

ARTICLE

Stories in Education: The Importance and Application of Storytelling in Inclusive Education

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the pedagogical and communicative significance of storytelling, with a special focus on its application in inclusive education. Storytelling—whether visual, written, oral, digital, or audio—offers a powerful method for transmitting knowledge, values, and experiences in ways that foster emotional engagement, critical thinking, and mutual understanding. The study draws on a qualitative methodology, including action research, conducted within an international educational project that brought together university students from diverse cultural backgrounds. The research shows how storytelling can enhance interaction between students and teachers and strengthen the inclusive character of the learning environment. Stories presented in the project (e.g., from students with hearing impairments or autism) illustrate how narrative practices give voice to marginalized perspectives and challenge dominant discourses of deficit. Through discourse analysis, the study highlights how storytelling becomes a space for constructing identity and empathy. The findings emphasize the transformative power of storytelling—not only as a pedagogical strategy but also as a tool for reshaping educational and linguistic discourse towards equity and inclusion. By embracing diverse forms and contents of stories, inclusive education and the inclusion process can move from access and adaptation to belonging, acceptance, solidarity, and recognition of diversity and linguistic and cultural differences. The study suggests that storytelling, when applied reflexively, represents not only a method but also a way of thinking and transforming a positive approach for building an inclusive approach and inclusive language (not only) in society.

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1. Introduction

The issue of access to quality education is crucial because, despite all the problems that schools face today, education is still seen as a gateway to a better life. To close the gap between the advantaged and disadvantaged parts of the population, Europe is beginning to look for an optimal model of education that increases everyone's chances of receiving quality education. In international discourse, the term inclusive education is appearing increasingly often, and with it the belief that this model contributes to social inclusion. Slovakia also subscribed to these ideas by promising to improve access to education for all, and through reform measures, such as ratifying documents and gaining membership in the European Agency for Special Needs Education in 2012 aims to ensure the consistent application of inclusion principles in education. Despite all the declarations, the issue of inclusive education is nowadays a more attractive topic for the professional public than the reality of our schools. The proof is many current articles, publications, or projects, in the titles of which this key concept resonates. Although interest in the issue is rising, it cannot be said that there is a consensus in Slovakia on the nature, significance, necessity, or feasibility of inclusive education. Probably that is why there has been no declared political demand for inclusive education. However, although there are some references, they are more the result of political imports from transnational and international groupings. The country's readiness for inclusive education is determined by the extent to which these values are considered a real goal. Education in Slovak society is a recognized value; it strengthens a person's chances in life, and opens the way to society and work. Inclusive education is generally considered to be an effective tool for social inclusion. This conviction was also declared in the press release from the conference "Assumptions of Inclusive Education in Slovakia", organized in 2011 by the Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic in cooperation with NGOs Amnesty International Slovakia, People in Need Slovakia, and the Institute for a Well-Governed Society. Its content resonates with the view that the result of inclusive education is full

integration - that is, the inclusion of everyone in social and cultural life. The idea of inclusion in pedagogical thinking is the result of postmodernism. Socialization processes are directed towards the idea that a child, as a social actor with their own culture, transforms it through his actions. We currently encounter the terms inclusive education and inclusive school frequently, but it must be noted that Slovak education is often in the practical implementation of inclusion, is still in its early stages. It is through various methods and methodologies that we can increase and build inclusive awareness among students and in society. One such method, within the framework of solving the problem of this article, is storytelling as a tool for building inclusive awareness. The stories represent more than meets the eye. They play a key role in a person's life because they contribute to the organization of events and provide a framework for interpreting experiences. According to Lenart^[1], storytelling and the transmission of on stories are universal elements of any culture and constitute an integral part of it. Stories enable the connection of new knowledge with previously acquired knowledge, skills, and experiences. Nowadays, educational methods that provide an alternative to traditional forms of teaching are being emphasised. Their main aim is to support critical thinking in pupils and encourage them to reflect on ethical and moral values^[2]. Capek^[3] emphasizes that a variety of teaching methods contributes to a greater chance of success within the educational process. Storytelling is one of these methods and is characterized by the deliberate sharing of stories through words and actions to transfer knowledge and emotions between the storyteller and the listener^[4]. Serrat^[5] defines storytelling as a dynamic process of communicating ideas, beliefs, and personal experiences through stories that elicit emotional responses.

