

MGLU3504
English 2 module 2
Spring semester 2022

FOU THESIS
Representations of Disability in Norwegian EFL
Textbooks in Primary School

Elin E. Nilsen

Candidate number: 10008

Supervisor: Dr. Libe García Zarranz

16.05.2022

Preface

I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Libe García Zarranz for guiding me through the entire process of writing, and for making the idea I had into an actual thesis. I would also like to thank her for calming me down when this thesis seemed impossible to write, and for supporting my ideas and thoughts all the way from start to finish. I also want to thank the other professors and students in the faculty that have helped me in some way or another. Especially my classmates who have motivated me to come to class, where I have gotten to discuss my ideas and listen to their propositions.

Lastly, I am also thanking my family and friends for supporting me through this process, for both taking the time to read and comment on my thesis as well as supporting me mentally.

Table of contents

ABSTRACT	1
INTRODUCTION.....	2
METHODOLOGY.....	4
PRESENTATION OF TEXTBOOKS & MULTIMODALITY IN THE EFL CLASSROOM.....	4
METHOD OF TEXTUAL ANALYSIS	5
CRITICAL HUMILITY AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS.....	5
THEORETICAL BACKGROUND	7
TERMINOLOGY	7
SOCIAL- AND MEDICAL MODEL OF DISABILITY	7
INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION IN THE ENGLISH SUBJECT CURRICULUM	8
REPRODUCING VS. RE-SEEING DISABILITY.....	10
CULTURAL INTOLERANCE IN THE EFL CLASSROOM	11
FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS OF DATA COLLECTION	12
VISIBLE REPRESENTATIONS OF DISABILITY	12
IMPLICIT REPRESENTATIONS OF DISABILITY	13
NARRATIVE AND STORYLINES IN EFL TEXTBOOKS	14
DISCUSSION OF AND REFLECTION ON RESEARCH FINDINGS.....	15
VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE REPRESENTATIONS	15
STEREOTYPING OF DISABILITY THROUGH REPETITION.....	16
DISABILITY AS A TRAGEDY TROPE.....	17
ACCESSIBILITY AS A BARRIER IN THE EFL CLASSROOM	18
LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND DIRECTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH.....	19
CONCLUSION	20
REFERENCES	22
APPENDICES	

Abstract

It is very common to have a disability or to know somebody who does, and this group of people encounter barriers in the society that everyone needs to learn about. This way we educators can minimize obstacles and help prevent further discrimination. Based on this, educators need to reflect on how the topic is taught in schools and what the outcome of this could be. The main objective for my thesis is to analyze the representation of disability in Norwegian textbooks in primary- and secondary education. I have employed the method of textual analysis to examine and discuss English subject textbooks used in Norway called *Engelsk 5* and *Engelsk 6* (Solberg & Unnerud, 2020). These books follow the English subject curriculum LK20, so I have looked at patterns of inclusion and exclusion in the Norwegian curriculum as part of my theoretical background. I have also drawn from theory that presents different models to understand disability (Leduc, 2020), to analyze my data and discuss the outcome of my findings. This research study hopes to shed light on how disability is treated in Norwegian schools, and the effects this has on the students.

Introduction

Disability is a broad and complex term, and the definition of the word varies depending on the context where the term is being used. Therefore, it is useful to include some definitions for clarification. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2022) states that disability refers to the interaction between individuals with a health condition and personal and environmental factors. Meanwhile, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in America (2020) describes disability as “...any condition of the body or mind that makes it more difficult for the person with the condition to do certain activities and interact with the world around them” (par.1). We can see that both definitions include disability as a term consisting of two main factors: health, or medical factor, and social factor. Bufdir (2022), the Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family affairs, have conducted research that concludes that between 15-18% of the population between 15-66 years old are considered disabled. The WHO (2022) supports these numbers and adds that it is increasing “due in part to population ageing and an increase in the prevalence of noncommunicable diseases” (par.1). This shows that disability is something that affects a great part of our society on a personal level. A group this big should not be marginalized and should be included in education to shed light on diversity in our society. Teaching children about disability could be a way to help create a society that respects and facilitates the inclusion of disabled people.

