

Reading Inclusion: a Framework for Selecting Picturebooks on Disability

Leggere l'inclusione: un framework per la selezione di albi illustrati sulla disabilità

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RIASSUNTO: Gli albi illustrati sono strumenti educativi efficaci per promuovere immaginari infantili inclusivi, soprattutto rispetto alla disabilità. Questo contributo presenta il FAIR (*Framework for Authentic and Inclusive Representation*), pensato per accompagnare insegnanti ed educatori a selezionare criticamente albi illustrati con rappresentazioni realistiche, rispettose e prive di stereotipi della disabilità.

PAROLE-CHIAVE: revisione della letteratura, analisi comparativa, rappresentazione autentica, criteri narrativi, guida per insegnanti.

ABSTRACT: Picture books are practical educational tools for fostering inclusive childhood imaginaries, especially regarding disability. This paper presents the FAIR (*Framework for Authentic and Inclusive Representation*), designed to help teachers and educators critically select picture books that offer realistic, respectful, and stereotype-free representations of disability.

KEY-WORDS: literature review, comparative analysis, authentic representation, narrative criteria, teacher guidance.

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1. Disability in picturebooks: opportunities, risks, and the need for critical selection

The picturebook is a distinct and sophisticated form of children's illustrated literature in which verbal text and images are integrated and interdependent, creating a unified semiotic system where neither mode is subordinate to the other; instead, both contribute equally to the construction of meaning (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006; Sipe, 1998). Picturebooks are not just illustrated books; they are authentic artistic and literary creations in which words and images mutually reference and enhance one another, resulting in multiple layers of reading and interpretation (Blezza Pichelle & Ganzerla, 2012). This profound interplay between different modes of communication makes the picturebook a uniquely powerful narrative and educational tool, capable of addressing complex subjects by engaging readers' symbolic interpretive skills and fostering empathy towards the characters and scenarios (Terrusi, 2012).

Among the various themes explored through picturebooks is disability. Several studies have examined this potential, demonstrating that picturebooks can serve as effective pedagogical mediators, enabling teachers to develop educational projects that promote greater awareness, understanding, and acceptance of disability among children (Prater & Dyches, 2008; Ostrosky & Favazza, 2015; Pennell, Wollak, & Koppenhaver, 2017; Bianquin & Sacchi, 2017). However, realising this potential requires teachers to carefully select from the wide range of available publications: a picturebook should not only mention disability; it must also critically analyse its portrayal (Bianquin & Sacchi, 2019).

In several picturebooks, disability continues to be depicted through stereotypical viewpoints, typically along two contrasting but problematic thematic lines. On one hand, models that are deficit-based, driven by pity, or paternalistic continue to exist, limiting characters with disabilities to peripheral roles or representing them only through their impairments, which reduces their complexity and dignity (Dyches & Prater, 2005; Pacelli, 2022). On the other hand, the supercrip narrative has become increasingly prevalent, celebrating individuals with disabilities as exceptionally strong, resilient, or gifted with extraordinary abilities. Although this narrative may seem positive, it risks promoting unrealistic, normative models of success, overlooking the everyday experiences of living with disability

and reinforcing performative expectations that deny the right to an ordinary life (Clogston, 1990; Pennell *et al.*, 2017).

In contrast to these reductive portrayals, an authentic representation of disability should reflect the diversity of experiences, the richness of social relationships, and the right to complexity. Realistic, respectful, and strengths-based narratives are essential for preventing the reproduction of stigma or invisibility and for offering all children, both with and without disabilities, authentic opportunities for recognition, engagement, and reflection (Hayden & Prince, 2024; Prater & Dyches, 2008).

The educational effectiveness of a picturebook, therefore, depends on the quality of its aesthetic and narrative choices: the coherence between text and image, the multidimensionality of characters, the absence of visual and linguistic stereotypes, and the rejection of medicalised models are crucial factors in fostering empathy, critical thinking, and the internalisation of diversity as a value (Prince & Hayden, 2021; Pennell *et al.*, 2017).

