuel gains from the barbershop that can take him the furthest in terms of coping with life and participation?

Summary

We learn language through experience. When a child learns to speak, this is a process that occurs through being seen, heard, and communicated with. When an individual requires AAC and is to communicate in an alternative manner, he or she is completely dependent on having access to communication partners who dare to see, listen and communicate with him or her. Experiences with communication and use of language are important. Imanuel has received a speech generating device, but these are merely his words. For Imanuel to 'become skilled' he needs to have someone with whom he can communicate.

It is you, me and us he needs to communicate with. Imanuel and his communication partners display this in practice. Imanuel is seen and heard. Through alternative communication, Imanuel has gained access to new ways of acquiring and displaying knowledge. Through being active in different language environments, he has gained experiences with different types of conversations. Because Imanuel encounters interested communication partners with positive attitudes, such as openness, time, patience and expectations, and skills including daring, waiting and listening, this allows both Imanuel and his communication partners to develop.

Thank you, Imanuel and the people in your life, for allowing me to tell this story!

Get to know Imanuel better

You can become better acquainted with Imanuel through Statped's e-learning here: https://statped.instructure.com/courses/3/pages/9-dot-1-avsluttende-tekst?module_item_id=877, or in this article from Statpedmagasinet https://www.statped.no/globalassets/statpedmagasinet/dokumenter/statpedmagasinet_2_2017_dobbeltsider.pdf pp. 48–50.

References

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA). (2020). Retrieved from https://www.asha.org/PRPSpecificTopic.aspx?folderid=8589942773&section=Key_Issues

Beukelman, D. & Mirenda, P. (2013). *Augmentative and alternative communication: Supporting children and adults with complex communication needs* (4th ed.). Baltimore, MD: Brookes.

Blackstone, S. & Hunt-Berg, M. (2003). *Social Networks-A communication inventory for Individuals with Complex Communication Needs and their Communication Partners: inventory booklet.* Monterey, CA: Augmentative Communication.

Vartun, M. (2018). – Lær barn som mangler talespråk sosiale ord! [Teach children without speech social words!] Retrieved from https://www.uv.uio.no/isp/forskning/aktuelt/aktuelle-saker/2018/barn-som-mangler-talesprak-sosiale-ord.html

Bottegaard Næss, K.-A. (2015). God kommunikasjon med ASK-brukere [Good communication with AAC users]. I K.-A. Bottegaard Næss & A.V. Karlsen (eds.), *God kommunikasjon med ASK-brukere [Good communication with AAC users]* (pp. 15–46). Bergen: Fagbokforlaget.

Davison-Hoult, A. & Ward, C. (2018). *An Introduction to AAC for People with Rett Syndrome and other Complex Communication Needs.* Rett syndrome UK.

De Bortoli, T., Arthur-Kelly, M., Mathisen, B., Foreman, P. & Balandin, S. (2010). Where are teachers' voices? A research agenda to enhance the communicative interactions of students with multiple and severe disabilities at school. *Disability and Rehabilitation*, *32*(13), 1059–1072. https://doi.org/10.3109/09638280903410730

Eberhart, B., Forsberg, J. Fäldt, A., Nilsson, L., Nolemo, M. & Thunberg, G. (2017). *Tidiga kommunikations- och språkinsatser till förskolebarn [Early communication and language initiatives for preschool children].* Föreningen Sveriges Habiliteringschefer.

Korsten, J. (2011). *AAC: Systemic Change for Individual Success*. Retrieved from http://www.janefarrall.com/aac-systemic-change-for-individual-success/

Light, J.C., &, McNaughton, D. (2014). Communicative competence for individuals who require augmentative and alternative communication: A new definition for a new era of communication? Augmentative and Alternative Communication, 30, 1–18.

Look Howery, K.L. (2015). *Literature Review: Conditions for Success in Augmentative and Alternative Communication Practice.* Speech-Language & Audiology Association of Canada (SAC).

Lund, S.K., & Light, J. (2007). Long-term outcomes for individuals who use augmentative and alternative communication: Part III-contributing factors. *Augmentative and Alternative Communication, 23*, 323–335.

The Norwegian Education Act. (1998). Act relating to Primary and Secondary Education and Training (LOV-1998-07-17-61). Retrieved from https://lovdata.no/dokument/NL/lov/1998-07-17-61

Rasmussen, T.D. (2015). ASK-brukeren som en interessant person og kommunikasjonspartner: et foreldreperspektiv [The AAC user as an interesting person and communication partner: a parent's perspective]. I K.-A. Bottegaard Næss & A.V. Karlsen (eds.), God kommunikasjon med ASK-brukere [Good communication with AAC users] (pp. 15–46). Bergen: Fagbokforlaget.

Norwegian Government. (2003). UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Retrieved from https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/upload/kilde/bfd/bro/2004/0004/ddd/pdfv/178931-fns_barnekonvensjon.pdf%C2%A0

Norwegian Government. (2008). *Språk bygger broer – Språkstimulering og språkopplæring for barn, unge og vaksne [Language builds bridges – Language stimulation and language training for children, adolescents and adults]* (White Paper 23 (2007–2008)) Retrieved from https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dokumenter/stmeld-nr-23-2007-2008-/id512449/?ch=4

Sennot, S.C., Light, J.C. & McNaugthon, D. (2016). AAC Modeling Intervention Research Review. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, *41*(2), 101–115.