My motivation for choosing to write about disability in ESL textbooks was that I wanted to employ my knowledge from studying the field of special pedagogy to explore a topic within the English subject. I also felt like I would enjoy writing and learning about disability because it is something I have experience with because of different people in my life, and I wanted to learn more about disability in regard to the English EFL classroom. I was also curious to see if this was a topic that had been researched at length, but quickly learned that there is a need to continue the research in a Norwegian educational context. This motivated me to do my own research. Lastly, I also felt motivated to write a thesis that would treat the topic respectfully, and I aimed to do this through reflecting on my positionality as an author and the ethical dimension of my thesis. I will be discussing and reflecting further on this in my methodology, as this is a central part of my study.

Ethical questions also relate to terminology, which I have developed a subsection on under the theoretical background section. The theoretical frameworks I have found and used in this thesis all use identity-first language and employ the term “disabled people”. The authors of these sources have all specialized in the field of disability, and/or identify as

disabled themselves. Some examples are Colin Barnes, Nicole Marcotić and Patricia A. Dunn. Based on this, I feel that it is safe to utilize the term “disabled people” in my thesis, and that this will come across as respectful and inclusive for the people that identify as disabled.

In terms of purpose, my thesis aims to analyze the representation of disability in textbooks in primary- and secondary education. My research question is thus as follows:

- How is disability represented in EFL English subject textbooks?

I hope that this study will allow further research on how these representations shape students' learning outcomes in the primary classroom. The EFL classroom in particular allows for discussion of different abilities and resources that educators have available. This is because English, as it is a lingua franca, allows for insight into how disability is treated around the world. This means that you have the opportunity to choose textbooks that are written with disability in mind, and that you have access to resources such as authentic books written by authors that have knowledge about the topic and that engages with the topic critically. The Norwegian EFL classroom should be a space where students with different abilities feel included, and the lack of textbooks that represent disability is a barrier that could make the integration of disabled students difficult.

Methodology

In the following section, I will present the methodology used in my thesis. This involves presentations of selected textbooks and criteria for the choice of materials, reflection around multimodality and the method of textual analysis, as well as ethical considerations and a discussion of critical humility (Cariou, 2020).

Presentation of Textbooks & Multimodality in the EFL classroom

I want to briefly introduce the textbooks I will be analyzing before I move on to look at multimodality and the ethical dimension of the thesis. To find my data, I have decided to look at the books *Engelsk 5* and *Engelsk 6*. Both textbooks are written by Cecilie Solberg and Hege Dahl Unnerud (2020) and published by Cappelen Damm. The textbooks are written for 5th and 6th grade, and a key point to make is that both books are written in coherence with the English subject curriculum LK20, also known as fagfornyelsen (Solberg & Unnerud, 2020, p. 210). It is important to keep this in mind when I discuss disability in the English subject curriculum later in my thesis.

The textbooks I have analyzed contain both written text and images, so multimodality is a central term to understand how disability is represented. Eva Maagerø and Elise Seip Tønnessen (2021) claim that “The text world of today is multimodal, and the texts students meet in, and outside school are multimodal, consisting of language and other meaning-making resources such as images, colors, sound, music, numbers, graphs, etc” (p. 28). This means that it is crucial for students to meet multimodality in school, so they are prepared to engage in the multimodal world. Maagerø and Seip (2021) also add that multimodal literacy brings our attention to issues of power and ideology that shape all modes of communication, and that students need to understand that texts construe different representations of the world. It is therefore central to introduce multimodality in the EFL classroom to teach students about issues of power and ideology in the English-speaking world, not just in Norway. This gives them the tool to understand and engage in communication better. This is also relevant to my study because discussing representations of disability does in fact involve questions of power and ideology, as disability has a history of being disregarded and discriminated against.

Method of Textual Analysis

The method I have chosen for my FOU thesis is textual analysis because I am interested in learning more about disability and how the topic of disability is presented in primary school resources such as textbooks. I also believe that textbook analysis has provided me with information about how the topic is being introduced and taught to our students. Alan McKee (2003) describes textual analysis as a way for researchers to gather information about how other human beings make sense of the world. As McKee (2020) claims,

We interpret texts (...) in order to try and obtain a sense of the ways in which, in particular cultures at particular times, people make sense of the world around them. And, importantly, by seeing the variety of ways in which it is possible to interpret reality, we also understand our own cultures better because we can start to see the limitations and advantages of our own sense-making practices. (p. 1)

McKee (2003) continues to describe textual analysis as a methodology, a data-gathering process, for those researchers who want to understand the ways in which members of various cultures and subcultures make sense of who they are, and of how they fit into the world in which they live. In my case, I have employed this method in my qualitative research study to analyze the representations of disabled people. Textual analysis has allowed me to examine the images and the narratives in the textbooks as multimodal texts. The images explicitly or implicitly carry meaning, and gives us information about how disability is treated.