However, teachers are responsible for selecting appropriate picturebooks, and they often must make these choices without shared guidelines, clear indications, or pedagogically grounded criteria. While the growing availability of editorial offerings has expanded access to texts addressing disability, it has also increased the risk of encountering works that, despite claims of inclusivity, convey simplified, dysfunctional, or even stigmatising representations. Thus, there is an urgent need to establish a robust theoretical and operational framework that can help teachers and educators intentionally select picturebooks, offering analytical criteria for assessing the quality of representations and their educational potential from an inclusive perspective.

Within the broader framework of contemporary pedagogical efforts aimed at creating inclusive educational environments, this study seeks to outline a theoretical and operational framework that, drawing from scientific literature and comparative analysis of existing tools, identifies reliable criteria and indicators to guide the conscious selection of picturebooks that address disability in a respectful, stereotype-free manner, thus supporting inclusive educational practices.

2. Selecting picturebooks for disability representation: methodological approach and key findings

To address the research question, a qualitative, theoretical, argumentative literature review was conducted. Following Snyder's (2019) framework, the literature was approached as a primary source of theoretical data to critically synthesise and organise existing knowledge on the criteria for selecting picturebooks that portray disability in an authentic, respectful, and non-stereotypical way.

The analysis followed an interpretative approach, drawing inspiration from the practices outlined by Kalpokaite and Radivojevic (2021), which advocate for applying qualitative coding and thematisation methods to textual data from the literature. The identified studies were examined comparatively, particularly regarding the emergence of shared criteria.

Thirteen scientific works published between 2002 and 2024 were selected, each proposing structured approaches or guidelines for analysing disability representation in picturebooks. These studies span varying levels of depth: from guidelines for identifying respectful and non-stereotypical representations (Pennell *et al.*, 2017; Rieger & McGrail, 2015) to the development of systematic analytical tools (Blaska, 2004; Hayden & Prince, 2024), and to broader educational frameworks aimed at promoting inclusion (Prater & Dyches, 2008; Circle of Inclusion Project, 2002). A reasoned synthesis of the principal works analysed is presented in Table 1 (Tab. 1).

Table 1. Summary of the selected tools

Author(s)/ Year	Title	Brief Summary	Criteria
Circle of Inclusion Project (2002)	<i>Inclusive Children's Literature Guidelines</i>	This document presents practical criteria to help educators, librarians, and parents select children's books that authentically and respectfully represent diversity, including disability, promoting positive models of inclusion and social participation	Active participation Meaningful relationships Positive roles Normalisation of diversity Avoidance of pity and excessive heroism Dignified representation
Smith- D'Arezzo, (2003)	<i>Disability Representation in Children's Books</i>	This study critically analyses how disability is represented in children's literature, identifying criteria to promote authentic narratives	Avoidance of tokenism Use of respectful and accurate language Representation of the plurality of experiences Overcoming pity-based or heroic narratives

