"Then we had to analyse a picture" - blind immigrant student in upper secondary school

Abstract

This chapter examines the question "What are the educational experiences of inclusion of young immigrant students with blindness?" through the thematic life story of a young blind student at upper secondary school. Inclusion is a key principle in the Norwegian school system. Nevertheless, there are still a large number of students who feel that they do not belong in the learning community. Approximately 25% of students at upper secondary school drop out, a figure the authorities consider to be too high. There are many reasons why adolescents end up not finishing upper secondary school. Inadequate adaptation can be one of several reasons.

The primary focus of this chapter is the immigrant student's own experience of support when learning difficulties were linked to visual impairments. In this study, we follow the thematic life history of a single student, in order to go in depth on this student's narrative. The perspective of the student is highlighted based on the blind student's self-reporting through an in-depth interview. The narrative has been analysed based on sociological theory, primarily Bauman's theory of the Stranger and togetherness.

The results show that inadequate adaptation and poor proportional support from the teacher lead to a poor perception of inclusion. It may seem that the sensory impairment is a more important reason for this than the fact that the student is an immigrant. The blind immigrant student is treated as a Stranger and is unable to assume a student role involving learning-promoting encounters with fellow students or teachers. The impetus for completing upper secondary school is to achieve a grade transcript rather than the motivation that could have been provided by a safe and positive learning environment.

Key words: Blindness, upper secondary school, immigrant student, the Stranger, togetherness

Introduction

In Norway, all children and adolescents have a right and duty to receive primary and lower secondary education (Section 2-1 of the Education Act, 1998). This right takes effect in the calendar year during which a child turns six years of age and lasts until the tenth school year is completed. Adolescents who have completed primary and lower secondary school have a right but not a duty to receive upper secondary education. This right applies to everyone,

regardless of primary and lower secondary school credits and pass marks. Nevertheless, approximately 20% of adolescents drop out without completing upper secondary education. Among immigrant students, nearly 40% end up dropping out (ssb.no, 2022). Individual, institutional and structural causes play in, especially for groups where the processes of marginalisation have started early, for example because of health problems (Sletten & Hyggen, 2013).

The overarching part of the curriculum (Directorate of Education, 2017) has regulatory status and stipulates that school shall constitute an inclusive environment that promotes health, well-being and learning for everyone and that school shall provide all students with equal opportunities for learning and development. This chapter will address the issue of inclusion in upper secondary school for a blind student who has recently immigrated to Norway. Blindness is defined as visual acuity worse than 3/60 (WHO). Visual impairment is a health challenge, but can also result in challenges in learning situations. Many students with visual impairments do not receive adequately facilitated school provision (Ipsos, 2016). This could include audiobooks and braille books being delivered late, widespread use of exemptions and inadequate adaptation in mathematics and physical education. Inadequate adaptation is also an important barrier preventing people with visual impairments from finding work (Andersen & Skarsholt, 2014). There is a need for greater knowledge of the school situation for students with visual impairments. In order to reduce institutional and structural causes, we need to listen to students with disabilities, as this provides valuable information on educational practices (Wickenden, 2018). This chapter constitutes a contribution in that context. The thematic aspect is the student's life story relating to their school day as a blind immigrant student in a Norwegian-speaking class consisting of sighted students. By taking an in-depth look at this individual case, we can shed some light on areas for improvement.

Immigrant students in Norway come from different education systems. Mukhopadhyay et al. (2021) describe how the school system in Botswana previously did not have any provision for students with disabilities, but established a school for learners with visual impairments in 1969. Today, learners in Botswana are integrated into mainstream schools, but there are still special schools and special units in mainstream schools. This is characteristic of the situation in many countries and also corresponds to the situation in Norway. Despite the ambition for school to be inclusive, many students undertake part or all of their learning activities outside of their regular class.

The governmental support system for special needs education in Norway (Statped) examined how adolescents with learning difficulties justify their choices of dropping out of or completing upper secondary education in the project "Dropout rates in upper secondary education for students with learning difficulties". The project examined several aspects associated with this and the issue will be elaborated on further in this chapter. What are the educational experiences of inclusion of young immigrant students with blindness?