Research related to textbooks is also described by Annekatrin Bock (2018) as a broad, multidisciplinary area, and “an extremely complex, multi-dimensional and multi-faceted undertaking” (p. 58). In other words, textual analysis is a complex umbrella term, and in my case, I have focused on the text as multimodal. This means that I have looked at both written text and images to analyze the representation in the textbooks. Disability is a complex topic and cannot always be seen by others. Therefore, it is important to look at both the textual part of the text as well as images, to see if various abilities/disabilities are presented in an authentic/complex way or if they are misrepresented or presented in a stereotypical way.

Critical Humility and Ethical considerations

Métis scholar Warren Cariou (2020) writes about the term critical humility and describes it as “the first requirement for someone seeking knowledge or asking for advice. In a sense, then, it can be understood as the basis of education, the gateway to knowledge” (p. 3). In other words, critical humility is a term that is very relevant for this thesis where I aim to

educate both myself and others further on the topic of disability. Cariou (2020) continues to describe that critical humility can be understood as a way of strength, a mode of engaging with the world and with other people without ego getting in the way (p. 6) and clarifies that it revolves around the fact that there is not one authoritative way of telling a story and that many other versions will be equally valuable (p. 4). My takeaway from this is that when writing a thesis where you critically engage with different sources, you have to engage with them in a way that is not egocentric and that only acknowledges one set of opinions. It is important to remember that other opinions, reflections, and views are just as valuable as mine, and that my way of understanding certain issues might not be the key or the only way of understanding them. My goal is to stay humble, and I have kept this in mind during the process of writing my thesis. I will come back to this in the end of my discussion of and reflection on research findings, where I discuss the limitations of my study.

The ethical dimension of my thesis is very important, as I have chosen a topic that concerns a specific minority group. Therefore, ethical considerations need to be addressed. Firstly, I want to address my position as an author. This is important for how I interpret and perceive different findings I have come across while writing this thesis and researching the topic. When it comes to me being an outsider because I do not have any disabilities, looking into a topic I have very little personal experience with may lead me to find issues an insider would not have classified as problematic. Also, it could cause me to overlook things that an insider would not have overlooked because of their familiarity with the topic. I want to shed light on the American disability rights slogan, which is “nothing about us without us”. In the book *Keywords for disability studies*, Michael Bérubé (2015) points out what the slogan calls attention to, which is the fact that social policies and speech acts have been carried out by people without disabilities, whether benevolently or maliciously (p. 151). As mentioned, I am a person without disabilities, and so you could argue history repeats itself. Therefore, in my thesis, I have focused on theoretical sources written or approved by people with disabilities and done thorough research that attempts to do justice to the topic and the people included in this community. This way, I can engage in the topic as ethically as I can, despite my outsider position. As a start, I want to look at terminology, as this is a central aspect to my methodology and to my theory. Therefore, I want to start the following section by reflecting on the use of terms.

Theoretical background

In the following section I want to look at theory that is relevant to reflect, discuss and analyze the findings in my textbook analysis. I am firstly looking at terminology, before I move on to the social- and medical model of disability, inclusion and exclusion in LK20, reproducing vs. reseeing disability and lastly cultural intolerance in the EFL classroom.

Terminology

When looking into a subject you are unfamiliar with, it is crucial to address which terminology to use. This way I can explore the topic without being insensitive or disrespectful to the people in this community. It is also necessary to explain different terms that are going to be used frequently in this thesis, and to reflect on the meaning of these, since “...the meanings we attribute to disability are shifting, elusive and sometimes contradictory. Disability encompasses a broad range of bodily, cognitive, and sensory differences and capacities” (Serlin, Reiss, & Adams, 2015, p. 5). This quote contributes to show how disability is an umbrella term that includes a wide range of differences and capacities that different individuals can relate to in various ways. Many of us have set ideas on what disability is and what it should or should not look like, so it is important to demolish these thoughts and make place for new and more inclusive ways of thinking. Disability scholar Nicole Markotić also writes about disability and terminology (2021). She discusses definitions of the term where disability implies “inability, incapacity” or “weakness” (p. 60). In other words, disability as an independent term can be seen as hurtful or harmful when not used correctly. It is important to keep this in mind when using it to prevent spreading further negative attitudes towards the community and the people that identify as disabled.

