



WHEN A STORY CHANGES THE CLASSROOM: DIGITAL NARRATIVES AS A TOOL FOR FOSTERING EMPATHY AND INCLUSION

KAD PRIČA PROMIJENI RAZRED: DIGITALNI NARATIVI KAO ALAT ZA RAZVOJ EMPATIJE I INKLUZIVNOSTI

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ABSTRACT

Digital narratives, particularly animated films, are increasingly recognized as powerful educational tools capable of fostering empathy and promoting inclusive values among school-age children. This study examined how viewing the animated film *Jonathan from Seagull Mountain* contributes to the development of empathy and understanding of diversity among primary school students in Bosnia and Herzegovina. A mixed-methods design was employed, integrating quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. The sample comprised 214 students aged 9 to 15 years from four cities (Tuzla, Sarajevo, Zenica, and Mostar), while a purposive subsample of 32 students participated in four focus groups. Data were collected through a structured post-viewing questionnaire and semi-structured focus group discussions. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data from focus group transcripts were analyzed through thematic analysis. Results indicate that the film elicited positive emotional responses in the majority of participants, with 78.6% expressing a desire to help the protagonist and 78.0% reporting increased motivation to support peers who are different from them. Girls demonstrated markedly higher levels of affective empathy than boys, with the most pronounced difference recorded on the item relating to sadness over the protagonist's exclusion (86.5% vs. 53.6%). Thematic analysis identified five main themes: emotional experience of the narrative, development of empathy and acceptance of diversity, peer support and moral responsibility, symbolic elements, and student recommendations for more inclusive school practices. The findings confirm the potential of digital narratives as a pedagogical tool for developing empathy and inclusive attitudes among primary school students.

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SAŽETAK

Digitalni narativi, posebno animirani filmovi, sve se više prepoznaju kao moćni obrazovni alati sposobni za poticanje empatije i promoviranje inkluzivnih vrijednosti među djecom školskog uzrasta. Ova studija ispitala je kako gledanje animiranog filma Jonathan s planine Galeb doprinosi razvoju empatije i razumijevanja različitosti među učenicima osnovnih škola u Bosni i Hercegovini. Korišten je dizajn mješovitih metoda, koji integrira kvantitativno i kvalitativno prikupljanje i analizu podataka. Uzorak je činilo 214 učenika u dobi od 9 do 15 godina iz četiri grada (Tuzla, Sarajevo, Zenica i Mostar), dok je svrsishodni poduzorak od 32 učenika učestvovao u četiri fokus grupe. Podaci su prikupljeni putem strukturiranog upitnika nakon gledanja i polustrukturiranih fokus grupa. Kvantitativni podaci analizirani su korištenjem deskriptivne statistike, dok su kvalitativni podaci iz transkripata fokus grupa analizirani tematskom analizom. Rezultati pokazuju da je film izazvao pozitivne emocionalne reakcije kod većine učesnika, pri čemu je 78,6% izrazilo želju da pomogne protagonistu, a 78,0% prijavilo povećanu motivaciju za podršku vršnjacima koji su drugačiji od njih. Djevojčice su pokazale znatno viši nivo afektivne empatije od dječaka, s najizraženijom razlikom zabilježenom na pitanju koje se odnosi na tugu zbog isključenosti protagonista (86,5% naspram 53,6%). Tematska analiza identificirala je pet glavnih tema: emocionalno iskustvo narativa, razvoj empatije i prihvatanje različitosti, vršnjačka podrška i moralna odgovornost, simbolički elementi i preporuke učenika za inkluzivnije školske prakse. Nalazi potvrđuju potencijal digitalnih narativa kao pedagoškog alata za razvoj empatije i inkluzivnih stavova među učenicima osnovne škole.

Ključne riječi: digitalni narativi, empatija, inkluzija, animirani film, učenici osnovne škole