In recent years, storytelling has also gained relevance in linguistic and discourse-based research, especially within inclusive education. Scholars such as Gee^[6] and Fairclough^[7] argue that stories are not only vessels of meaning but also acts of positioning—they construct identities, shape relationships, and reflect underlying social norms. Through the lens of discourse analysis, storytelling in education becomes a site where power relations, inclusion/exclusion

dynamics, and cultural ideologies are enacted. In inclusive settings, the language of the story—its metaphors, narrative structure, and discursive patterns—can reveal whether learners are positioned as passive recipients or active participants in the learning process. This approach allows educators and researchers to explore not just what is being communicated through stories, but how such communication affirms or challenges inclusive values. Furthermore, inclusive education benefits from a critical examination of language use, as linguistic practices in classrooms (including how teachers frame questions, respond to neurodivergent expressions, or narrate difference) directly impact students' sense of belonging and self-worth^[8].

In the context of linguistic storytelling, especially in British English, researchers highlight the cultural and structural characteristics of narrative forms. British English narratives often favor subtle irony, ellipsis, and an understated tone, reflecting broader cultural conventions of indirectness and politeness^[9,10]. Storytelling in British discourse frequently uses metaphors, modal verbs, and hedging devices to express nuance, empathy, and shared social positioning^[11,12]. These linguistic strategies help frame inclusive storytelling in classrooms, where power hierarchies can be softened through dialogic language and carefully framed speech acts^[13,14]. Narrative linguistics explores how stories are constructed at the sentence and discourse levels, focusing on aspects such as cohesion, deixis, temporality, and point of view^[15,16]. In inclusive education, these elements take on an ethical dimension—supporting identity affirmation, safe spaces for self-expression, and co-construction of meaning. For example, inclusive storytelling encourages students to use first-person perspectives, modals of possibility (e.g., “might”, “could”), and agentive structures (e.g., “I decide”, “we create”) to assert their experiences and values^[17]. The combination of linguistic sensitivity and inclusive ideology forms the core of what may be called inclusive storytelling discourse. This framework not only avoids stigmatizing or deficit-oriented language, but actively seeks to validate linguistic diversity, neurodivergent expressions, and multilingual forms of narration^[18]. British inclusive discourse, shaped by principles of critical pedagogy and linguistic equity, recognizes storytelling as a dialogic act grounded in shared humanity, rather than as a tool of hierarchical instruction. As such, storytelling becomes a transformative tool

for developing empathetic, critically literate, and socially responsible learners.

Storytelling, then, becomes a powerful medium not only for sharing experiences but also for transforming the discourse of education itself—towards one that recognises diversity as a strength rather than a challenge. Storytelling is applicable in a variety of fields, including marketing and education. When implementing storytelling, factors such as the age of the target audience, the content of the story, and the aim of the storytelling need to be considered. Storytelling is divided into several main forms:

- Visual storytelling: The oldest form of storytelling, which was present in prehistoric times in the form of cave paintings and is now manifested in illustrations and comics.
- Written storytelling: The least financially demanding form that includes books, articles and blogs.
- Oral storytelling: Requires improvisational skills and is performed through presentations, interviews, and discussions.
- Digital storytelling: Requires a larger budget but offers high effectiveness through video games, social media videos, and animations.
- Audio storytelling: Includes podcasts and other audio forms of storytelling^[19].

According to Vorac^[20], three main categories of stories within the so-called Norwegian school of storytelling exist:

- Author stories: Based on characters and their settings.
- Personal stories: Based on the memories and life experiences of the author.
- Written stories: These include myths, fairy tales, novels, and film stories.

Visual or artistic expression in storytelling represents a specific art of communication, where visual elements play a key role in conveying the story. This approach is applied in art, design, illustration, and animation. Key aspects of visual storytelling include:

1. Visualisation of emotions and atmosphere through colour, shapes, and textures.
2. Characterisation of characters to help define their personality and emotions.

3. Setting and worldbuilding that emphasizes the atmosphere of the story.
4. Symbolism and metaphors that add depth to the story.
5. Dynamics and movement that support the development of the plot.
6. Interaction with the viewer that encourages personal interpretation.