Social- and medical model of disability

Two models that represent different ways of seeing disability are the social- and medical models. Amanda Leduc (2020) describes both of these models claiming that the social model “...holds that the disability of individuals is, in fact, maintained by systemic barriers, exclusion and negative attitudes towards these disabilities more than the physical limitations of the conditions themselves” (p. 19). In other words, the disabled person is not limited by its disability but rather by the society surrounding the individual. The medical model stands in contrast to the social model. According to Leduc (2020), the medical model links a body directly to a diagnosis and places emphasis on the intervention of medicine as a way of solving or eradication the particular disability or condition. She continues to write that

disability almost always is the villain in the medical model, and that disability is viewed as “different” because there is an assumption that there is one single way of moving through the world (Leduc, p.20, 2020). One could thus say that the medical model labels disability as “a fault”, and often looks to cure the disabled person so that they fit in our version of the world better. This relates to my project, because the textbooks I have analyzed seem to reproduce this medical model. One could also argue that even though many disabled people get support in the classroom, others experience classrooms designed in ableist ways.

Vidal-Albelda & Martínez-Bello (2016) discuss visual representations of disability in textbooks. Looking at visual representation can be a tool in textbook analysis, as the images can tell us if disabled people are represented in a way that is inclusive or not. The way the different bodies are presented can give us information about the attitudes of the culture surrounding the body, and this also inform us about what is being taught to the newer generations. Vidal-Albelda & Martínez-Bello (2016) further argue that “The body as social construction is related to media and especially the visual representation of the body could create the idea of a normal body silencing another ways of embodiments” (p. 2). In other words, the culture surrounding the body is a key part of representation and misrepresentation. In other words, the lack of representation of disabled people could create a false idea of the “normal body”. We need to reflect on what kind of information about disabled people we introduce to the students in the EFL classroom. What do we communicate to them? Do we teach them to think critically through these representations? This can be connected to the social model of disability, as the focus is on social barriers, such as negative attitudes and exclusion. Lastly, the resources teachers use in the EFL classroom matter, and textbooks such as the one I have analyzed offer problematic representations that could be detrimental for the pupils. Because of this, it is key that the curriculum offers guidelines and core values that make sure there are authentic and positive representations. Thus, I will be looking at inclusion and exclusion in the English subject curriculum LK20 next.

Inclusion and Exclusion in the English Subject Curriculum

Inclusion and exclusion are two important terms that we use when discussing how disability is represented in texts. These terms can both be used on a lot of different levels when it comes to disability but based on the focus area of my thesis, and I have chosen to discuss inclusion and exclusion physically and socially. On the physical level, the focus is on whether disabled people are included in images in textbooks or not, and for example, if the

environment around the disabled character in the pictures has physical barriers or not. Socially, one would look at who the disabled person is surrounded by and if they are welcomed into society in equal terms as able-bodied people. Colin Barnes & Geof Mercer (2003) write about exclusion as a form of social oppression (p. 42). Along similar lines, Markotić (2021) points out that disabled bodies historically have been feared, ignored, despised and/or rejected in society and its culture (p. 61). She also uses the term “ableist”, which is an important notion when it comes to inclusion and exclusion. Ableism can be described as discrimination against disabled people and is a notion that can help us explain exclusion against disabled people. Often ableism disregards disabled people and instead caters to the needs of those who are able-bodied. It is key to examine how these practices of inclusion and exclusion are presented in the core values and the competence aims. One of the interdisciplinary topics of the English subject curriculum LK20 is democracy and citizenship. Here, one of the goals is to “...promote curiosity and engagement and help to prevent prejudices” (The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2021). This is a goal that helps students work towards inclusivity for all groups of people with different identities, including disabled people. The textbooks I have analyzed follow the new English subject curriculum LK20, and this matters in various ways.

When looking at the competence aims, I chose to include aims from both after year 7 and after year 10. The first relevant competence aim I found in year 7 states that students should “investigate ways of living and traditions in different societies in the English-speaking world and in Norway and reflect on identity and cultural belonging” (The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2021). This competence aim allows students to reflect on identity and cultural belonging, which means that the focus is on understanding and being inclusive by reflecting on, and thereby gaining knowledge about, for instance disability. This also works towards the interdisciplinary topic democracy and citizenship to help prevent prejudice. The second competence aim is “express oneself in an understandable way with a varied vocabulary and polite expressions adapted to the receiver and situation” (The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2021). Working on this in the classroom could give the students a chance to learn proper terminology when discussing topics like disability. As I have mentioned earlier, terminology is an important part of understanding and respecting someone and their identity, and this competence aim allows for this to happen. The year 10 competence aims that are relevant for this topic involve the following: “ask questions and follow up input when talking about various topics adapted to different purposes, recipients and situations” and “explore and describe ways of living, ways of thinking,

communication patterns and diversity in the English-speaking world” (The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2021). These competence aims both focus on asking questions and exploring diversity and different situations and could be used to explore disability in the classroom.