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary education faces a growing challenge in developing students' socio-emotional competencies, particularly in the context of the increasingly present need for inclusive practices and acceptance of diversity. Empathy, as a key component of socio-emotional intelligence, represents the foundation for building positive interpersonal relationships and creating an inclusive school environment (Hoffman, 2000; Decety & Jackson, 2004). Research consistently demonstrates that students who develop empathic skills at an early school age exhibit greater social competence, less peer violence, and greater willingness to accept diversity in the school environment (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998; Zins et al., 2004). Digital art, and animated film in particular, has proven to be a powerful educational tool that can contribute to the development of empathy and understanding of diversity among children and young people (Marsh, 2006; Wohlwend, 2009). Unlike traditional didactic approaches, digital narratives, stories told through a combination of animation, imagery, sound, and text activate students' emotional engagement in a way that facilitates identification with characters and the internalization of prosocial values (Mar & Oatley, 2008). The narrative structure enables students to experience the perspectives of others through a safe emotional distance,

develop an understanding of different life experiences, and build a capacity for empathic reasoning (Green & Brock, 2000). This potential of digital narratives is particularly significant in the context of inclusive education, where the development of empathy towards students with differences is a key prerequisite for creating an environment of equal participation. Despite growing interest in the application of digital narratives in education, research examining their immediate impact on the development of empathy and inclusive attitudes among primary school students in the Bosnian and Herzegovinian educational context remains scarce. This study seeks to fill that gap by examining how viewing the animated film *Jonathan from Seagull Mountain* contributes to the development of empathy and understanding of diversity among primary school students. In this context, within the framework of the project *Inclusive Platform: Empathy, Inclusion and Equality through Digital Art*, the literary work *Jonathan from Seagull Mountain* by Jens Ahlbom was digitalized. The translation into Bosnian and its publication were undertaken by the Centre for Information of Persons with Disabilities Lotos from Tuzla. The animated film was produced by the Academy of Dramatic Arts at the University of Tuzla, thereby transforming the literary source into a digital narrative adapted to the educational context and age-related characteristics of primary school students. The film follows the story of Jonathan, a boy who differs from the other inhabitants of Seagull Mountain, a community whose members are all endowed with wings, and his struggle for acceptance, equal participation, and the discovery of his own identity and strength. The central metaphor of the film is wings as a symbol of ability, potential, and social acceptance, providing a powerful narrative framework for discussions about difference, exclusion, and the value of every person regardless of their characteristics.

Jonathan is the protagonist of the story, a boy born without wings in a society where flying is the norm. At the beginning of the story, he is a carefree child who does not reflect on his difference until Sara confronts him with reality. This moment marks a turning point in his emotional development from innocence to a painful awareness of his own otherness. Jonathan goes through stages of sadness, anger, and a sense of isolation, culminating in his courageous attempt to reach school on foot. This decision reveals his perseverance and refusal to surrender to pity. His transformation from a hurt boy to an inventor who builds wings symbolizes the power of human creativity and determination to overcome physical limitations. At the end of the story, Jonathan not only flies again but also plans to build staircases and bridges for others who cannot fly, demonstrating empathy and a vision of a more just society.

Sara is Jonathan's best friend, a character who embodies loyalty and emotional intelligence. Although she unintentionally hurts Jonathan with her remark about wings, her concern for him never wavers. Sara feels guilty about Jonathan's isolation, which is visible in her unhappiness when the other children learn to fly while he remains on the sidelines. Her visit to Jonathan after school and the idea of building wings demonstrate her creativity and deep care. Sara is not merely a companion, she is an active agent in Jonathan's recovery, a symbol of friendship that transcends superficial differences. Her role in the story emphasizes the importance of empathy and support in overcoming life's obstacles.

Jonathan's parents represent unconditional love and wisdom. His father is an optimist who sees potential for greatness in Jonathan, while his mother provides emotional security and

realism. When Jonathan discovers he has no wings, his mother speaks the key words: "You are just as good and just as important as anyone else." This message becomes Jonathan's emotional foundation. The parents do not attempt to change their son or shield him from reality, instead, they empower him to find his own solutions. Their participation in building wings demonstrates how family support can serve as a catalyst for innovation and courage. They are the quiet heroes of the story, symbols of parental love that does not negate difference but accepts and transforms it into strength.

The old man appears as a mentoring figure at Jonathan's darkest moment. His aged, weakened wings make him similar to Jonathan - he too lives "like a shadow down here on the ground." This character brings a crucial realization: Jonathan is not alone. The old man explains the systemic nature of the problem: society was designed by and for those who can fly, regardless of the needs of others. His wisdom and gentleness provide Jonathan not only with comfort but also with a broader context for understanding his own situation. He represents the voice of experience and quiet resignation, but also an inspiration for change. His presence suggests that difference is not an individual problem but a social challenge that requires collective action.

Krile is a minor character who represents a typical childish taunting tone but also a wider social attitude towards difference. His comment about Jonathan's "crazy wings" reveals superficiality and incomprehension, but is not malicious, it is a reflection of ignorance and discomfort in the face of otherness. Through Krile, the author subtly indicates how society often marginalizes those who are different, not out of malice but out of a lack of empathy and understanding.