Theory

In this section, I will take a closer look at theories associated with inclusion and interaction between people, with the pivotal point being Bauman's theories on the Stranger and togetherness. The study is based on factors that may be of importance to whether adolescents with learning difficulties complete upper secondary education or not.

Inclusion

Kuippis and Haustätter (2014) looked at various studies on inclusion and found that researchers have three different perspectives. Inclusion can be understood as someone outside becoming part of something that is already established, it can be understood as marginalised groups being included in a learning environment or it can be understood as being about the learning environment at school being designed in such a way that there is room for variation and differences. I belong to the latter group, as I argue that inclusion concerns everyone and that acceptance and adaptation for differences and diversity need to be front of mind for all stakeholders in the school system (Olsen, 2013). There is no exact definition of inclusion, but there seems to be consensus that inclusion relates to presence, participation and benefit for all and that inclusion is understood as a continuous process (Olsen, 2021).

Upper secondary school and inclusion

There are many indications that we have not fully succeeded at this form of inclusion in Norway. For example, the proportion of adolescents not in education or employment increased until 2017 (OECD, 2022) and dropping out of school is said to be the primary risk factor for remaining out of work. The large proportion of students that drop out constitutes a major societal problem (Lillejord et al., 2015). Adolescents who do not wish to continue their education after primary and lower secondary school often find it difficult to identify any real options.

Challenges associated with the completion of upper secondary school must be understood both from a system and student perspective (Tangen, 2019). The system perspective describes and explains the lack of completion as *dropouts* based on consequences for society at various levels, while the student perspective explains the same phenomenon as *interruption of studies.* That is, an active and natural action logically motivated based on the student's life situation. The student perspective can be divided into both school-related and non-school-related causes for failure to complete upper secondary education (NOU 2018: 15). School-related causes include significant academic challenges, unfulfilled expectations, low motivation and unhappiness. Unhappiness encompasses loneliness, bullying and poor relationships with teachers. Non-school-related causes encompass living condition challenges, psychosocial challenges, health challenges, home situation and language challenges.

Visual impairments and inclusion

One Norwegian study based on individual interviews with five students with visual impairments (Jacobsen et al., 2021) highlights several unfortunate aspects of the provision for this student group. Students talked about a lack of adaptation and called for greater expertise relating to students with visual impairments among teachers. Being a professional teacher involves having detailed knowledge relating to the learning and development of students. Hovdenak (2016) references Aristotle's three intellectual virtues: episteme, techne and phronesis. Episteme is the theories or knowledge the teacher brings to their practice, techne is the teacher's skills, while phronesis refers to practical wisdom. Teachers must continually balance these three virtues. When dealing with students with various learning difficulties, the teacher will face daily situations that require interpretation and have no ultimate answers and the teacher must therefore make decisions based on practical wisdom. The value and effect of the teacher's decisions depend on the teacher's previous experiences, but also require the teacher to link theory and academic knowledge to their actions and to learn from them. Phronesis therefore interacts closely with both techne and episteme.

A study has been conducted on the psychosocial condition of children and adolescents with visual impairments (Ipsos, 2016). The study revealed that many blind and visually impaired students experience social barriers during the school day. For example being alone during breaks, not participating on an equal footing to other students during breaks and activities, as well as experiencing fellow students simply walking away. Practical challenges such as

stumbling over things that are in the way and being unable to find their things because they have been moved are also described.

Several reports submitted to the Norwegian Parliament in recent years have problematised the fact that children and adolescents with various disabilities have lower learning outcomes than their potential for learning indicates (Report no. 19 (2015-2016) to the Norwegian Parliament and Report no. 21 (2016-2017) to the Norwegian Parliament). Ytterhus and Tøssebro (2006) claim that institutions establish the conditions for large aspects of children and adolescents' lives. This means that the school, as an institution, sets a form of standard for children and adolescents and greatly contributes to shaping their lives. According to Ytterhus and Tøssebro, children and adolescents have both a need for and desire to participate together with their peers. School, education and working life constitute key aspects of the identity and self-image of an individual. Ensuring that children and adolescents have positive experiences of learning and education must therefore be considered an important socioeconomic investment that increases the likelihood of positive participation in society and working life in adulthood. A report was published a few years ago concerning career opportunities for people with visual impairments (Andersen and Skarholt, 2014). The physical environment was listed as one of the four greatest challenges to people with visual impairments in finding work. Barriers in this category include large communal spaces that prevent accessibility and social interaction, a lack of physical adaptation and failure to enlarge things for those who are visually impaired. Employers and colleagues constitute another main category. In this context, the report looks at barriers such as lack of knowledge and understanding on the part of those surrounding the person with visual impairment, colleagues appearing insecure, sceptical and having negative attitudes and limited willingness to ensure adaptation. These factors can most likely also be transferrable as relevant to school and educational settings too.