Reproducing vs. Re-seeing Disability

Since I am conducting a textbook analysis, the visual aspect of the analysis is an important part. Therefore, we need to know what to look for. Patricia A. Dunn (2010) introduces the term “re-seeing”. When using the term, the focus is on seeing disability in a new light rather than reproducing already existing and possibly harmful stereotypes. Dunn (2010) contends that the term re-seeing “invites us all to learn more, to include more people, to change our perspectives, to pose different questions, and to understand more about all student abilities” (p. 14). Re-seeing disability vs. reproducing stereotypes is a central part of my analysis. I want to examine how disability is represented in the images and storylines, and if the representations are stereotypical and reproduce negative attitudes, or if they present disability in a new, and more informative, way. This is key in both visual aspects of the textbook, such as pictures, and in the storylines that occur.

Tanya Titchkosky (2020) also discusses the visual representation of disabled people focusing on expressions of disability, and how disability should be recognized in, for example, the media. Titchkosky (2020) claims that “Attending to print and images about the intersections of difference in our daily lives is a way to understand that we are active participants in making up the meaning of people” (p. 6). In other words, Titchkosky (2020) points out that we, as readers, writers, and teachers, take on an active role when it comes to making up meaning of people, such as disabled people. We interpret representations of disabled people, and make meaning out of these. This means that we as teachers, through choosing what literature we expose our students to, are active participants when it comes to how we and our students view others. We actually get to choose what meaning or role we give to different groups of people. During my analysis, this will help us look at what kind of meanings and attitudes are attached to disabled people as they appear in the textbooks, and how this affects the receivers of the story. This can help us answer the question of how we perceive different people, and why.

Cultural Intolerance in the EFL Classroom

Jensen, Herrebrøden & Andreassen (2021) discuss cultural intolerance as an important term. They draw from the work of feminist disability scholar Rosemarie Garland Thomson's theory on cultural intolerance, which includes two strategies in which western culture has handled people with disabilities and the threat of being different (as cited in Jensen, Herrebrøden & Andreassen, 2021). The two strategies they include are making people with disabilities invisible and preventing the society from being exposed to them. Cultural intolerance is an important term because it can be tied to the core values in the curriculum. The curriculum aims to create a understanding of cultural diversity, and cultural intolerance can help us understand why some do not have this understanding. I have thus focused on cultural intolerance to discuss the findings in the textual analysis and helps us ask important questions, such as How often are disabled people included? Are the disabled people included just as much as abled bodied people? Based on the answer to these questions, cultural intolerance can help explain the question "Why?", and this notion can help me find some answers to my research question.

Findings and Analysis of Data Collection

In my analysis, I have looked at how disability is represented both visually and in narratives or storylines in the textbooks *Engelsk 5* and *Engelsk 6* (Solberg & Unnerud, 2020). The findings I will be discussing can be found as appendices. By focusing on these aspects, my goal has been to uncover both visual and hidden or invisible disabilities in the textbooks. I have chosen to part my analysis into three categories: visual, invisible/hidden and narrative. I have applied the theory I presented earlier in the thesis to critically reflect on and analyze the findings in the textbooks. Before I start my discussion, I want to re-introduce my research question; How is disability represented in EFL English subject textbooks?

Visible Representations of Disability

Most of the representations of disability I found in the two textbooks were visible. This includes all of the images in both books, and all of the storylines in the book except from one. In this paragraph about visible representation, I will not mention the storylines, but it is important to note that these representations were what I categorize as visible.