Blaska, (2004)	<i>Images and Encounters. Representing Disability in Children's Literature</i>	The study explores the role of literature in shaping children's mental images and attitudes toward disability. It offers educational strategies to use books as opportunities for 'encountering' diversity, strengthening social awareness, and promoting inclusion from early childhood	Agency Meaningful relationships Respectful language Variety of disabilities
Prater, Dyches, (2008)	<i>Books that Portray Characters with Disabilities</i>	This study proposes a catalogue of children's books portraying characters with disabilities, organised by type of condition represented. The authors assess narrative quality and accuracy of representations, suggesting criteria for integrating these texts into educational activities in a meaningful and respectful way	Character multidimensionality Overcoming pity-based and supercrip stereotypes
Anti-Defamation League (2013)	<i>World of Difference® Literature</i>	The guide offers a thematic selection of literary works promoting respect for all kinds of differences, including disability. It is designed to support educators and parents in anti-bias education and the appreciation of diversity through storytelling and shared reading	Selection of texts to avoid stereotypes Focus on everyday normality
Emmerson, Coles, Rose (2014)	<i>Children's Literature and Ableism</i>	This work addresses the concept of ableism in children's literature, analysing how many books implicitly reinforce normative standards of normality. The authors propose a systematic critique and offer suggestions for selecting stories that celebrate functional diversity without perpetuating ableist hierarchies or distorted views of disability	Narratives challenging implicit ableism Strengthening empathy
Ostrosky, Favazza, (2015)	<i>Pick a Book, Any Book</i>	Practical guide for selecting books that positively and authentically portray children with disabilities. The work emphasises the importance of introducing inclusive narratives from early childhood to foster respectful views of differences and contributes to the construction of inclusive school environments.	Choosing texts that support positive attitudes and equitable relationships
Rieger, McGrail, (2015)	<i>Exploring Children's Literature with Authentic Representations of Disability</i>	The authors examine a range of children's books presenting authentic representations of disability, highlighting how literature can serve as a powerful educational tool to counter stereotypes, broaden young readers' perspectives, and promote a culture of inclusion grounded in everyday realities	Humanisation of characters Positive use of humour Realistic contexts

Pennell, Wollak, Koppenhaver, (2017)	<i>Respectful Representations of Disability in Picture Books</i>	This study focuses on picture-books and the quality of disability representation within them. The authors analyse how to construct narratives that do not reduce characters with disabilities to their conditions but rather present them as complex individuals capable of rich and varied life experiences.	Narrative complexity Overcoming the victim/hero dichotomy
Enriquez, G. (2021)	<i>Diversity Mirrors and Windows in CPBs</i>	Enriquez applies the 'mirrors' and 'windows' metaphor to contemporary picturebooks, analysing how these texts can either reflect the experiences of children with disabilities or offer others the opportunity to encounter diverse realities. The author emphasises the importance of creating narrative spaces where all children can feel recognised and respectfully approach diversity	Critique of superficial representations Centrality of lived experiences
Prince, A.M.T. & Hayden, H.E. (2021)	<i>Repositioning Disability in Children's Picture Books</i>	This work proposes a paradigm shift in the representation of disability in picturebooks, moving the focus from clinical conditions to everyday life experiences. The authors highlight the need for narratives that normalise disability as one of many expressions of human diversity, avoiding pity and exoticising narratives	Representations centred on autonomy, agency, and intersectional diversity
Pacelli, S. (2022)	<i>The Supercrip Rhetoric</i>	The study explores the 'supercrip' rhetoric, which portrays individuals with disabilities as exceptional heroes overcoming extraordinary obstacles. The work discusses the negative implications of this narrative, which, despite its seemingly positive tone, further marginalised people with disabilities by reinforcing unrealistic expectations and stereotypes	Critique of heroism rhetoric Need for ordinary Everyday narratives
Hayden, H.E. & Prince, A.M.T. (2024)	<i>The Strong Stories Framework</i>	The tool is a theoretical and operational model guiding the creation and evaluation of stories with strong and respectful representations of disability. The framework aims to overcome stereotypical approaches, promoting narratives that integrate characters with disabilities as full protagonists, valuing their complexity, agency, and humanity	Strengths-based approach: agency, everyday life, normalisation of disability

3. Toward conscious selection: the imperative of rigorous criteria in choosing picturebooks

A review of national and international scientific literature, encompassing studies published between 2000 and 2024, underscores that selecting picturebooks addressing disability in early childhood and primary education requires teachers to possess and apply rigorous evaluative criteria (Dyches & Prater, 2005; Pacelli, 2022). Although continuous growth in picturebooks addressing disability is evident (Pacelli, 2022), it remains clear that this «quantitative increase (...) does not necessarily equate to qualitatively authentic visibility» (Pacelli, 2022, p. 277): the mere presence of disability within a picture book «does not automatically guarantee a respectful and realistic representation» (Pennell, Wollak, & Koppenhaver, 2017, p. 412).