The main aim of the study was to examine how viewing the animated film *Jonathan from Seagull Mountain* contributes to the development of empathy and understanding of diversity among primary school students. Specific objectives included: examining students' emotional reactions during and after viewing the film; identifying socio-emotional skills that students recognize or demonstrate after viewing the film; analyzing the elements of the story that students cite as most influential in shaping their attitudes; and collecting students' recommendations for improving inclusive practices at school.

In accordance with the stated objectives, the study was guided by the following research questions: How does viewing the digital narrative *Jonathan from Seagull Mountain* contribute to the development of empathy and understanding of diversity among students? What socio-emotional skills do students recognize or demonstrate after viewing the film? Which elements of the story do students cite as most influential in shaping their emotions, attitudes, and understanding? What recommendations do students propose for improving social relations and inclusive practices at school?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants

The sample consisted of primary school students aged 9 to 15 years from four cities in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Tuzla, Sarajevo, Zenica, and Mostar. A total of $N = 214$ students participated in the study, of whom 140 were male (65.4%) and 74 were female (34.6%). The

mean age of participants was 12.4 ± 1.4 years, with a minimum recorded age of 9 and a maximum of 15 years. In terms of grade structure, the sample included students from the fourth to the ninth grade. The most represented were seventh-grade students ($N = 68$; 31.8%), followed by eighth-grade students ($N = 58$; 27.1%) and sixth-grade students ($N = 37$; 17.3%). A smaller proportion of participants attended the fourth grade ($N = 20$; 9.3%) and the ninth grade ($N = 17$; 7.9%), while the smallest proportion was recorded among fifth-grade students ($N = 14$; 6.5%). For the purposes of the qualitative component of the study, an intentional subsample of participants was formed for focus groups from the total sample. Four focus groups were organized, one for each city included in the study, with 8 students in each group (total $N = 32$). Participant selection was based on the criterion of equal representation by gender and grade, thereby ensuring a balanced representation of different demographic profiles within the qualitative component of the study.

Design and Procedures

The study was designed as a mixed-methods study integrating quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis methods. This research approach was selected with the aim of achieving methodological triangulation, which enables a more comprehensive and deeper understanding of the studied phenomenon than would be possible through the application of a single methodological paradigm alone (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

Data collection was conducted in three consecutive steps. In the screening phase, students watched the animated film *Jonathan from Seagull Mountain*, lasting 18 minutes, which was used as the digital narrative in this study. The screening was organized in school premises under controlled conditions, without prior familiarization of students with the film's content, in order to minimize the potential influence of the researchers on participants' initial reactions. Immediately upon completion of the screening, participants independently completed a structured questionnaire about the viewed content, which took approximately 15 to 20 minutes. Within 30 minutes of the digital narrative screening, focus groups were conducted with purposively selected participants, with each session lasting between 45 and 60 minutes. The focus groups were led by researcher-moderators according to a pre-defined semi-structured protocol, and all sessions were recorded in audio format for the purpose of subsequent transcription and analysis. Prior to data collection, all necessary ethical approvals were obtained from the relevant institutions, and the parents or guardians of participants signed informed consent in accordance with prevailing ethical standards for research with children in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Measures

Two data collection instruments were constructed for the purposes of this study. **Student questionnaire** after viewing the films constructed with the aim of assessing participants' emotional reactions, socio-emotional competencies, and dominant attitudes after viewing the film. It consisted of three sections:

(a) demographic data - encompassing age, grade, and gender;

(b) open-ended questions - for collecting qualitative responses regarding the identification of key characters and relationships in the film, perceived challenges of the protagonist, personal interpretations of the film's message, identification with a particular character through a projective question, emotional reactions, and direct addresses to characters;

(c) closed-ended questions with a three-point response scale - measuring emotional reactions, motivation for prosocial behavior, acceptance of diversity, and self-efficacy.

The semi-structured focus group protocol was organized around three thematic sections. The first section, introductory questions, was aimed at activating memories and identifying the most memorable segments of the film, thereby establishing a common reference framework for further discussion. The second section, empathy and understanding of diversity, included questions about participants' emotional reactions, identification with characters, perspective-taking, and personal understanding of the concept of difference. The third section, socio-emotional skills and recommendations for school, addressed the transfer of insights gained through the film to participants' everyday school context, including reflection on peer relationships and students' proposals for improving inclusive practices at school.