In *Engelsk 5* (Solberg & Unnerud, 2020), disabled people are included visibly in two images (see appendix 1 & 2). The first time disability appears visibly is in the introduction of chapter two *Take an interest* (pp. 54-55). This spread shows a playground with people engaging in different activities such as skateboarding and roller-skating, including five disabled people in wheelchairs playing basketball together. The second and last time disability is represented in *Engelsk 5* (Solberg & Unnerud, 2020) is also in chapter two *Take an interest* (pp. 74-75). The topic of these pages are *Skateboard poems*, with the texts “I Tried to Ride a Skateboard” and “The Skateboard”. These texts revolve around getting hurt by riding a skateboard, scooter and tricycle. Under them, we can find a picture of a man who is a wheelchair user and a picture of a man with a broken leg using crutches. As can be seen in the Appendix, both men convey sadness by having downturned mouths and upturned eyebrows. It is important to mention that both men are disabled as a result of an injury, as pointed out by the texts. Leduc (2020) contends that disability is almost always represented as the villain, in line with the medical model (p. 20). Examples on times where disability is represented as a villain is in fairy tales such as *Hans My Hedgehog*, where Hans is born half human half hedgehog (Leduc, 2020, p. 21).

The textbooks I have analyzed also seem to follow the logic. The portrayals of disabilities focus on being hurt, or not being able to do specific things. This can be seen as a

negative form of representation because disability is depicted as a flaw and an obstacle. Markotić (2021) claims that “In children’s literature, the category of the normal body creates (and is often posed as re-creating) an able-bodied norm that assumes disability as a lesser state of being, invariably tied to illness or corruption” (p. 61). In other words, the images in the textbook convey a negative representation because it promotes able-bodied people as the goal and creates the assumption that a disabled person is not a complete person.

In *Engelsk 6* (Solberg & Unnerud, 2020), one wheelchair user appears in three different pictures (see appendices 3, 4 & 5). First, he appears in the introduction to chapter one *Friendship* (pp. 6-7). Here he is surrounded by people without visible disabilities. He then is included in a picture that takes place in a classroom, again surrounded by classmates who do not show signs of visible disability (p. 22). Lastly, the same picture as on page 22 is used at the end of chapter one (p. 35). This means that even though the character appears three times, there are only two different representations because one of the pictures are re-used two times.

Borja Vidal-Albelda and Vladimir E. Martínez-Bello (2016) claim that “The body as social construction is related to media and especially the visible representation of the body could create the idea of a normal body silencing another ways of embodiments” (par. 3). One could say that the fact that disability is being represented at all is a positive start, no matter how it is actually presented. At the same time, I would argue that a negative representation of disability as a medical issue that needs to be cured, also is a way to silence this way of embodiment, like Albelda & Martínez-Bello pointed out. In other words, it is very positive that disability is represented, but the way the representation is done can promote negative, false, or stereotypical ideas.

Implicit Representations of Disability

Overall, there were very few examples of hidden disabilities in the textbooks. In *English 5* (Solberg & Unnerud, 2020), I could not find any clear examples of disabilities that are not visible to the eye, but I came across one example in *English 6* (Solberg & Unnerud, 2020) (see appendix 5). In the text “to be or not to be” (pp. 35-37) in chapter one *Friendship*, the main character learns that one of his classmates has dyslexia. Dyslexia is a learning disability, and non-visible because it is impossible to see that someone has dyslexia by just looking at them. Many types of disabilities are non-visible, and it is important to include them in textbooks to show the diversity within disabilities.

We can then ask ourselves if the textbooks show signs of cultural intolerance in their representations. Cultural intolerance includes two strategies, which is making people with disabilities invisible and preventing the society from being exposed to them (Jensen, Herrebrøden & Andreassen, 2021). On the one hand, we cannot claim that disability is invisible in the textbooks. Both books include some representation, such as texts that reflect on disability, and a disabled character who is included in the narrative. On the other hand, the lack of diversity could lead to parts of the community of disabled people feeling invisible or left out. In other words, disability is not invisible in the textbooks, but that does not mean that that different identities within disability are being presented in complex terms.

Narrative and storylines in EFL textbooks

There is one representation of disability within a storyline in *Engelsk 5* (Solberg & Unnerud, 2020) which is the text “Stanley Paste” (pp. 50-51) (See appendix 6). In this story, Stanley Paste complains about being small, when he meets a girl who is too tall. Even though this storyline is not directly linked to disability, it shows bodily diversity and the struggles people have with their bodies. Therefore, I think it is relevant to include it as a finding. In *English 6* (Solberg & Unnerud, 2020), there are two stories that include disability (See appendices 5 & 7). The first storyline is about growing up with a disability (pp. 33-37). Here, they talk about using a wheelchair and having dyslexia, which means that both visible and invisible disability representations are included. The character actually does not mention that he is a wheelchair user, but talks about using a lot of space and what questions the classmates ask such as “don’t you wish you could walk?” (Solberg & Unnerud, 2020, p. 37). At the end of the text, there are tasks called “talk and tell” (p. 37) which encourage students to reflect on and discuss different questions regarding a blind or partially sighted person, not being able to walk and how to increase accessibility in school for disabled people. It is interesting that the words “blind” and “partially sighted” is used. This narrows down the people included, instead of using a broader term such as “visually impaired” that includes everyone having a form of visual impairment.