Across various studies, scholars consistently emphasise that «the portrayal of disability must go beyond mere acknowledgement of the condition: it should capture the complexity, humanity, and active participation of individuals within society» (Dyches & Prater, 2005, p. 204). This perspective is further corroborated by Hayden and Prince (2023), who note that many ostensibly inclusive representations «fail to portray the authentic experiences and strengths of individuals with disabilities» (p. 7).

The literature thus points not merely to the need for a greater quantity of works but, more crucially, to the necessity of adopting rigorous and analytical criteria to ensure the quality and authenticity of representations. Within the educational field, this need translates into a precise pedagogical responsibility: to select picturebooks that promote an authentic, complex, and respectful image of disability, countering the perpetuation of simplified or stereotypical models.

The following section presents a discussion of the main findings that emerged from the comparative analysis of the tools listed in Table 1. The various studies examined, particularly the selection criteria they included, were systematically analysed and compared. This process led to a transversal reorganisation of the content, which has been synthesised into seven recurring analytical criteria.

3.1. *Building authentic and complex representations*

To counter the prevalence of simplified or misleading narratives, it is essential to identify representational principles that value the plurality of experiences, granting characters with disabilities a complete and articulated narrative space. The focus thus shifts toward how literature can respectfully and credibly reflect the diversity of real lives. As Prater and Dyches (2008) observe, «children’s literature should reflect the real complexities of individuals with disabilities, rather than reinforcing one-dimensional or idealised portrayals» (p. 36). Promoting genuinely inclusive representations requires moving beyond reductive narratives, offering stories that convey the complexity, ordinariness, and dignity of the experiences of individuals with disabilities as integral to human diversity (Pacelli, 2022). As Dyches and Prater (2005) assert, «disabled characters must be portrayed as complex, multidimensional individuals, not reduced to their disabilities» (p. 204). Prater and Dyches (2008) also stress the importance of selecting stories where protagonists with disabilities are depicted with «strengths, interests, and challenges that mirror the diversity of all human experiences» (p. 35). A multidimensional portrayal overcomes reductive views, creating complex and relatable narrative figures. This approach normalises the presence of disability in stories, presenting protagonists with dreams, emotions, choices, and meaningful relationships, similar to any other character.

3.2. *Avoiding stereotypes: pity and supercrip narratives*

Identifying general selection criteria also entails critically recognising the main narrative distortions that, despite good intentions, compromise authentic representations. Among these, pity narratives and supercrip rhetoric emerge as recurring, stereotypical models that require vigilance.

This principles drawn from the reviewed literature calls on educators to avoid picturebooks that depict disability through two well-documented critical lenses (Clogston, 1990; Dyches & Prater, 2005; Pennell, Wollak & Koppenhaver, 2017): pity narratives, which reduce individuals to objects of compassion or moral inspiration, and supercrip narratives, which portray them as extraordinary heroes, thus reinforcing marginalisation against normative standards of success. Both representations ultimately dehumanise or isolate disability, framing it as exceptional rather than as an

ordinary facet of human experience. As Pennell, Wollak, and Koppenhaver (2017) explain, «even well-intentioned portrayals may marginalise disabled characters by casting them as either tragic victims or inspirational heroes, thus maintaining a binary that excludes nuanced understandings» (p. 413). Similarly, Pacelli (2022) notes that «idealised portrayals can invisibilise the everyday realities of persons with disabilities, reinforcing unattainable standards of success» (p. 281). Disability should be neither an insurmountable barrier nor a source of exceptionalism, but recognised as part of the human condition. As emphasised by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (2019), «depictions of disability must move beyond tropes of pity, heroism, or tragedy, embracing instead the full humanity and diversity of experiences» (p. 18).