Practical applications of visual storytelling include comic books, book illustrations, animation, and advertising. The result is an effective communication tool that conveys stories through visual elements as intensely as the textual form.

2. Materials and Methods

The methods within the research are specific in that they are qualitative in nature. This study employed an action research and natural experiment to explore causal relationships between variables in smaller working groups composed of university students. A natural experiment is a type of empirical research that does not require statistically equivalent groups and does not need a comparison (control) group. The action research was conducted with a small working group of students involved in the project tasks of the international Erasmus+ (E+) project, which ran from 2021–2024. The core of the working group was truly inclusive and came from different parts of the world and cultural backgrounds. The students involved came from the University of West Bohemia in Pilsen (ZČU Czech Republic), De Haagse Hogeschool (THUAS Netherlands), Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam (EUR Netherlands), University of Constantine the Philosopher in Nitra (UKF Slovak Republic). Through their joint efforts, the partner institutions aimed to help rewrite the story of inclusive education in Central Europe and beyond. The project “Changing Our Story: The Pursuit of Inclusive Education” seeks to remove misconceptions about what it takes to build inclusive principles in the classroom and emphasizes the involvement of students, staff, and teachers within the higher education sector. Student engagement plays a key role in fostering an inclusive environment at institutions, and student and staff sections must be perceived as a unified and collaborative organization.

“Changing Our Story” Project. “Changing Our Story”

is a Europe-wide educational project designed for students aged approximately 19–24. It aims to deepen engagement and inclusivity by blending creative storytelling, critical thinking, and participation. The project fosters awareness through hands-on activities, discussions, and creative expression, empowering students to become active change-makers:

The key objectives of project wereas cultivating skills in storytelling, media literacy, and creative expression, and to promote empathy and collective action through collaborative activities.

Student Activities:

1. Storytelling Workshops (students use diverse media—written stories, drawings, short films, podcast—to express how change impacts the world around them);
2. Debates & Mock Elections (through this role-play, students learn fairness, critical argumentation, and democratic decision-making—mirroring real-world processes);
3. Creative Mapping & Visual Storyboards (using “story” or picture-prompt storyboards, students map out narratives of change—visualizing emotional and environmental impacts);
4. Investigative & Media Literacy Projects (students analyse media content for bias, misinformation, or constructive narratives then present balanced findings as news bulletins or articles);
5. Collaborative Improvisation & Theatre (drawing from methods used by NGOs in youth engagement, students participate in “Yes, and...” exercises);
6. Community Action & Reflection (students reflect on their learning via journals, group discussions, or digital portfolios, solidifying their transition from audiences to active contributors).

Scientific Description: Action Research Focused on Storytelling

This study employs a participatory action research (PAR) approach, which is iterative, context-sensitive, and practitioner-led. It focuses on the implementation of storytelling as a pedagogical tool to foster critical thinking, social awareness, and student engagement in real-life issues—especially social and inclusive climates.

1. Research Aim

The aim is to examine how structured storytelling activities impact:

- students' creative and critical thinking;
- their emotional and cognitive engagement with complex issues;
- and their collaborative and reflective learning processes.

2. Research Phases

- Diagnostic Phase: Baseline mapping through questionnaires, interviews, and student reflection tasks to assess prior engagement with sustainability topics.
- Planning: Co-design of a sequence of storytelling-based activities (e.g., visual storytelling, oral histories, creative mapping of climate futures).
- Implementation: Delivery of sessions in school settings; documentation of student outputs (stories, visuals, role-plays).
- Real-time observation and collection of multimodal evidence.
- Reflection and Data Analysis
- Thematic and narrative analysis of student work.
- Focus groups with students and teachers to reflect on learning outcomes.
- Assessment of shifts in narrative voice, agency, and inclusive consciousness.

3. Data Collection Tools

Semi-structured interviews; Classroom observation logs; Samples of student storytelling artifacts; and reflective journals (students and facilitators)^[21].

3. Results

The student working group consisted of a stable group throughout the duration of the project. They were involved in online meetings for professional self-development under the guidance of coach and lecturer in inclusive education Prof. Naomi van Stapele and lecturer Aminata Cairo. The working group participated in three summer schools, in the Netherlands, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia. Their approach was experiential learning—a process in which knowledge is acquired through the transformation of experiences. It was a combination of classroom lectures that provided students

with context and definitions of the topic.