The Stranger

Two concepts retrieved from a sociological perspective by Bauman: togetherness and the Stranger are key to the analysis of the data. Bauman (2006) describes the Stranger as the category you are left with when all other people fit into your mental schema. The Stranger is someone that cannot naturally be aligned in a classification system (Olsen, 2011). Bauman (2006) provides examples of several groups of the Stranger: the poor, unemployed, disabled and immigrants. According to Bauman, modern society has three ways in which to deal with strangeness. The Stranger can be excluded by being refused access or they can be isolated by being given their own spaces to stay in. Both of these reactions prevent or impede inclusion.

The third variant would be to assign the role of guest to the Stranger. The Stranger is allowed to be present but must be grateful for their privilege. Olsen (2013) describes this guest status as something many students with disabilities experience in school and society in general. Bauman (2006) claims there are no actual encounters between strangers, only some forms of togetherness.

Togetherness

Bauman (1995) lists six different types of togetherness but stresses that the list is not exhaustive and that the different types cannot be ranked. They deal with different areas of togetherness. Three of the six are mobile togetherness (such as passers-by on the street), stationary togetherness (for example waiting rooms, trains, planes) and manifest togetherness (an external event such as a football match of disco). I have chosen to ignore these three. Instead, I will take a closer look at the other three: tempered togetherness, postulated togetherness and meta togetherness. These have been chosen because they include the possibility of developing into an encounter and constitute togetherness that can be input in data.

Tempered togetherness refers to gatherings where the purpose of the gathering determines the form it takes. The implicated individuals gather to do something. Students gather to attend teaching, eat lunch and so on. The class can therefore constitute a venue for tempered togetherness, while having lunch in the canteen can be another. Each venue in which tempered togetherness takes place has standards in place for togetherness, a set of rules the individuals adhere to. The standards and the consequences of violating such standards constitute boundaries that can make encounters difficult. However, the standards also constitute boundaries that can border on the concept of the Stranger and can be completely different for students with disabilities to other students. The standards are generally unspoken and are visualised through the actions and reactions of individuals.

Postulated togetherness is based on an expectation of something shared, such as nationality, race, profession or similar. It relates to the group you identify with, the group you feel a sense of belonging to. Here, the implicated individuals meet because they assume that they will find something in common with other participants. For a student, postulated togetherness can be understood as being with other students in the class. Bauman (1995:65) writes that this type of togetherness seduces through a promise of intimate encounters and stimulates a form of homesickness, a desire to belong. For students with disabilities, postulated togetherness can

also relate to others with disabilities, such as wheelchair users, depending on the group the student identifies with.

Meta togetherness refers to the stage of encounters. The implicated individuals meet in or at something. In meta togetherness, every participant has a defined space, such as on a stage. According to Bauman (1995), this allows for encounters at a reduced cost and the opportunity to try and fail during the encounter. As mentioned, the class can constitute a venue for tempered togetherness, but the classroom is also a stage on which students and teachers assume roles. The role of student, but also the role of the clever student or class clown. None of these roles have any guarantee of an encounter. There are several stages in the school environment, several venues for meta togetherness and possibilities of an encounter.

The encounter

According to Buber (2007), the encounter is an I-You, not an I-It. The encounter is therefore a betweenness, in which both parties are subject to one another, nothing can intervene in the I-You relationship. At the same time that Buber notes that an encounter with a You and not an It involves opening yourself completely to the Other, he also includes the interaction between. My You – my significant Other, the person I encounter with my entire being – affects me (Levinas, 1998). In the same way, I can work on my You. This is claimed to constitute the reciprocity of the relationship in the encounter (Buber, 2007). Furthermore, Buber argues that an encounter cannot be forced, only made visible.