The complete questionnaire and focus group protocol are available upon request from the corresponding author.

Statistical Analysis

Quantitative data from the structured questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods. For each item separately, frequencies, percentages, and response distributions were calculated. Statistical analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics 26.0 software.

Qualitative data from focus group transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis in accordance with the methodological guidelines of Braun and Clarke (2006). The analytical process comprised six phases: familiarization with the data, initial coding, searching for themes, reviewing and checking themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. Analysis was conducted with the support of the ATLAS.ti software package.

RESULTS

The results of the descriptive analysis of students' responses to the post-viewing questionnaire are presented in Table 1. The table shows that the majority of students reported a positive emotional experience during film viewing. 71.5% of students confirmed that they felt happy, while only 7.5% expressed uncertainty regarding their own emotional reactions. At the same time, a significant proportion of participants reported an empathic reaction to the exclusion of the protagonist: 65% of students stated that they felt sad when the community excluded Jonathan, while only 15% remained undecided. These findings suggest that the film's narrative activated both positive emotional reactions and affective empathy towards the character experiencing exclusion in the majority of participants. Items related to motivation to help and support others recorded the highest rates of affirmative responses across the entire instrument. As many as 78.6% of students confirmed that they wanted to help Jonathan or

provide him with support during the film, representing the highest proportion of positive responses among all seven items. Similarly, 78% of students stated that the film motivated them to be more attentive and supportive towards people who differ from them, with only 8.9% responding negatively, the lowest rate of negative responses in the entire instrument. These results suggest that the film fostered the internalization of prosocial values and awareness of one's own role in creating an inclusive environment in a large proportion of participants. The item concerning diversity as a strength of the community showed a somewhat more moderate but still high proportion of affirmative responses. 65.4% of students agreed with this statement, while 20.6% remained undecided. The relatively high proportion of undecided responses on this item may be interpreted as a reflection of the complexity of the concept of diversity for certain age groups, but also as a space for further pedagogical action towards developing inclusive attitudes. Two items related to self-efficacy and belief in one's own potential recorded somewhat lower but still above-average rates of positive responses. 72.4% stated that the film encouraged them to believe in themselves, while 58.4% of students confirmed that during viewing they felt capable of finding their own "wings" - that is, recognizing their own strengths. The latter item also recorded the highest rate of negative responses (23.8%), which may suggest that the metaphor of "wings" as a symbol of personal potential was more abstract or more difficult to transfer to personal experience for some students.

Table 1. Results of descriptive analysis of student responses to the post-viewing questionnaire

Item	Yes N (%)	No N (%)	Not sure N (%)
I felt happy while watching the film	153 (71,5)	45 (21,0)	16 (7,5)
I felt sad when the community excluded Jonathan	139 (65,0)	43 (20,0)	32 (15,0)
I wanted to help Jonathan or give him support	168 (78,6)	23 (10,7)	23 (10,7)
The film motivated me to be more attentive and supportive towards those who are different	167 (78,0)	19 (8,9)	28 (13,1)
The film encouraged me to believe in myself	155 (72,4)	34 (15,9)	25 (11,7)
It is good to be different from others; diversity is a strength of the community	140 (65,4)	30 (14,0)	44 (20,6)
I felt that I too can find "my wings" (my strengths)	125 (58,4)	51 (23,8)	38 (17,8)

The analysis of the distribution of students' affirmative responses by grade, presented in Table 2, reveals several patterns worthy of attention. Eighth-grade students consistently recorded lower rates of affirmative responses on nearly all items compared with other grade groups. The most pronounced deviation was recorded on items relating to positive emotional experience during film viewing (51.7%), sadness over the exclusion of the protagonist (51.7%), and finding one's own "wings" (44.8%), with the last item recording the lowest rate of affirmative responses of all grade groups across all items. This pattern may indicate that older students experience animated content more critically or with greater emotional reserve, which is consistent with the developmental characteristics of the pre-adolescent and early adolescent period, marked by a rise in critical thinking and distancing from content perceived

as childlike. In contrast, fifth- and ninth-grade students recorded exceptionally high rates of affirmative responses on the item concerning the desire to help the protagonist (100%), and ninth-grade students also on the item concerning belief in oneself (100%), suggesting that the film, despite age-related differences in emotional openness, nonetheless elicited a strong motivational response in some older students. Fourth-grade students recorded the lowest rate of affirmative responses on the item about finding one's own "wings" (50.0%), which may reflect the difficulty of abstracting the metaphor and transferring its symbolic meaning to personal experience among younger students.