Pennell, Wollak, and Koppenhaver (2017) affirm that «respectful representations provide nuanced depictions of disability, avoiding both tragic victimhood and unrealistic heroism» (p. 413). Respectful portrayals move beyond the dichotomies of victimisation and exceptionalism, offering complex and holistic images of individuals. They emphasise relational, emotional, and social dimensions, presenting disability as part of human diversity rather than as a spectacle. Selecting picture books that adopt this perspective offers children narratives that foster authentic inclusion, based on celebrating differences rather than dramatising them.

3.3 Moving beyond tokenism: ensuring substantive representation

The literature (Smith-D'Arezzo, 2003; Anti-Defamation League, 2013) also highlights the risk of tokenism: the superficial and symbolic insertion of characters with disabilities. Tokenism occurs when such characters lack narrative depth, appearing merely to satisfy representational expectations rather than making a meaningful contribution to the plot. This reduces disability to a decorative element, promoting the idea that inclusion is about visibility rather than authentic recognition. True inclusion is measured not by presence alone but by the quality and depth of representation. Superficial inclusion — where a character is present but doesn't influence the storyline or develop authentic relationships — risks reinforcing marginalisation rather than promoting true inclusion. Characters must not be confined to marginal or stereotypical roles, but rather be integrated organically, endowed with agency, meaningful relationships, and complex characterisation. Com-

bating tokenism thus requires prioritising works where characters with disabilities are narratively central or fully embedded in the story's dynamics. Similarly, Rieger and McGrail (2015) advocate for «construct characters with disabilities as full participants in narratives, not merely subjects for others' development» (p. 145), highlighting the risks of instrumental diversity.

3.4. Promoting agency and a strengths-based perspective

According to Prince and Hayden (2021), representing active participation «challenges the notion that individuals with disabilities are passive or dependent, offering more empowering alternatives for young readers» (p. 36). Compelling narratives should depict protagonists who influence their environments, make choices, and shape story outcomes, moving beyond portrayals of passivity or dependency. Children's literature thus plays an educational role, offering models that normalise full participation and celebrate autonomy and competence. Strengthening images of characters with disabilities as active agents can foster a culture of inclusion that helps dismantle persistent stereotypes.

The strengths-based perspective emphasises the importance of portraying characters with disabilities by highlighting their skills, aspirations, and active contributions, rather than focusing solely on limitations or challenges. Recent frameworks (Hayden & Prince, 2024; Emmerson, Coles & Rose, 2014) advocate for narratives that shift away from deficit-centred portrayals and instead present characters as capable, resilient, and integral members of their communities.

This approach fosters a more empowering view of disability, encouraging young readers to recognise diversity as a source of richness rather than as a marker of otherness or deficiency.

3.5. Respectful and non-stigmatising language and imagery

Another crucial element concerns the use of respectful language. Several contributions (Smith-D'Arezzo, 2003; Anti-Defamation League, 2013; Circle of Inclusion Project, 2002) emphasise that language profoundly shapes young readers' perceptions. Inadequate language, relying on reductive labels or stigmatising expressions, risks perpetuating stereotypes even when representation intends to be inclusive. Thus, texts must employ language

that honours the dignity and complex identity of persons with disabilities. Person-first language (e.g., “a child with a disability” rather than “a disabled child”) is particularly recommended. Enriquez (2021) warns that inauthentic linguistic representation can create «foggy mirrors and heavy doors» for readers seeking to see themselves in literature (p. 103).

Thoughtful language thus becomes a fundamental tool for promoting respectful, authentic representations that recognise disability as part of human diversity.

Similarly, illustrations should convey dignified and realistic depictions, avoiding excessive medicalisation and sensationalization of disability. Verbal and visual language play crucial roles in shaping young readers’ imaginations and promoting a culture of respect and normalisation of diversity.