• STORYTELLER 1: Katty's Story (Hearing Impaired)

This is my fifth year in the field of design. I am deaf and come from eastern Slovakia. My work focuses on the topic of hands and words, both of which are of great significance to the Deaf Culture. This form of communication allows Deaf individuals to present words and letters using gestures, which allows them to communicate even with those who do not know sign language. The finger alphabet therefore serves as a bridge between these two groups of people, allowing them to understand and communicate with each other. Finger alphabet language is beautiful because its beauty lies in its ability to express words and convey meaning through finger movements. This form of communication is the result of human creativity and the ability to overcome communication barriers. It is an important tool for inclusive communication and fosters mutual understanding between different groups of people. The same meaning is expressed in the depiction of hands from Michelangelo Buonarroti's work, namely 'The Creation of Adam', where the touch of hands is symbolised as physical touch. The method presented is known as "sandwiching", and also involves the alternative use of gestures and finger-reading of words^[22] (Figure 1).

• STORYTELLER 2: Nina's Story (Hearing Impaired)

I am 36 years old and have been living with a hearing impairment for 36 years. I depict my ear—an organ that does not work properly, or the non-functioning part is not visible in the plastic art (Figure 2). The ear symbolizes hearing; for me it symbolizes what I "lack" in relation to mainstream society. My work is a reflection of my memories. I am currently living a full life, finishing my external study and working. I am happy; I have a circle of people that I get along with, I meet colleagues at work and in school with I am comfortable with. The same applies to my family and friends. But there was a time in my life when that was not the case. With my poem and the few words I wrote back then, I would like to draw attention to what tormented me, what made me cry many times, and what made me realise that I was different and often felt lonely. It was something like "fear" that I saw in the eyes of the people I tried to make

some kind of contact with. It was as if the phrase “I don’t want to talk to you, I don’t know how to do it” was present in their eyes. I felt panic at the thought that I wouldn’t understand them, that an unpleasant situation might occur. That they might feel uncomfortable. I think that’s what hurt me the most in my life. Aside from knowing that I was differ-

ent (gradually, through my will and surroundings, otherness became more of a uniqueness in my eyes), I got the feeling that people wouldn’t want to be with me. I was incredibly grateful when someone didn’t hesitate to try to “talk” to me despite there being a possibility of us not understanding each other.



Figure 1. AHOJ (in English, “hello”).



I CAN'T HEAR YOU
 BUT I READ YOU, YOUR MOUTH, YOUR HANDS, YOUR EYES, YOUR EYEBROWS, YOUR
 CHIN, YOUR FEET, YOUR POINT OF VIEW.
 SLOW DOWN. I CAN'T KEEP UP, I'M MISSING SOMETHING. SLOW DOWN A LITTLE, BUT
 DON'T LEAVE.
 DON'T LEAVE ME STANDING, BE HERE WITH ME.
 DON'T BE AFRAID.
 THEY SAY THERE'S A FEAR OF "AWKWARD SILENCE"
 WHAT IS IT?
 DON'T BE AFRAID, I FEEL YOU, I KNOW WHAT YOU'RE TELLING ME.
 DON'T WORRY, I KNOW YOU'RE TRYING.
 DON'T BE AFRAID OF "SILENCE", WE'LL MAKE OURSELVES UNDERSTOOD EVENTUALLY
 DON'T GIVE UP, I'M NOT GIVING UP EITHER
 I WANT TO KNOW AND LIVE
 I MAY NOT HEAR BUT I WANT WHAT YOU WANT
 SO, UNDERSTAND THAT I'M HERE AND I WANT TO HAVE FUN.
 HOW'S YOUR DAY AND WHERE DID YOU GET THOSE SHOES?
 HOW'S YOUR DOG?
 SLOW DOWN A LITTLE, BUT OTHERWISE, WE'RE DOING FINE.
 AND IF WE DON'T... WE CAN LAUGH.
 PEOPLE OFTEN DON'T UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER AFTER ALL. EVEN THOSE WHO CAN
 HEAR...
 AND I MAY NOT BE ABLE TO HEAR YOU BUT BELIEVE ME, I'M LISTENING TO YOU INTENTLY
 WITH MY EYES AND MY MIND.

Figure 2. Nina's poem.