Bauman (1995) classifies three different types of encounter. The simplest, the least risky, is *being-aside.* This is a brief and fleeting moment of a person seeing the Other. Then there is *being-with,* in which individuals find one another through shared interests. They meet without really having met, You becomes subject to our attention for a little while. As Bauman puts it: "*Being-with is an encounter between incomplete beings, of flawed selves.*" (1995:68). This means that in the encounter, participants will accentuate and hide depending on the topic of the encounter. The third is *being-for.* In this encounter, I has a responsibility for the Other. The self steps in to protect and defend the uniqueness of the Other. This might be the encounter that is closest to Buber's I-You. Being-for becomes an encounter for interactions, interactions with one another. This latter encounter cannot be found in any other of the forms of togetherness. Here, togetherness and encounter become completely separate.

Longva (2019) writes about the teacher's relational courage in encounters with students. She highlights the importance of teachers encountering students with respect and recognition and

daring to enter into relationships, including those that appear difficult. This is also close to Buber's I-You and Bauman's Being-for. Relational courage provides the courage to accept the vulnerability of the Other and the courage to assume responsibility for the Other.

Method

The project that forms the basis for this chapter is a sub-analysis performed as part of a study conducted by the governmental support system for special needs education in Norway (Statped). The topic of the study is dropout rates in upper secondary education for students with learning difficulties. I will take an in-depth look at the story of a young immigrant student with blindness and will present the thematic life history (Numan, 2006) associated with educational experiences.

A link to a digital questionnaire was issued via the Norwegian Association of the Blind and Partially Sighted's Youth Group. Adolescents born during the 1992-2002 period were encouraged to respond and we received a total of 67 responses. The purpose of the questionnaire was to examine the conditions for adolescents with learning difficulties in connection with the completion of upper secondary education. The sample selection for supplementary interviews was obtained by respondents checking a box in the questionnaire and providing their contact details. This is considered voluntary, informed consent. In the analysis of quantitative data, the responses from each participant have been analysed. Based on this work, the interview guide was designed as a semi-structured research interview (Dalen, 2011, p. 26). The purpose of the interviews has been to understand the informants' experiences and perceptions of upper secondary education. The interview guide was based on topics such as motivation, coping, adaptation, support and well-being. The interviews took 30-45 minutes and were subsequently transcribed.

This chapter is based on data from only one interview and comprises a detailed description of an individual and therefore cannot be generalised to apply to other students with visual impairments. Nevertheless, it is possible to make an analytical generalisation by establishing a pattern that others in similar situations can recognise. A thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) has been used. This means that the transcript has been read several times in order to identify patterns and key statements. These have been sorted into different topics, with illustrative quotations from the informant. Finally, the topics have been sorted into general topics that form the basis for the structure used in the results element. The analysis revolved around Bauman's theories of the Stranger and togetherness.

There are few blind immigrant students in Norway. The country and continent the informant originates from will therefore not be stated. Nor will I state which part of Norway the informant lives in now. This is to protect the informant's privacy. Gender has also been omitted and the informant is addressed using the gender-neutral name Kim. The study has been assessed by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data.

Results

In this section, I will present the informant's background in order to provide the context for understanding the case (Yin, 2014). The results will subsequently be presented based on the topics derived from the thematic analysis. 1) motivation and well-being, 2) adaptations and 3) a safe and positive school environment.

Context description

Kim arrived in Norway with their family around five years before the interview took place. Kim is completely blind and attended a school for the blind in their home country, where they completed upper secondary education. After arriving in Norway, Kim started a combination class in order to learn enough Norwegian to cope in a mainstream class. Kim had to repeat some elements of upper secondary education. According to Kim, this was because the Norwegian education system is at a higher level than the education system in their home country.

Kim is older than their fellow students, they are married and live together with their spouse in an apartment. At the time of the interview, Kim had completed Norwegian courses, attended a combination class and was attending their second and final year at a Norwegian upper secondary school.