3.6. Realistic and everyday life representation

Finally, a key selection criterion is the representation of disability as an integrated part of everyday life. According to the Circle of Inclusion Project (2002), the most effective picturebooks portray children with disabilities engaged in ordinary activities, participating naturally and meaningfully in school, family, and social contexts. Situating characters with disabilities within common life dynamics normalises diversity and prevents marginalisation and sensationalism. Narratives depicting children playing, learning, dreaming, and building friendships promote an image of disability as a normal aspect of human experience. This approach responds to the call, highlighted by numerous studies (Smith-D’Arezzo, 2003; Anti-Defamation League, 2013), to avoid isolating disability as a distant or defining feature. Teaching children to see disability within everyday life fosters a more inclusive cultural imagination, where difference serves as a basis for connection and mutual recognition. Characters must be depicted as socially engaged, capable of forming relationships, having aspirations, and possessing competencies, avoiding narratives that isolate or define them solely by their conditions. Therefore, selecting stories that depict inclusion as a lived, everyday reality is critical for fostering genuinely educational and respectful children’s literature.

4. Framework for Authentic and Inclusive Disability Representation (FAIR)

Considering the main findings that emerged from the literature review, a structured operational tool (FAIR) is proposed to guide teachers in consciously selecting picturebooks that address the theme of disability (see Table 2). It constitutes a structured framework for the selection of picturebooks featuring authentic and inclusive representations of disability, aimed at systematically supporting teachers in the identification of books capable of fostering inclusive educational practices and promoting a nuanced, respectful understanding of human diversity.

This proposal represents the natural evolution of the theoretical and analytical work conducted, aiming to translate the identified criteria into observable and applicable dimensions and indicators for educational practice.

Rather than offering general guidelines, this model proposes a structured methodological system, based on a critical and systematic elaboration of the scientific contributions analysed (Blaska, 2004; Pennell, Wollak & Koppenhaver, 2017; Hayden & Prince, 2024).

The table presented above visually summarises this proposal.

Table 2. FAIR.

Criterion	Dimensions	Indicators	Guiding Questions
Building authentic and complex representations	Character complexity	Rich characterisation: multiple traits (aspirations, skills, emotions, relationships)	Does the character exhibit a variety of traits, dreams, emotions, and relationships?
	Social and relational participation	Integration into authentic, meaningful social dynamics	Is the character involved in authentic relationships?
Avoiding stereotypes: pity and supercrip	Avoidance of pity narratives	No victimisation: character not portrayed as an object of pity	Is the character portrayed as an active agent, not merely a victim?
	Avoidance of supercrip rhetoric	No excessive heroism: character not depicted as an extraordinary hero	Is the portrayal realistic, avoiding excessive glorification?
Moving beyond tokenism: ensuring substantive representation	Integration into the plot	Full narrative integration: character is part of the story	Is the character genuinely part of the story and not just a token?
	Narrative influence	Significant decision-making impacting the plot	Does their role meaningfully contribute to the plot? Do their decisions influence the course of the story?

Promoting agency and a strengths-based perspective	Character agency and decision-making Focus on strengths and positive attributes	Active influence on the story through independent choices. Emphasis on strengths and contributions.	Does the character take initiatives independently? Does the character influence the story through independent choices? Does the story highlight strengths and positive attributes?
Respectful and non-stigmatising language and imagery	Inclusive language Absence of stigmatisation Accuracy and respectfulness of visual representation	Person-first language (e.g., <i>child with a disability</i>) Avoidance of archaic or discriminatory terms Neutral and respectful tone Respectful and realistic depiction of disability without stigmatising visual emphasis	Is the language person-centred? Are outdated or stigmatising terms avoided? Is the tone respectful, avoiding pity? Are disabilities depicted realistically and respectfully in the illustrations, without exaggeration or stigma?
Realistic and everyday life representation	Realistic contexts and situations Natural participation in daily life	Depiction of familiar, ordinary settings and activities. Integration of disability naturally within daily experiences	Are characters portrayed in realistic and everyday contexts? Is disability represented as a natural part of daily life?