● STORYTELLER 3: Marry's Story (Autism)

Neurodivergence and neurodiversity are topics of great importance to me because they are the answers to questions that have plagued me all my life. I started looking specifically at autism about two and a half years ago, in my twenties, when I discovered that I was on the spectrum myself. Autism manifests itself a little differently in women and there is not much information about it in the Czech context. That was the main reason I decided to pursue it myself and start with some form of education. It seems to me that autism is a much neglected and stigmatized topic. People have a lot of prejudices, myths, and stereotypes that I would like to try to refute through my illustrations (**Figure 3**). I lived my whole life believing that I was broken and only in adulthood did I realise that I wasn't broken; just different. Sometimes I wonder what would have changed if I had known this earlier. When I was in elementary school, I desperately needed support—which, of course, never came. I wish no child had to experience what I did. That's why the idea of an inclusive environment is important to me.



Figure 3. Marry and her panels.

4. Discussion

The findings from this study offer compelling evidence of the multifaceted role that storytelling plays in inclu-

sive education—linguistically, culturally, and pedagogically. Through the lens of discourse analysis, we observe that stories are not simply passive vessels of meaning but active constructors of social reality. They reflect and shape the identities of both tellers and listeners. Particularly in inclusive contexts, storytelling can either reinforce hegemonic norms or subvert them, depending on the language choices, narrative framing, and relational dynamics involved. A key insight from this research is the transformative function of storytelling when it is grounded in linguistic sensitivity. The use of inclusive and agentive language structures—such as first-person pronouns, modal verbs (e.g., “can,” “might,” “should”), and affirmative metaphors—empowers students to present their perspectives with agency and dignity. This is particularly important for students from marginalized backgrounds, including those with disabilities, neurodivergent learners, and multilingual students. When learners see their linguistic practices and lived experiences reflected in classroom discourse, their sense of belonging deepens, and their cognitive engagement increases. British English, with its emphasis on politeness strategies and indirectness, adds another layer to the linguistic complexity of inclusive storytelling. While features such as hedging, ellipsis, and metaphor can facilitate empathy and reduce confrontation, they may also obscure power imbalances or limit direct expression. Educators must thus navigate a delicate balance between maintaining cultural norms and promoting clarity and inclusion. For example, while understatement is valued in British discourse, inclusive storytelling might require more explicit affirmations of identity and difference. This research also underscores the dialogic nature of storytelling in the classroom. It is not a monologic transfer of knowledge from teacher to student, but a co-constructed process involving mutual recognition, negotiation of meaning, and shared authorship. In multilingual and neurodiverse classrooms, this dialogic process is further enriched by varied linguistic repertoires and cognitive perspectives. Stories become multi-modal performances—spoken, written, visual, signed—that invite empathy and foster deep learning. Furthermore, the implementation of storytelling as an inclusive practice aligns with broader shifts in educational theory, particularly socio-cultural and constructivist paradigms. These frameworks posit that knowledge is not transmitted but built through social interaction and meaning making. In this light, story-

telling serves as a medium for situated learning, in which students develop conceptual understanding through authentic narratives anchored in their cultural and emotional realities. Lastly, the analysis reaffirms that inclusive storytelling is not just about content but about structure and delivery. The sequencing of events, use of figurative language, tone, and narrative perspective all contribute to how a story is received and interpreted. Educators must therefore consider not only what is being said, but how it is being said and who gets to speak. By fostering linguistic reflexivity and equitable participation, storytelling can move beyond representation to enactment—shaping the very discourse of inclusive education. In the methodological analysis of a student's own work, it is important to apply objective methods and systematic procedures to gain a deeper understanding of the creative process, its strengths and weaknesses, and to identify opportunities for further improvement. This methodological approach allows for a systematic analysis of your own creation, which will not only help you to evaluate the result more objectively, but also to improve your own skills over time. Beyond the visual, emotional, and experiential qualities of the stories shared by the students, it is crucial to analyse how language itself shapes the experience and perception of inclusive education. Through discourse analysis, we examine how narratives about disability, identity, and inclusion are constructed linguistically. For example, in Nina's poem, the repeated phrases "don't be afraid," "slow down," and "I want" not only convey emotional appeals but also function as discursive strategies that reposition the speaker from a passive subject to an empowered agent in the communicative encounter. The use of direct address and modal verbs ("I can," "I want," "I will") highlights agency and determination, challenging dominant discourses of deficit and exclusion. In Katty's and Marry's narratives, the linguistic construction of identity is evident using metaphor and symbolic language (e.g., "fingers as a bridge," or "I wasn't broken, just different"). These discursive choices frame neurodivergence and deafness not as limitations, but as meaningful variations of human experience. This aligns with the social model of disability, which shifts the focus from individual impairment to societal barriers and attitudes. Research on the communication of bimodal bilinguals has described exceptional phenomena, which are co-de-switching (code switching) and code-blending, or code-mixing (inter-