During their first year, Kim attended school together with third-year students, a period Kim describes as positive both from an academic and social perspective. During their second year, Kim was attending school together with first-year upper secondary school students. Kim describes this year as boring and does not feel that they are included in the learning environment. Kim notes that the issue is not linked to language, but a lack of adaptation. The organisational adaptation consists of an assistant for around eight hours per week to take notes and two hours of one-on-one teaching per week with the teacher. There is no permanent assistant available for the lessons in question. This year, Kim is completing the final two subjects they are missing to get their university and college admission certification. Kim intends to start university next autumn.

Motivation and well-being

There are two breaks in Kim's story. The first is between the school for the blind in Kim's home country and upper secondary school in Norway. At the school for the blind, motivation was connected to meeting their friends. Kim describes the academic level as low, that there are few materials and aids available and that there is poor provision for the blind. Nevertheless, Kim said that they had completed upper secondary school before arriving in Norway and was now facing a situation where they had to repeat their education. Kim attempted to see the positive side of this: "It has been a good experience for me to try both, even though I find it a bit boring to attend upper secondary school again."

There are several reasons why Kim perceives upper secondary school as boring and this is where the next break in Kim's life story appears, between the two years at upper secondary school in Norway. The age difference is a key element that Kim returns to several times. The age difference was smaller in the first year. Kim attended together with adolescents who had already completed two years of upper secondary education. In the second year, Kim attended together with first-year students. Kim experienced the environment as worse, with a lot of nonsense taking place during lessons. What motivated Kim to continue despite the desire to drop out was their desire to study at university. In order to achieve admission, Kim needed a grade transcript. Kim said "I only attend school to complete my plan".

Another key reason for low motivation was the lack of adaptation, especially during the second year. Kim spoke about paper-based group work, image analyses, paper assignments with e.g. a face or a sun to write the answer in. This could not be done using braille displays on a PC. Kim became reliant on the assistant and explained that fellow students would only interact with the assistant during such group work. Family and friends were mentioned as factors that helped motivate Kim to attend school. They gave Kim the support they needed to continue.

Adaptation

Kim highlighted several aspects associated with adaptation and also provided examples of a lack of adaptation. Technical adaptations at school were good, including PCs and braille displays, as well as audiobooks. The problem was that a lot of the coursework, especially during the second year, was paper-based and Kim therefore did not have access to it. Audiobooks were not always identical to the textbooks, either because they were a different edition or a different book.

Kim also raised the importance of facilitating effective use of hearing. One example of this is class discussions, in which the teacher walks around the class and various students provide input.

> Blind people cannot always concentrate in situations like these, as everyone in the class is talking (...) we use our hearing more so when many people talk and the group is large, we struggle to hear so well.

Kim believes that their grades were lower than they should have been because they were unable to catch everything. The ability to hear would also affect communication during group work: "Sometimes I feel that I am talking about something the others have already discussed without me hearing." Kim felt that the ideal group size was three pupils so that the blind person can concentrate, keep an overview of who is talking and is able to hear what they say. At the same time, Kim also noted the importance of the teacher when it comes to class and group sizes: "I do not think it matters too much how big the class is as long as the teacher is good at ensuring adaptation and ensures that everyone concentrates when the teacher speaks."

Kim called for creative teachers who have sought good advice for teaching when blind students are part of a mainstream class. Kim believes that this relates to the personal traits of the teacher rather than the school as a whole. This perception may originate from the break between the two school years, with Kim perceiving there to be better adaptation during the first year both academically and socially than was the case during the final year.

With regard to social interaction, Kim said "I feel like an outsider". School is no longer a place to meet friends. Kim spoke of breaks spent on Facetime with friends they had made through the Association of the Blind and Partially Sighted. This was something they found better during the previous school year, which Kim put into words as follows: "I felt that I was a part of the class and everyone knew that I had a lot of knowledge." This constitutes some of the core of Kim's story, that sensory impairment has no impact on knowledge levels. Kim raised the need to be seen as a student with knowledge several times.

Safe and positive school environment

Students are entitled to a safe and positive school environment (Education Act, 1998, Chapter 9A). Kim experienced school to be safe. It was easy to navigate and teachers would always greet them.