FAIR is structured around six fundamental criteria, each of which is subdivided into specific dimensions and observable indicators. This dual-level structure aims to achieve two objectives: on the one hand, to ensure rigorous scientific coherence with findings from the literature; on the other, to provide teachers with a practical and immediately usable tool that facilitates critical evaluation without superficiality. Each criterion is accompanied by guiding questions designed to foster critical reflection and move beyond intuitive or impressionistic approaches to selecting narrative materials.

In particular, the construction of the criteria seeks to promote selections that enhance the complexity of characters with disabilities, avoiding any form of reductionism or stereotyping, and to overcome problematic narrative models such as pity narratives and supercrip rhetoric.

It further encourages the privileging of stories that embed disability within everyday life experiences, situating characters in ordinary contexts and authentic relationships without resorting to exceptionalism.

Equally central is the attention to language: texts must employ respectful formulations, avoiding even subtle forms of stigmatisation. FAIR explicitly calls for resistance to tokenism, advocating instead for narratives where characters with disabilities are central, fully integrated, and autonomous within the plot.

An additional goal is to reinforce the narrative agency of characters with disabilities, recognising their ability to influence story dynamics and make meaningful decisions, thereby constructing representations that move beyond paternalism toward full participation.

Finally, the proposal emphasises that disability should be narrated not as something extraordinary but as part of the normal range of human experiences, thus promoting an authentically inclusive and everyday perspective.

Each indicator has been carefully designed to be concretely observable and applicable even by teachers who are not specialists in children's literature, thus ensuring an accessible yet scientifically rigorous approach.

This proposal aligns with the broader, internationally recognised need (Hayden & Prince, 2024; Pennell et al., 2017) to equip education professionals with critical tools for making informed choices.

Selecting picturebooks that offer children authentic, respectful, and nuanced representations of disability is not merely a matter of narrative correctness but constitutes a profoundly pedagogical act, one that contributes to shaping more inclusive and respectful cultural imaginaries.

In this light, the systematic adoption of FAIR represents not only practical support for teachers but also an educational and cultural stance. Choosing to tell stories where disability is portrayed as usual and complex means contributing to building a school that is more just, equitable, and humane.

5. Final reflections and implications for research and practice

This study has demonstrated that using picturebooks to address disability in educational settings demands specific, methodologically grounded, and pedagogically informed expertise.

The literature highlights that only picturebooks portraying characters with disabilities as multidimensional, socially engaged, and part of everyday life can foster authentic inclusion. Selection criteria grounded in character complexity, ordinary settings, respectful language, and accurate visual representation offer educators a concrete framework for evaluating texts and promoting inclusive educational practices.

Choosing stories that depict disability without sensationalising it—without reducing it to deficit or heroism—means equipping all children with cultural tools to recognise the diversity of human conditions as integral to social life, rather than as deviations or exceptions. In this view, storytelling itself becomes a practice of inclusion, capable of shaping imaginaries that are open to difference and rooted in respect.

Ultimately, telling inclusive stories is not merely an educational choice: it is an ethical commitment through which schools contribute to shaping a more equitable society—one capable of recognising and valuing all forms of humanity.

In this view, FAIR not only responds to an urgent pedagogical need but also contributes to a broader cultural shift in how disability is conceptualised and narrated within educational contexts. Its structure, grounded in empirical literature and designed for immediate applicability, positions picturebooks as potent mediators in the co-construction of inclusive imaginaries.

Beyond its practical utility, the framework affirms the epistemic role of children's literature as a pedagogical space that can dismantle ableist norms and foster a pluralistic vision of humanity. From this perspective, the conscious selection of picturebooks becomes a critical act: one that influences how children learn to perceive others and themselves in relation to diversity.

Future research should explore the implementation of the FAIR in real educational settings, assessing not only its usability but also its impact on students' attitudes and teachers' reflective practices. Moreover, integrating the framework into initial and in-service teacher training could represent a strategic lever for embedding inclusive values across the entire school system.

In this sense, picturebooks cease to be mere resources and become ethical and educational agents—capable of transforming schools into spaces of recognition, equity, and shared humanity.

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