Statped. (2020). Minspeak® - undervisningsmateriell [teaching material]. Retrieved from https://www.statped.no/laringsressurser/ask/minspeak---undervisningsmateriell/

Tetzchner S.V. og Martinsen, H. (2002). *Alternativ og supplerende kommunikasjon [Augmentative and alternative communication].* Oslo: Gyldendal Akademisk.

Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training (Udir). (2020). Alternativ og supplerende kommunikasjon [Augmentative and alternative communication]. ASK i skolen [AAC in schools]. Retrieved from www.udir.no/ask

Østvik, J. (2008). Språkmiljø – tanker om prinsipielle og praktiske sider [Language environments – thoughts on fundamental and practical aspects]. *Dialog [dialogue],* no. 2, pp. 18–22. Oslo: ISAAC Norge.

Statped
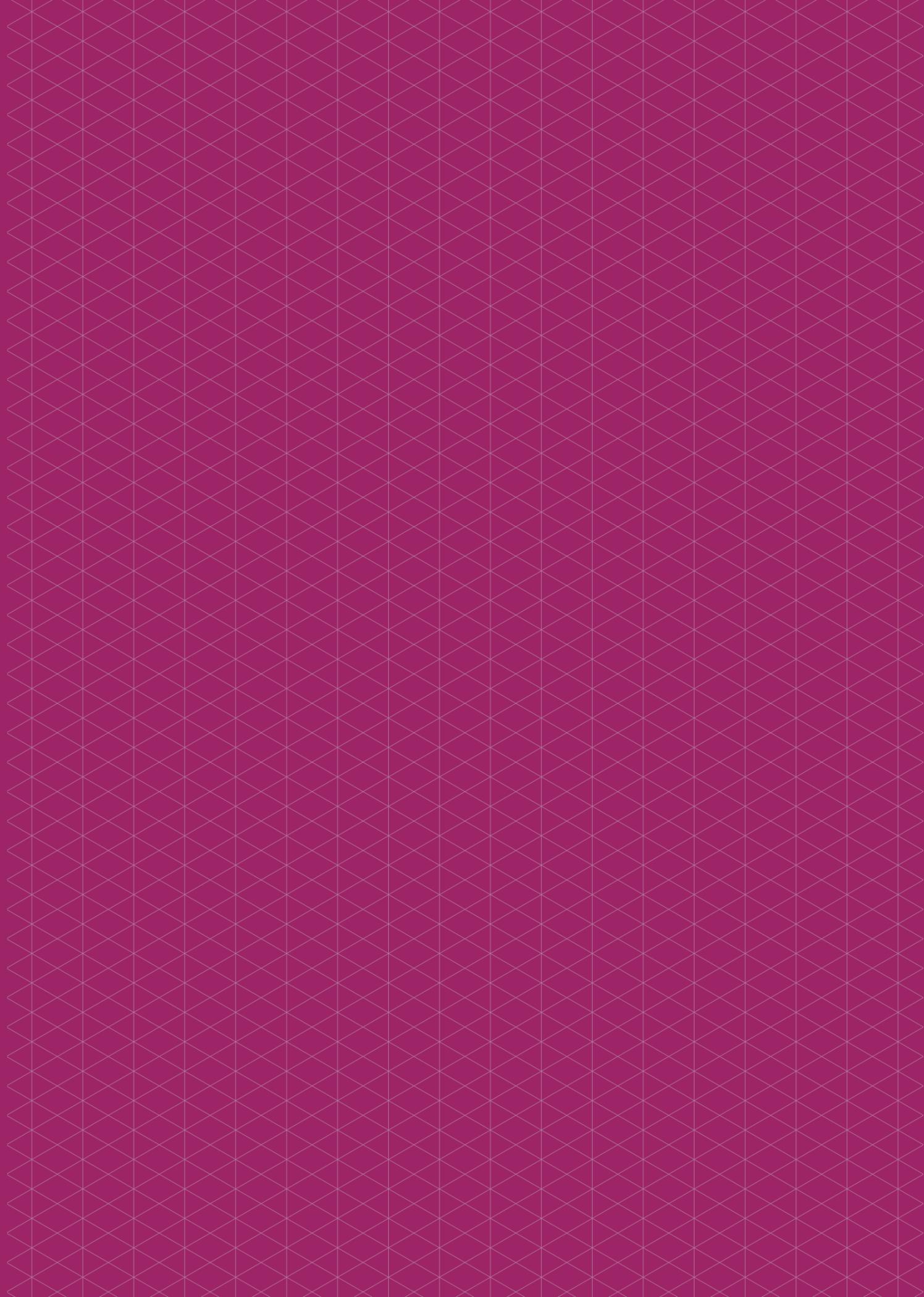
From a sociocultural perspective, children's learning and development occurs through participation in social communities — where community with peers is of particular importance. Children's participation in learning communities with other children, or facilitation of such participation, is a recurring theme in this anthology. The contributors to this anthology are advisers at Statped with experience from a variety of fields. They account for various approaches founded on experienced-based and research-based knowledge. What they all have in common is that they, through their adviser roles, have worked closely with the field of practice. This anthology shares the experiences from collaborations with kindergartens and schools in the efforts to develop a knowledge-based practice.

The anthology is primarily directed at students and professionals who work in kindergartens and schools but may also be of interest to others.