In general, Kim considered the school environment to be positive and justified this as follows: "Perhaps because I feel that there are many disabled people there. I don't feel as strange at school." Despite the experience, Kim was the only disabled student in their class.

Kim was not as positive when it came to the class environment. Kim described the class environment as poor. Kim did not know the names of everyone in their class. "Getting to know each other" games that took place at the start of the school year were not adapted for blind students. They would involve things like kahoot or drawing on the blackboard for students to guess. Kim withdrew from classroom discussions during breaks:

> I don't like it when everyone in the class sits together to talk or do stuff, because I don't have all that many friends there (...) last year I felt included, there were lots of people trying to talk to me and I participated in activities.

Kim also raised the location within the room as an example of the level of safety they felt in the learning space: "I like sitting at the front because I don't like coming in and getting it wrong when trying to find my place." Kim stressed that this was not about mobility but inclusion. The middle of the room can work well, as long as there is a sense of safety and generosity when it comes to mistakes. This year, the fear of making mistakes is greater: "I don't feel that I know anyone in the classroom". Kim believes that friendship is more important to younger students and can be crucial to whether or not they complete upper secondary school. With regard to themselves, Kim said: "I am an adult and it's not something I think too much about." Kim had heard that there were other adult students at school, but he had not met them, they did not get in touch.

During their story, Kim was critical of the teachers and believes that they are responsible for the wellbeing of students. Kim believes that teachers need to receive training and that they should provide other students with tips on how to communicate with blind fellow students. At the same time, this needs to be balanced to avoid creating stigma. Kim spoke of teachers that justified instructions by saying "we have blind people in this class", which made Kim feel uncomfortable. Kim also claimed that statements like those create barriers to contact: "Students end up having to think about it before they make contact". Kim was also critical of the guidance provided by support systems such as Statped and believes that they should talk more about the classroom environment and alternative solutions for teaching when there are blind students. Together with the criticism, Kim also defended the teachers and believes that it is difficult for teachers when they are unable to establish eye contact with students and students are unable to see facial expressions and body language. Kim said that blind students

need to prove that they know things and that they find that there is a lower expectation of knowledge.

Kim believes that only simple steps are needed to ensure good adaptation for blind students. In Kim's own words: "I understand adaptation to mean me being given the same opportunities as others in the class". This could include additional time during examinations, since braille takes longer, or an assistant making notes from the blackboard so that the blind student can concentrate on listening. Such measures can compensate for the student's difficulties. In addition to compensatory measures, Kim also stressed the importance of teachers talking to the student, thereby creating trust.

At the time of the interview, the greatest uncertainty for Kim was the idea of transitioning to university. In Kim's own words:

> When I call the university they say "we don't know" and when I ask school, they say that they don't know. This leads to students becoming very insecure and stressed.

Kim called for procedures for the transition to higher education. Despite repeated enquiries to the university, no answers were available in relation to the organisation of e.g. secretarial assistance, transport and mobility training. According to Kim, this was something several of their blind friends had also experienced.

Discussion

I introduced the question "What are the educational experiences of inclusion of young immigrant students with blindness?" and have examined the question through the thematic life story of a young blind student at upper secondary school. In this section, I will take a closer look at the presented results and discuss them in light of Bauman's sociological theories in particular. The discussion is therefore systematised based on three of Bauman's togetherness types: tempered, postulated and meta togetherness. All these include the possibility of an encounter, which in turn will form the basis for the student's perception of inclusion at school and in the learning environment. In general, the material shows that it is primarily sensory impairments that appear to pose an obstacle for encounters, not language or cultural differences. This is based on Kim's point of view, interviews with teachers or fellow students might have resulted in a different picture being painted.

Mainstream class as a tempered togetherness

A school class operates with standards relating to togetherness, standards that the various individuals are consciously or unconsciously aware of. Standards may differ between different classes and the quality of the learning environment will largely control both the standards that apply and the consequences of violating such standards. People who are perceived as strangers in the school class find it difficult to identify standards and navigate within the applicable set of standards.

