Speech generating devices – the experience and meaning ascribed to these devices

Speech generating devices are a type of essential augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) for those with speech limitations. While the benefits of these devices are implied, understanding the complexity of living with and using these devices is also required. This metasynthesis integrates the emerging qualitative literature exploring the experiences and the meanings of these devices by people with complex communication needs and their closest communication partners. A systematic review of the literature identified 21 original articles suitable for analysis using thematic synthesis (Thomas and Harden 2008). A lengthy process of analysis lasted several months and involved a research team of four. Thirteen descriptive sub-themes were identified and assembled into overarching, analytical main themes (a) It’s an Inefficient Voice, (b) It’s Not a Natural Voice, (c) Making the Most of This Voice, (d) It’s My Voice, (e) It’s More Than a Voice, and (f) Having a Voice: Being Heard. Findings highlight the limitations of devices, the impact of societal expectations as well as the opportunities for empowerment and participation provided by speech generating devices.