Table 2. Distribution of students' affirmative responses by grade

Item	4th grade (N=20)	5th grade	6th grade	7th grade	8th grade	9th grade
I felt happy while watching the film	70,0%	100,0%	78,4%	80,9%	51,7%	64,7%
I felt sad when the community excluded Jonathan	50,0%	78,6%	73,0%	72,1%	51,7%	70,6%
I wanted to help Jonathan or give him support	95,0%	100,0%	75,7%	86,8%	53,4%	100,0%
The film motivated me to be more attentive and supportive towards those who are different	60,0%	92,9%	91,9%	83,8%	63,8%	82,4%
The film encouraged me to believe in myself	55,0%	71,4%	78,4%	79,4%	58,6%	100,0%
It is good to be different from others; diversity is a strength of the community	65,0%	64,3%	89,2%	61,8%	50,0%	82,4%
I felt that I too can find "my wings" (my strengths)	50,0%	50,0%	75,7%	60,3%	44,8%	76,5%

Table 3 presents the distribution of students' affirmative responses by gender. Analysis of the response distribution reveals the most pronounced differences on the dimension of affective empathy. On the item relating to sadness over the exclusion of the protagonist, 86.5% of girls responded affirmatively compared with 53.6% of boys - a difference of almost 33 percentage points, representing the most pronounced gender difference in the entire instrument. Similarly, girls recorded higher rates of affirmative responses on items concerning the desire to help the protagonist (89.2% vs. 72.9%), motivation for more attentive behavior towards people who are different (83.8% vs. 75%), and belief in oneself (81.1% vs. 67.9%). The only item on which gender differences are practically absent is the item about finding one's own "wings" (59.5% of girls vs. 57.9% of boys), suggesting that the experience of self-efficacy prompted by the film was equally present regardless of participants' gender.

Table 3. Distribution of students' affirmative responses by gender

Item	Male (N=140)	Female (N=74)
I felt happy while watching the film	70,0%	74,3%
I felt sad when the community excluded Jonathan	53,6%	86,5%
I wanted to help Jonathan or give him support	72,9%	89,2%
The film motivated me to be more attentive and supportive towards those who are different	75,0%	83,8%
The film encouraged me to believe in myself	67,9%	81,1%
It is good to be different from others; diversity is a strength of the community	62,9%	70,3%
I felt that I too can find "my wings" (my strengths)	57,9%	59,5%

Viewed as a whole, the results of the descriptive analysis suggest that viewing the animated film *Jonathan from Seagull Mountain* elicited positive emotional reactions in the majority of participants, stimulated empathy towards the excluded character, and motivated prosocial behavior and acceptance of diversity. Items recording somewhat lower rates of affirmative responses, such as the self-efficacy items, open space for deeper interpretation within the qualitative analysis.

Thematic analysis of the focus group transcripts identified five main themes, which are presented in Table 4 together with accompanying codes.

Table 4. Results of thematic coding of focus group content

Theme	Codes
Emotional experience of the story	Sadness/grief; Exclusion; Happiness/relief; Curiosity
Development of empathy and acceptance of diversity	Empathy; Change of perspective; Acceptance of diversity; Condemnation of mockery
Peer support and moral responsibility	Support for a peer; Loyalty of friendship; Peer responsibility
Elements of symbolism	Old man as a motivator; Wings as bridges
The old man as motivator; Wings as bridges	Recommendations for a more inclusive school Accessibility; Special support; Smaller classes; Assistive technology; Classroom climate

The first theme encompasses the rich spectrum of emotional reactions that students expressed during the discussion about the film. The dominant emotional reaction was sadness and grief over Jonathan's position in the community, with students spontaneously verbalizing empathy towards the character ("This film was very sad for me..."; "I felt sorry..."; "Sad when Jonathan was left out..."). Students clearly recognized and articulated the protagonist's experience of exclusion, indicating an understanding of how social marginalization affects an individual's emotional well-being ("He was left out... the children mocked him..."; "He must have been lonely..."). At the same time, the narrative arc of the story from exclusion to triumph generated in students a feeling of happiness and relief as a counterbalance to initial sadness

("...but at the end also happy at the same time"; "Happy when he finally managed to fly"). Some participants also expressed curiosity as an accompanying emotion during viewing ("I was very curious... about what would happen next"), indicating the strong narrative engagement that the film managed to elicit.