The mainstream classroom is a tempered togetherness, in which the implicated individuals meet by virtue of being students of roughly the same age, in the same field of study and the same subject. The classroom becomes the venue for togetherness but break areas, the canteen and the route to and from school can also constitute such venues. When one of the students in the group deviates with regard to age, number of subjects and school transport, as well as not participating in activities during breaks, the standards are broken and mark a boundary to something that can be perceived as alien. The fact that the student is blind further reinforces this strangeness, while being blind is precisely what leads to the other standard violations.

Kim's story indicates that the teacher considered Kim to be a guest in the class, a guest that had to be considered. At the same time, the needs of the guest were not fully understood and the role of guest was therefore further reinforced. Fellow students did not get any help to define roles and standard rules that could include Kim in the class community.

Friendship in the postulated togetherness

Bauman stresses that the postulated togetherness is based on an expectation of something shared, such as a profession or leisure activity. Holding the role of a student in a class contributes to the expectation of a community and the concept of togetherness is based on this student community.

This expectation of community becomes problematic when learning activities lead to a student being excluded from the community. These barriers to participation in a community could be organisational, cultural, academic or social, but could also include expectations and attitudes towards this group of strangers that are different compared to the attitudes faced by "natives". Kim gave examples of shortcomings within all of these categories, with a lack of knowledge about blind people seeming to be the decisive factor for both teachers and fellow students.

Kim seemed to be looking for foothold among their fellow students, while at the same time seeming as though they were just looking forward to finishing so that they could continue to

the next phase of their life. This might have disrupted the framework and boundaries of the togetherness.

Kim did not perceive the class as a venue for encounters and barely as a venue for togetherness. Instead, Kim had postulated togetherness with friends on Facebook. Social media has a lower threshold than a physical encounter, particularly for a blind person. Communication is paperless, based on verbal or written conversations, usually one-on-one or as part of a chat group, and is not always synchronous in terms of time. In such togetherness, participants encounter one another through shared disability. Kim is able to identify with other blind people and finds a community and some forms of encounters there. In this way, postulated togetherness constitutes a desire to belong, but the digital media can become a hindrance to physical togetherness if the student prefers digital friends over fellow students, thereby withdrawing from togetherness.

The longing for meta togetherness

Bauman (1995) describes meta togetherness as the stage of encounters. In Kim's life story, the stage is the classroom, where individuals gather for teaching. Meta togetherness encourages each participant to have assume a defined role, like actors on a stage. This is a role that can be difficult to fulfil as a student and a blind immigrant, as the rules of the game become unclear. Neither the teacher nor the fellow students appeared to know how to perform on stage with an actor taking on a role that was unknown to them.

It would seem that the theory of the Stranger is two-fold. On the one hand, there are elements of Kim's story which indicate that Kim is perceived as a stranger by their teachers and fellow students. The teacher's reminder to students to remember that they have a blind student in their class indicates that Kim has been assigned the role of a guest. On the other hand, Kim also seems to consider their fellow students and teachers to be strangers. Kim has an expectation regarding adaptation that goes beyond what the teacher does, but also conveys an expectation of different behaviour from fellow students. In this sense, it is possible to interpret Kim's story as no-one playing the roles expected by the other party. This makes encounters on the stage challenging.

Consequences of a lack of encounters

Being blind contributes to lasting disparity between the assumptions of the individual and the expectations the individual encounters. Andersen and Skarsholt (2014) emphasise visual impairment as a central barrier to individuals finding work. This finding from Andersen and

Skarsholt's study can likely be transferred to school students. Adolescents in Norway are entitled to upper secondary school education, but this is a right they can elect not to exercise or even be pushed away from. This becomes especially serious when we know that the gap between assumptions and expectations could be reduced through thoughtful adaptation of the learning environment. This is clearly demonstrated by Kim's story, based on the fact that first school year was significantly different to the next.