Lastly, we also find a story about Professor Stephen Hawking in *Engelsk 6* (Solberg & Unnerud, 2020, pp. 174-175). Here, Hawking’s life story is told. The focus is on his disease, Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), and about overcoming it. His story is thus told focusing on his disability as a problem and a limitation. This can be connected to the medical

model (Leduc, 2020), where disability is portrayed as a medical issue. I will develop this further in the Discussion section.

Discussion of and Reflection on Research Findings

In this section, I will be discussing and examining my findings. My goal is to critically engage with the textbooks and explore how they represent disability differently. I have found that there is absence of representation of invisible/hidden disabilities, stereotyping through repetition, the trope of disability portrayed as a tragedy, and accessibility issues. At the same time, there are also some positive findings, such as the representation of visible disabilities, and the use of a disabled character in the narrative. A lot of the visible disabilities can also be called physical disabilities, but since I am also discussing invisible disabilities, I have chosen to use the word “visible”.

Visible and Invisible Representations

As we now have seen in the findings, most of the representations of disabilities in both of the textbooks are visible representations. Only one out of the representations could be labeled as invisible. Invisible disabilities could be for example fatigue, autism spectrum disorders, chronic pain etc. I have reflected on why most of the representations are visible, and one reason could be that it is easier and takes less effort than including the concept of hidden or invisible disabilities. It is one thing to include a picture of a wheelchair user and to reflect on their struggles, but when writing about invisible struggles you need to approach the textual aspect in a different way. Some teachers could argue that it would be hard for children to grasp the concept of an invisible disability. If we look at the English subject curriculum again, one of the competence aims after year 7 states that pupils should “investigate ways of living and traditions in different societies in the English-speaking world and in Norway and reflect on identity and cultural belonging” (The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2021). This aim shows that the goal is to teach students about identity and cultural belonging, and for this aim to be met, I think it is crucial to discuss invisible disabilities, as this topic resonates with a large group of people. I also think that many 5th and 6th graders have a good understanding of both visible and invisible disability, and that teaching is only a matter of reflecting on different kinds of disability in the classroom.

The lack of invisible representation feeds into the stereotypical idea that disability is always something you can see. Lack of representation of invisible or hidden disabilities thus takes away from the fact that there is a wide range of disabilities, and teaches the students that

disability is something you see with your eyes. For the reader that is learning this, they may think that they are not surrounded by a lot of disability in their everyday lives because they cannot see it visually, which can lead to them not paying attention to the topic because it seems to not exist around them,

Stereotyping of Disability through Repetition

In many of the representations in the books we could find repetition of both images and of specific elements, such as the visible representation of a wheelchair. Repetition is a great tool that could be used to underline or amplify important elements or topics in a text, but it could also take away from other representations. For example, we could find that one of the pictures with a character using a wheelchair had been used two times in one of the books. Instead of using the same picture twice, there could have been an opportunity to present and explore other representations of disability, such as for example hearing impairment. This way, the diversity within disability would have stood out more. Something else that is problematic with this kind of repetition is that it could promote stereotypes. When the same kind of physical disability is repeated, the textbooks paint a picture of what they think disability looks like. Stereotypical views of disability are therefore promoted because we are taught that disability looks like one specific image exclusively. This is problematic and leaves out a large part of the community consisting of disabled people.

Even though I am critical to the way disability is repeatedly shown throughout the textbooks, it is very positive that a disabled character is portrayed in the narrative during the *Engelsk 6* textbook (Solberg & Unnerud, 2020). When students follow a character through different stories and pictures over time, we get to know the character better than if they were to appear only once. We get to know them on a deeper level, and by seeing them in different environments we implement the fact that disabled people exist, and have a right to exist, everywhere. This may also lead to identification, through students identifying with a disabled character and activating empathy.