The second theme encompasses the widest range of codes and represents the central socio-emotional dimension of the analysis. Students spontaneously expressed empathy towards the protagonist, with some participants describing the ability to take his perspective ("I felt sorry, I empathized with him..."; "The film showed me how she feels..."). Particularly significant is the finding relating to change of perspective, where some students articulated the need to view others' experiences as a general life principle ("To look at life through everyone's eyes..."). Acceptance of diversity as a value manifested through students' statements relativizing the protagonist's perceived difference ("That is not such a great difference"; "That he is equal and the same as others..."). Students also expressed moral condemnation of mockery, parallel with their own school reality ("And what I saw... they threw stones at him, which is terrible...").

The third theme groups students' statements relating to the recognition and valuing of peer support as a key resource in coping with exclusion. The character of Sara was consistently recognized as an example of loyal friendship and unconditional support ("Sara was a very good friend..."; "She did not abandon him..."). Students emphasized loyalty and commitment as central characteristics of authentic friendship ("They were actually very close..."; "She did not betray him..."), demonstrating an understanding that true friendship implies consistency and reliability in difficult situations. At the same time, some participants expressed a sense of personal moral responsibility towards peers experiencing exclusion ("I will try to explain to them that they should not do that anymore..."), indicating a transfer of learned values from the film context.

The fourth theme encompasses students' statements that testify to their ability to recognize and interpret the symbolic dimensions of the narrative. The figure of the old man was recognized as a key motivational resource in Jonathan's development, with students noting that the old man provided the protagonist with greater emotional support than the immediate family ("The old man motivated Jonathan and gave him hope..."; "The old man gave more motivation than the parents..."). Particularly analytically interesting is the finding relating to the reinterpretation of the symbolism of wings, which some students did not experience exclusively as an object of longing but symbolically transformed into bridges and accessibility infrastructure ("He wished he had wings to get past all those obstacles... instead he figured out how to build bridges or some staircases..."), indicating the capacity for creative and constructive thinking in the context of inclusion.

The fifth theme encompasses proposals that students formulated for improving inclusive practices in the school environment, demonstrating the ability to generalize insights gained through the film to concrete educational contexts. Students' proposals ranged from physical accessibility of school premises ("Add a ramp... so they would not have to drag the boy in a wheelchair over the stairs") to organizational solutions such as forming smaller class groups ("There are 27 of us... that is too many for us too...") and introducing special support spaces for students who need them ("A special room... for children who need help..."). Some students pointed to the potential of assistive technology as a means of support ("More devices...

technology..."), while others emphasized the importance of improving classroom climate and mutual respect as the foundation of an inclusive environment ("They need to respect each other a little more..."). Such a diversity of proposals testifies to the fact that students experienced the film not only as an emotional experience but also as an impetus for critical reflection on the inclusiveness of their own school environment.

DISCUSSION

Contribution of the digital narrative to the development of empathy and understanding of diversity

Quantitative data show that 65% expressed empathy towards Jonathan by feeling sad about his exclusion, and 78.6% of students confirmed that the film stimulated their desire to help Jonathan. A high percentage of students (78.0%) stated that the film prompted more attentive behavior towards those who are different, and 65.4% of students agreed that diversity is a strength of the community. This was further confirmed by qualitative analysis, which reveals the depth and complexity of these reactions. Particularly significant is the emergence of "affective empathy" which means students did not merely intellectually understand Jonathan's emotions but also experienced them themselves, which is consistent with Hoffman's (2000) theory of empathic development that emphasizes the importance of affective resonance. Students' statements such as "I felt as if I were going through it too" demonstrate a higher level of empathic identification that goes beyond mere understanding. Qualitative analysis also reveals the phenomenon of "projected empathy": students expressed a desire to actively help Jonathan, which represents a transition from empathic understanding to empathic concern (Eisenberg, 2000). These findings are consistent with the theoretical model of Mar and Oatley (2008) and Bal and Veltkamp (2013), according to which narrative texts enable the reader or viewer to simulate the mental states and emotional experiences of others, thereby developing the capacity for perspective-taking. However, it is important to note that identification with the character of Jonathan was selective in nature. Students identified with Jonathan's character qualities and his triumph over challenges, but without consciously adopting his physical difference. When subsequently asked whether they were aware that Jonathan had no wings and whether they themselves would want to live without wings, they responded negatively. This finding points to an important distinction between admiration for a character and genuine perspective-taking. Students internalized Jonathan's virtues as desirable but were not prepared to fully place themselves in the position of a person living with a physical difference. This pattern of selective identification raises an important pedagogical question about the depth of empathy that narrative media can stimulate, and points to the need for additional structured interventions that would guide students towards deeper forms of perspective-taking. Analysis of response distribution shows that the most pronounced differences between girls and boys were recorded on the dimension of affective empathy, which is consistent with the findings of previous research that consistently indicate higher levels of affective empathy in girls at primary school age (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998; Mestre et al., 2009). The most significant difference appears on the item relating to sadness over the exclusion of the protagonist, where 86.5% of girls responded affirmatively compared with