Olsen (2013) writes about the importance of adaptation for differences and diversity in order to achieve an inclusive learning environment. The teacher must demonstrate acceptance and respect for individual variations, thereby being a positive role model that other students can mirror (Amarasinghe et al., 2021). Kim calls for teachers with expertise in teaching blind students, a finding that Jacobsen et al. (2021) also highlight in their study of five students with visual impairment. Based on an analysis of Kim's story and similar student stories (see e.g. Jacobsen et al., 2021), it would seem correct to claim that, as well as knowledge of sensory loss, teachers also require knowledge of classification and exclusion processes in groups of people (Bauman, 2006; Olsen, 2011). In this sense, students are calling for phronesis, a practical wisdom from teachers based on a combination of knowledge and skills.

Inadequate adaptation at school can be understood as system failure (cf. Tangen, 2019) and can therefore create a risk of dropouts. This is further amplified through the student perspective, since inadequate adaptation can contribute towards unhappiness and loneliness, leading students to interrupt their education. Kim felt that age plays a part in this and that older students more so than younger students are able to see the value of completing their education despite unhappiness and a lack of friends. Ytterhus and Tøssebro (2006) have observed a number of children and adolescents for a period of several years. They claim that children and adolescents have both a need for and desire to participate in a community. It is therefore important to ensure that encounters between students are facilitated, encounters that cut across cultures, disabilities and age. This requires knowledge on the part of teachers, both pedagogical and sociological knowledge, but it also requires work to create an expectation of an encounter on the part of both the student at risk of becoming a stranger and for those referred to as natives by Bauman (2006). The likelihood is that there are many people who feel like strangers on the classroom stage.

In their story, Kim expressed frustration at being unable to demonstrate their skills and a fear that this would negatively affect grades. This happened either because teaching activities required visual acuity or because fellow students chose not to address Kim. It is not

uncommon for students with disabilities to face lower learning expectations than their learning potential would indicate (Report no. 21 (2016-2017) to the Norwegian Parliament). This is an issue we should focus on both in relation to educational policy and in the field of practice. Facilitating mastery based on individual abilities and assumptions is the responsibility of the school, a responsibility that requires school employees to have insight into the learning potential of students in order to make the right choices – demonstrating practical wisdom.

Changing the learning environment so that students with disabilities can feel more included may require the relational courage referenced by Longva (2019). Establishing positive relationships with blind students can be difficult. As noted by Kim, there is no eye contact and blind students are unable to interpret semiotic signs from the teacher or fellow students. In such contexts, it will therefore be important to enter into dialogue with the blind student. As noted by Jacobsen et al. (2021), students with visual impairments have a number of thoughts on how their education could have been better adapted for them. It is crucial that teachers are curious about the student's input and allow for participation.

All students need to feel that they are important to other people. Buber (2007) notes the importance of considering others to be a subject, opening up to others so that an interaction takes place between them. This opens up the possibility of togetherness becoming something more than fleeting togetherness based on a common mission. It opens up the possibility of the being-for encounter (Bauman, 1995), in which the parties take responsibility for the well-being of one another and have a desire to protect and defend the uniqueness of the other. This makes it possible to find a positive learning community, even as a blind student among sighted people.

Conclusion

This chapter presents data from an educational experience of inclusion. The narrative is affected by the fact that the student who speaks about their experiences is blind. Bauman (1991) writes that a stranger is someone who is facing accusation (Bauman, 1991). Bauman also states that immigrants and people with disabilities are people at risk of being perceived as strangers. A young, first-generation immigrant with sensory impairment therefore falls within this risk zone. This adolescent is seen as, or accused in Baumans terminology, consciously or unconsciously, of being inadequate, of having needs that are hard to meet, of being different. At the same time, the adolescent wants to belong, they want to encounter their fellow students

in a being-with encounter. Despite age differences, cultural differences and a different living situation to their fellow students, the expectation of an encounter remains as a longing.

A key question is whether the school employees are sufficiently aware of such sociological mechanisms. The offer for this pupil with special educational needs is organized with time with an assistant and time alone with the teacher. The importance of good interaction with fellow pupils does not seem to have been considered. In this sense, they have seemingly arranged for the student to cope. It is difficult for a student to understand how this is quality-assured, but the student will know whether they receive a quality education.

The history of the young informant is not unique and cannot be explained by visual impairment alone. We need to gain a greater understanding of the exclusion processes that take place in society in general and schools in particular. Only then can we look past the question of visual function and immigration and accommodate encounters between the teacher and student and between students.

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