lacing, mixing of codes). Bimodal bilinguals have the ability to switch between gestures and words (switching), or they can produce them simultaneously (blending). It has been found that they do not stop talking when they are gesturing, or conversely, they do not stop gesturing when they are saying something. This means that instead of code-switching they produce code-blending,¹⁵ in monomodal bilinguals it can only be co-de-switching^[23]. Moreover, language use in inclusive education must be seen not merely as a matter of vocabulary or terminology, but as a reflection of underlying values and power relations. Inclusive discourse embraces heterogeneity and emphasizes respect, co-agency, and dialogic interaction. For example, the collaborative process in the E+ project, as documented in the case studies, shows how multilingual and multicultural students used both verbal and nonverbal communication to co-construct understanding. Their shared stories function as counter-narratives, resisting stereotypical representations and asserting personal and collective voices. By analysing these storytelling practices through the lens of discourse, we gain insights into how language performs inclusion—not only by what is said, but by how it is said, who gets to speak, and under what conditions. This linguistic sensitivity is essential for fostering critical pedagogies that go beyond access, towards genuine belonging and voice for all learners.

• Katty:

Figure 1 shows a series of sculptures of hands in various gestures, arranged on a pedestal. For a qualitative analysis, we could evaluate different aspects. Hand gestures can have cultural or communicative meaning. For example, each hand movement could represent letters in sign language, emotions, or other symbolic messages. If these gestures are tied to a specific research project, what is their intention? For example, do they represent universal signs or culturally specific symbols? Aesthetic and artistic analysis: the sculptures are white and probably made of plaster or similar material. This choice of material may emphasize the purity or universality of the gestures. The orange-brown background of the bricks and wooden table contrasts with the white colour, giving the gestures more visual depth. The gestures are arranged in a line, suggesting a certain chronology or sequence. If this image is used in qualitative research, it could be an analysis of nonverbal communication, of artistic creation, or of the

meaning of signs in a cultural context. This image shows a series of sculptures of hands in various gestures, arranged on a pedestal. For a qualitative analysis we could evaluate different aspects. Hand gestures can have cultural or communicative meaning. For example, each hand movement could represent letters in the sign language, emotions, or other symbolic messages. If these gestures are tied to a specific research project, what is their intention? For example, do they represent universal signs or culturally specific symbols? Aesthetic and artistic analysis: The sculptures are white and probably made of plaster or a similar material. This choice of material may emphasize the purity or universality of the gestures. The orange-brown background of the bricks and the wooden table contrasts with the white colour, giving the gestures more visual depth. The gestures are arranged in a line, suggesting a certain chronology or sequence. If this image is used in qualitative research, it could be an analysis of nonverbal communication, of artistic creation, or of the meaning of signs in a cultural context. The analytical potential of such work is rich. On a linguistic level, the gestures serve as non-verbal deixis—anchoring meaning in space and form rather than syntax and lexicon. From a semiotic perspective, the hands function as signs with layered meanings, both culturally specific and universally human. In an educational context, this offers opportunities for cross-modal literacy development, where students learn to “read” and interpret narratives that do not rely on text or speech. This supports not only accessibility but also neurodivergent ways of knowing, particularly for visual learners or students with sensory processing differences. This example also exemplifies the interplay between narrative form and inclusive intent. By using hands to convey language and identity, Katty foregrounds embodiment and intersubjectivity—core themes in inclusive education. The artwork is not merely illustrative; it is dialogic. It invites viewers into a conversation about communication, difference, and perception. It also models how storytelling can be radically inclusive when it accommodates multiple modalities of expression, particularly for students who have been traditionally marginalized in mainstream verbal discourse.