53.6% of boys, a difference of almost 33 percentage points representing the most pronounced gender difference in the entire instrument. This finding suggests that girls show a greater tendency for affective response to another's emotionally difficult experience, which is consistent with theoretical positions on developmental and socialization factors that shape empathic capacities (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998). Similar patterns are confirmed on other items of an affective nature: girls record higher rates of affirmative responses on items concerning the desire to help the protagonist (89.2% vs. 72.9%), motivation for more attentive behavior towards people who are different (83.8% vs. 75%), and belief in oneself (81.1% vs. 67.9%). These percentages suggest that the film content stimulated in girls not only emotional resonance but also prosocial intentions and intrinsic motivation for behavioral change. An exception to this pattern is the item about finding one's own "wings", on which gender differences are practically absent (59.5% of girls vs. 57.9% of boys). This finding suggests that the experience of self-efficacy prompted by the film was equally present regardless of participants' gender, which may reflect the universality of the narrative message about personal growth and acceptance of one's own particularities. It is possible that the metaphor of "finding wings" resonated with the developmental needs of both groups, independently of gender-specific patterns of empathic responding (Mestre et al., 2009).

One of the most significant findings of this study is the way in which students reconceptualize diversity after viewing the film. Quantitative data show that 65.4% of students accept diversity as a strength of the community, while qualitative analysis reveals the depth of this transformation. Thematic analysis shows that students move from a superficial understanding of diversity ("we are all different") to a more sophisticated perspective that recognizes diversity as a source of innovation, creativity, and shared strength. This is consistent with theories of social diversity that emphasize the value of heterogeneous groups (Page, 2007).

Identified socio-emotional skills

The most pronounced was the ability to recognize and name emotions, both one's own and those of others, which represents a foundational component of socio-emotional competence (Zins et al., 2004). Students articulated complex, ambivalent emotional reactions ("I felt mixed emotions but also curiosity about what would happen"; "Sadness, happiness, and at the end all my emotions mixed together"), demonstrating a more developed emotional literacy than would be expected on the basis of mere cognitive processing of the film content. Prosocial motivation as a socio-emotional skill is particularly pronounced in the data, 78.0% of students stated that the film motivated them to more attentive behavior towards people who are different, and qualitative analysis of the focus group also revealed statements of moral responsibility towards peers ("I will try to explain to them that they should not do that anymore..."). Particularly encouraging is students' ability to recognize and name discriminatory behavior. Statements such as "That is not fair" and "They excluded him because he could not fly like them" demonstrate the development of critical awareness of social justice, which is crucial for creating an inclusive society (Adams et al., 2007).

Influential elements of the story in shaping emotions, attitudes, and understanding

Analysis of responses to open-ended questions in the questionnaire and statements from the focus group identified three narrative elements as particularly influential in shaping students' emotional and attitudinal reactions. The first and most influential element was the character of Jonathan as a protagonist with whom students could identify. Jonathan's struggle for acceptance and equal participation was recognized as a universal human experience where almost half of the students expressed a desire to be exactly that character, citing his courage and perseverance as key qualities ("Jonathan, because despite all the obstacles he managed to achieve his dream"). The second significant element was the character of Sara as a paradigmatic example of loyal friendship and prosocial behavior. Sara was consistently recognized as a symbol of unconditional support ("Sara was a very good friend..."; "She did not abandon him..."), and a significant number of students expressed a desire for her to be a model for their own behavior towards peers. The third element that stood out as particularly influential was the symbolism of wings as a metaphor for ability, potential, and social acceptance. The metaphor of "finding wings" proved exceptionally powerful in stimulating self-reflection and developing confidence in students. Quantitative data show that 58.4% of students feel that they too can find "their wings", while qualitative data reveal how students concretely apply this metaphor to their own lives. This is consistent with theories of positive psychology that emphasize the importance of recognizing and developing personal strengths (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). One of the most important findings of this study is that empathy elicited by the film leads to concrete intentions for behavioral change. Quantitative data show that 78% of students plan to be more attentive and supportive towards those who are different, while qualitative analysis reveals specific ways in which students plan to apply the lessons learned.

