

## BOOK REVIEW

Kommunikative relationer (2013) by Anne Varran Nafstad and Inger Bøgh Rodbroe. bu Statped, Norway and The National Board for Social Services, Denmark. Translation: Communicative Relations, Interventions that create communication with persons with congenital deafblindness (2015) by Kirsten C. Schou.

*Reviewed by Marlene Daelman*

This 'Communicative Relations' is an in-depth and convincing book that offers a well thought out content.

The book is a thoroughly revised and supplemented version of the approach presented in the authors's first book. The authors refer to the co-creative communication approach which was also informing their first book (Co-creating Communication, 1999, 73 pp) as "by now an acknowledged approach to communication intervention practices in the deafblind field, ..., emphasizing the role of the person with congenital deafblindness as an active and creative participant in his own communicative development" and "foregrounding the role of sighted and hearing others as co-creative partners" (p 11). This is an approach that is still in the process of developing and that 'Communicative Relations' aims to develop further.

The book succeeds in developing a diversity oriented perspective on complex communication. The point of departure is the problem of asymmetry and low readability, creating awareness of the risk that the voice of the person with CDB is unheard/unseen, and thus at risk of being overseen or overspoken by the partner with the more signed and/or spoken resources. As the person with deafblindness develops communicative competence, new challenges regarding readability will arise. Studying this book will help partners cope with these challenges in a positive way.

Communicative Relations is strongly influenced by Dialogical Theory. This theory understands the problem in communicating as relational, and never as an individual's problem. Strategies based on Dialogical Theory offer the best guarantee for giving a voice to the person with congenital deafblindness. And for revealing his subjectivity by following his attention-direction and sharing his focus and his personal way of bringing in meaning to the dialogue. Many case studies, referred to in the book, exemplify the relevance of this theory, with their focus on communicative agency and not on communicative skills.

Additional theories allow to understand the differentness of the deafblind way of being in the world as a variation and not as a mere limitation. The authors strongly believe that "deafblindness does not change the developmental micro-processes that are basic to communicative relations", and therefore one of their very specific intentions is to "search for those theories that afford a detailed understanding of the characteristics of those micro-processes ... , of how those processes and relations develop and of what promotes development" (P. 19). All this is given so much attention because the authors also believe that this theoretical grounding will support partners in using bodily/tactile ways for their planned interventions.

The conceptual framework (chapter 3, pp. 51-88) is intended to build up "the knowledge of the professionals who support the partners of the deafblind person" with supervision activities. Communicative Relations is intended for readers who are

professionally concerned with communication. The many concepts make it possible to analyse and describe the transactional route of embodied signs, originated in a shared dyadic interaction, expressed by spontaneous gestures and co-constructed into shareable language by the collaborative engagement of two partners.

Very impressive for me as professional reader is the elaboration of the possible perspectives of the partner role, “meaning the different perspectives a partner can adopt when she relates to a deafblind person in face-to-face situations” (p. 53). The authors have chosen to use the terminology I-, YOU- and IT- perspective, clarifying how the partner perceives her own perspective to the deafblind person. The relevance of this is important, because sliding away from the YOU-perspective, by which the partner is not viewing the deafblind person as an other-directed YOU anymore, is often caused by “feelings of uncertainty, entering the strange landscape in which the deafblind person lives”(p. 61). Finally attention is given to the consequences for the further development of the person with congenital deafblindness, depending on how these perspectives are played out in the communicative relation (p. 54).

Professionals who support the partners of the deafblind person also dispose of two analytical tools (chapter 4, p. 89-182). The Diamond Model (p. 89) explains how environmental relations, ways in which a person relates to the world, are connected in development and intervention. And it shows how basically important the role is of the partner’s TRUST in the Other. The Cue model (p. 101) is primarily intended to help reduce the problem of readability and helps to emphasize on stabilizing the communicative relations, a prerequisite for reaching the Zone of Proximal Development.

Here the reader of *Co-creating Communication* will feel at home, familiar with the recycled materials. But at the same time it will become clear how the content of the authors’s first book, still standing after 17 years, has been expanded upon by more recent theoretical grounding and by new encounters with persons with congenital deafblindness and their communication partners.

The book *Communicative Relations* is especially meant for staff development activities (chapter 5, pp. 187-203). It is not hard, but demanding to read. It is a kind of handbook that needs to be studied systematically, discussed and used in an educational situation for staff or students. As a consequence of many partners around each person with congenital deafblindness **focus groups** are suggested as a model for sessions with video analysis (pp. 191-193). On the basis of “collaboratively created shared knowledge”, where every participant can add his own understanding to that of the authors, the focus group can suggest the partner how to act further with the deafblind person.

This magistral book is refreshing and absorbing from the first contact.

Practitioners already involved in co-creative communicative practices with persons with congenital deafblindness will experience reading ‘*Communicative Relations*’ not only as an inspiring key work. They will also feel invited to discuss the content with a more analytical gaze and deeper insight.

For those who are new in the field ‘*Communicative Relations*’ not only sheds light on the way to go. The book conceptualises and models basic communication processes, not only describing, but also explaining them, highlighting the process rather than the result. It also explains how this practice has developed in the past decades, being grounded on theory as well as empirically proving theoretical principles. In this way studying and practicing communication development for persons with CDB is touching the root of humanity.

Clear illustrations are visualising the theoretical concepts and frames. Compared to the first book these illustrations have also been updated both on the basis of more recent theoretical insights and by conceptualisations that refer to the own voice of people with congenital deafblindness. The book is illustrated with pictures from video clips, presented as film strips. It also contains true examples without images, described in separate grey

'example boxes' that are clear illustrations of the content. In this way making the group of people with congenital deafblindness visible also to people without direct access to video-material or without personal practice in the field.

And if the book is relevant for families and other disability fields ?

A native English speaking mother finds the book very good. Written in clear English, she says, though simple and easy to understand. With sentences that are not too long. The examples exactly describe what happens in daily life and what she experiences in interacting with her child.

A former practitioner and sign language interpreter finds the book appealing in form, content and illustrations. She was enjoying the methodical elaboration of the content, connecting all steps in a clear way, as e.g. in 'Following one another's attention in communication' (pp. 78-83). And also the striking conceptual cohesion between separate paragraphs is very tempting for reading without interruption. To her this is a book to read with much attention.

Communicative Relations should be read because of its rich content to up to date themes and concepts. And because it is a beacon for anyone heading off together with a person with congenital deafblindness.

Communicative Relations: not only '*nice to read*', but also '*need to read*'

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