• **Nina:**

This poem (**Figure 2**) is very emotional and introspective. It expresses the depth of communication between people

trying to understand each other despite physical or other barriers. Here is a more detailed analysis:

- **Nonverbal Communication:** The poem emphasizes the importance of reading nonverbal expressions, such as gestures, glances, facial expressions, and body language.
- **Patience and Empathy:** It talks about the need to slow down and take time to understand each other.
- **Overcoming Barriers:** The author emphasizes that even if they cannot hear, they are still able to “listen” with their eyes and mind.
- **Fear of not being understood:** Reflects fears of “awkward silence” or the inability to communicate. It also encourages the acceptance of silence as a natural part of human interaction.
- **Universality of misunderstanding:** States that even people without physical barriers often have difficulty communicating, thus normalizing this challenge.
- **Repetition:** Words like “don’t be afraid”, “slow down”, and “I want” are repeated, emphasizing the main messages - the need for understanding, patience, and determination.
- **Contrast:** The poem contrasts auditory communication and visual perception (“I can’t hear you, but I can read you”), showing that communication can take different forms.
- **Dialogic tone:** The text is written as a conversation or a personal appeal, which makes it intimate and direct.
- **Metaphors:** “With my eyes and mind I listen to you intently” shows that listening does not have to be literal, but can be a manifestation of mental and emotional concentration.
- **The poem refers to inclusivity, understanding and acceptance.** It tries to encourage the reader to be perceptive of others, to not be afraid of silence, and to communicate authentically and patiently.

The text can serve as inspiration for understanding how to overcome communication barriers, especially with people with hearing impairment. It can be used as a tool to discuss empathy, patience, and alternative forms of communication in pedagogy or therapy. Equally powerful is Nina’s

contribution, which takes the form of a poem infused with vulnerability, strength, and a call for understanding. Her narrative operates within the genre of personal storytelling but expands into a broader commentary on communication barriers, social perception, and the emotional cost of exclusion. The poem is rich in metaphor and repetition—rhetorical devices that perform the dual function of expressing personal pain while inviting communal empathy. Phrases like “Don’t be afraid” and “Slow down” are not merely poetic refrains; they are discursive acts that reframe the relationship between speaker and listener, turning hesitation into invitation and silence into space for connection. The emotional texture of Nina’s story adds another dimension to inclusive storytelling. It reminds educators that storytelling is not merely cognitive or linguistic—it is affective. Feelings of shame, fear, gratitude, and courage shape how stories are told and received. When students are invited to bring their full emotional selves into the classroom, including their uncertainties and hopes, storytelling becomes an embodied practice of healing and affirmation. Nina’s narrative thus contributes to a pedagogy of presence, where stories become bridges rather than walls.

- **Marry:**

Figure 3 shows a series of six illustrated panels on a wall, arranged in two columns and three rows. Each panel has a unique colour scheme and likely depicts a different story or motif. For analysis, we can proceed as follows:

- The colour blue often evokes calm, introspection, or melancholy. This panel could depict a situation related to reflection or inner peace.
- Purple (upper right panel): Purple is the colour of creativity, spirituality, and introspection. The illustration could represent a theme of fantasy or introspective thoughts.
- Yellow (middle left panel): Yellow is associated with joy, energy, and happiness. This panel may depict a positive or optimistic situation.
- Orange (middle right panel): Orange is associated with energy and warmth. The illustration likely depicts a dynamic or social scene.
- Red (lower left panel): Red often symbolizes passion, love, or intensity. The panel may depict an emotionally charged moment.
- Green (lower right panel): Green is associated

with nature, harmony, and peace. This panel likely refers to natural themes or a peaceful environment.

- Characters and setting: Each panel depicts at least one character in a situation that suggests different contexts (e.g., home environment, nature, social interaction).
- Actions and emotions: Gestures, facial expressions, and the environment of each character may suggest specific stories or messages.
- Position and composition: The panels are arranged by colour, which may be deliberate, to reflect a spectrum of emotions or events.
- Cultural and artistic style: The style of the illustrations may refer to a particular culture, social theme, or artistic direction.