Recommendations for improving inclusive practices at school

The recommendations that students formulated in the focus groups represent one of the most valuable findings of this study, as they testify to the ability to generalize insights gained through the film to concrete educational contexts. The diversity and concreteness of the proposals : encompassing physical accessibility of school premises ("Add a ramp..."; "...so they would not have to drag the boy in a wheelchair over the stairs"), organizational solutions such as smaller class groups ("There are 27 of us... too many..."), the introduction of special support spaces ("A special room... for children who need help..."), the application of assistive technology ("More devices... technology..."), and the improvement of classroom climate ("They need to respect each other a little more...") indicates that students experienced the film not only as an emotional experience but also as an impetus for critical reflection on the inclusiveness of their own school environment. Particularly significant is the fact that students formulated recommendations on multiple levels, from physical infrastructure to social climate, suggesting that the film's narrative stimulated a multidimensional understanding of inclusion as a concept encompassing both the material and relational aspects of the school environment. This finding supports arguments in favor of using digital narratives as a

pedagogical tool that not only develops empathy but also stimulates critical thinking and civic engagement among primary school students (Ohler, 2013).

CONCLUSION

The study findings, obtained through a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, provide insight into the emotional, attitudinal, and prosocial effects of the digital narrative as an educational medium.

Quantitative analysis shows that the film stimulated positive emotional reactions in the majority of students, affective empathy towards the excluded protagonist, and motivation for prosocial behavior. High rates of affirmative responses on items concerning the desire to provide help (78.6%) and motivation for more attentive behavior towards people who are different (78.0%) indicate that the film's narrative successfully activated empathic concern as a higher level of empathic response. Analysis by grade and gender revealed that eighth-grade students consistently recorded lower rates of affirmative responses compared with other age groups, and that girls demonstrate markedly higher levels of affective empathy than boys, which is consistent with findings from the broader literature on gender differences in empathy. Qualitative analysis of the open-ended questionnaire questions identified three dominant thematic clusters in the understanding of the film's message: belief in oneself and perseverance, acceptance of diversity and equal value of all persons, and the value of friendship and mutual support. The projective question about identification with a character revealed a particularly analytically valuable finding about the selectivity of perspective-taking, whereby students identified with Jonathan's character qualities and his triumph but were not prepared to adopt his physical difference, indicating a distinction between admiration for a character and full perspective-taking.

Thematic analysis of the focus groups identified five themes: emotional experience of exclusion and relief at the story's end, development of empathy and acceptance of diversity, peer support and moral responsibility, elements of symbolism, and student recommendations for a more inclusive school. Particularly valuable is the finding that students spontaneously reinterpreted the film's central metaphor "wings as symbols of accessibility and inclusive infrastructure" and formulated concrete and multidimensional recommendations for improving inclusive practices at school, ranging from physical accessibility of the premises to improving classroom climate and mutual respect.

Viewed as a whole, the findings of this study confirm the potential of digital narratives as a pedagogical tool for developing empathy and inclusive attitudes among primary school students. The animated film *Jonathan from Seagull Mountain* proved to be an educational medium capable of activating emotional engagement, stimulating reflection on diversity, and motivating prosocial behavior, making it a valuable resource for teachers and professional associates working on the development of an inclusive school culture.

Although this study provides valuable insights, it is important to acknowledge its limitations: Time frame - the study measured students' immediate reactions after viewing the film, and the long-term effects on behavior and attitudes were not examined. A longitudinal study could provide insight into the durability of the changes the film elicits.

Social desirability - there is a possibility that students provided responses they believed to be socially desirable, particularly in the context of group discussions. Future research could use anonymous methods or behavioral observation to minimize this effect.

Cultural context - the study was conducted in a specific cultural and educational context. Generalization of findings to other contexts requires caution. Replication of the study in different cultural settings could provide insight into the universality or specificity of the findings.

Inclusion of a control group - the study did not include a control group that would not watch the film. This makes it difficult to establish a causal relationship between watching the film and the development of empathy. Future experimental studies with a control group could provide stronger evidence for the effectiveness of the intervention.

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