Analysing Marry’s work from a discourse-visual hybrid perspective reveals how colour symbolism, spatial arrangement, and facial expression serve as narrative devices. For instance, the dominance of cool hues such as blue and purple in certain panels may reflect introspection or overstimulation, while warmer tones like orange and yellow might represent moments of social connection or internal clarity. This visual language allows viewers to enter Marry’s world not through diagnostic labels, but through empathy and interpretation. What makes Marry’s story especially impactful is its meta-narrative function: it is not just a story about being autistic, but a story about discovering one’s identity, advocating for visibility, and reshaping public understanding. Her work confronts stereotypes about autism as a deficit and reframes it as diversity—calling for inclusive environments that honour sensory, emotional, and cognitive differences. In doing so, Marry’s narrative contributes to a broader redefinition of educational participation, where the goal is not conformity, but authenticity.

5. Conclusions

Storytelling in inclusive education is more than a pedagogical technique—it is a transformative linguistic and cultural act. By combining narrative form with critical reflection, educators can create spaces where all learners feel seen, heard, and valued. Narrative ethics refers to the ethical responsibility involved in telling, listening to, and interpreting stories —

especially when those stories reflect lived experiences, social injustice, or emotional vulnerability. In educational contexts, narrative ethics highlights the relational nature of storytelling: each story carries implications for how we see others, ourselves, and the world. Following this ethical lens, educators act not only as facilitators of narrative expression but also as guardians of safe, inclusive, and respectful storytelling environments. Students are encouraged to share authentically while respecting the stories of others. Storytelling thus becomes both a cognitive and moral activity—cultivating empathy, critical reflection, and responsible dialogue^[24].

The conclusions drawn from this study emphasize the need to view storytelling not only as a tool for teaching content, but as a medium through which language, identity, and belonging are actively co-constructed. Inclusive storytelling fosters dialogue, empathy, and mutual recognition. It allows learners from diverse linguistic and cognitive backgrounds—including those who are neurodivergent or speak English as an additional language—to participate meaningfully in educational discourse. In this way, storytelling promotes not just comprehension, but co-agency. Moreover, the use of linguistic features such as modality, deixis, and metaphor enables learners to express themselves with nuance and dignity. British English, with its cultural preference for indirectness, politeness, and subtlety, offers a unique linguistic environment for inclusive storytelling. Educators working within this context must be aware of both the affordances and limitations of such a narrative style. They should aim to balance clarity with creativity, and foster communication that is both socially sensitive and intellectually empowering. In practice, this means encouraging learners to experiment with narrative voice, to engage critically with dominant storylines, and to construct alternative narratives that reflect their lived realities. Storytelling becomes a way of resisting marginalization—of pushing back against the silencing of certain voices and experiences. When educators facilitate this kind of storytelling with linguistic awareness and cultural humility, they contribute to a pedagogy of recognition and transformation. Ultimately, the inclusive potential of storytelling lies in its ability to bring people together across differences. It invites shared reflection, mutual understanding, and a reimagining of what education can be. It requires educators to shift from delivering knowledge to co-creating meaning, and from managing classrooms to cul-

tivating communities. As such, storytelling is not simply an art or technique—it is a commitment to equity, dialogue, and humanity. All three analysed works are united by the theme of communication, understanding and perception of differences between people. Each element offers a unique perspective on how people interact with each other and how barriers to mutual understanding can be overcome.

- The sculptures of hands: They symbolise non-verbal communication, which is the universal language of understanding. Hand gestures refer to body language, sign language, or emotional expressions, which are often as important to communication as words.
- Illustrated panels: Represent a variety of stories, emotions and situations that are interpretable through colour scheme, context, and symbolism. They emphasize that different colours and scenes represent diverse human experiences and that understanding requires attention to detail and empathy. The poem “Nina’s Poem”: Powerfully articulates the call for acceptance and empathy for people who communicate in a different way. The poem emphasizes the importance of nonverbal cues and the ability to listen with the eyes and mind. It calls for respect for silence as part of communication and for patience in the process of understanding. It motivates students to take an objective view of themselves, e.g., in solving difficult tasks of problematic situations without negative effects on their self-concept, to break down the barriers of pupils’ defence mechanisms in solving difficult tasks, to lead pupils to be aware of their own “weaknesses” so that they do not develop feelings of inferiority^[25].

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Institutional Review Board Statement

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Data Availability Statement

The data used in this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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