The textbooks provide representations that re-see disability, but also some that reproduce stereotypes. One way disability is re-seen is when the textbooks include disabled people in pictures that they stereotypically would not be represented in. An example of this is when people with disabilities are included in sports. On the one hand, you could claim that this is re-seeing disability because you place the disabled characters in an activity that you stereotypically would not include disabled people in. At the same time, some might say that

re-seeing takes a bit more effort than that. Dunn (2021) claims that one way of re-seeing disability is using literary and other texts as a springboard for informed discussions of disability and ableism (p. 17). Is picturing disability in activities that contradict stereotypes enough, or do we need to introduce material that allows for discussion and reflection? I think discussion and reflection are needed to re-see disability in the EFL classroom. The students are asked once in one of the textbooks to discuss and reflect on accessibility and accommodations for disabled people, and even though this is positive and might be considered a way of re-seeing disability, it is not enough to include this only once. When it comes to reproducing stereotypes, you could argue that the book reproduces these by not including enough representation of diversity within disability. There are many visible representations of characters in wheelchairs, and since this is repeated all throughout both books, one specific portrayal of disability is promoted and adds to the stereotype that there is a single answer as to what disability should look like.

Disability as a Tragedy Trope

Many of the representations of disability in the textbooks revolve around injury or tragedy. Some examples are disability as a result of falling off the skateboard, and the story about Stephen Hawking and ALS. In both stories, disability is presented as something negative and as a medical issue, which fits into the medical model of disability (Leduc, 2020). In the story about Stephen Hawking, they even talk about him not being able to “overcome” ALS, which is something I am very critical about. Talking about overcoming a disability creates the idea that disability is a flaw, and that it makes the disabled person incomplete, contrary to able bodied people who then stand as the “norm”. Marcotić (2021) argues that “For many people, being disabled means an undoing of the body’s whole, originary state, making any illness, age, or injury that moves the body away from its supposed normality undesirable” (p. 60). This can be linked to the medical model of disability, and we can see that the textbooks fit into this model by writing about overcoming the disability.

In the findings I also pointed out that some of the disabled people, specifically disabled people using wheelchairs, were drawn with sad expressions. This adds on to the idea that disability is perceived as a personal tragedy, which is insulting to disabled people because it paints their personal situation as “something to avoid” and implicates that they cannot be happy as long as they also are disabled. These textbook representations may then teach children without disabilities that being disabled equals a worse life, and it teaches disabled

children that they never will reach the same level of happiness as able-bodied children. The focus is very much on challenges and difficulties which counteracts with the interdisciplinary topic democracy and citizenship in the core values/curriculum.

Accessibility as a Barrier in the EFL Classroom

Accessibility can give us information about how a particular society treats disabled people. As we saw in the findings, none of the pictures show any kind of accommodations around the disabled person. Some examples on accommodations that could have been included are different leading markings for visibly impaired people, wheelchair ramps or lifts, or microphones for people that live with hearing loss. These are common things to find in a classroom or school in Norway. Based on this, it is strange that none of these elements are portrayed in the textbook images. The social model of disability (Leduc, 2020) denounces how society disables people, and that the focus needs to be on reshaping social barriers instead of curing the disabled person. This is central when we discuss accessibility and accommodations in the EFL classroom and shows how society is the issue that creates barriers for disabled people.

In many ways we can say that the pictures convey messages to the students engaging with the books, and the goal would be to convey that accessibility for disabled people is an important matter in the classroom. Many children are familiar with different accommodations, it is just a matter of including them as something natural in the literature they are exposed to. This being said, accessibility is discussed in one of the tasks. In one of the “talk and tell” tasks, students are faced with three assignments: “If you can see, close your eyes. Discuss what challenges a blind or partially sighted student would face in your classroom, corridors and schoolyard.”, “if you can walk, pretend that you can’t. what kind of challenges do you face at your school if you have to use crutches or a wheelchair?” and “Suggest changes to make your school a better place for all students” (Solberg & Unnerud, 2020, p. 37). The questions display several disabilities and encourage discussion and reflection that allows students to reflect on flaws in the current situation when it comes to accessibility in our society. This is a great way to make students reflect on other identities, and it promotes inclusivity and knowledge about the topic. The task also avoids using language that makes disabled people seem like sufferers, which is very positive.

Limitations of the Study and Directions for Further Research

Before I move on to directions for further research, I feel it is necessary to reflect on the limitations of my study. Firstly, one limitation could be that I have not conducted enough research. Because of the guidelines of the thesis, I had to limit the extent of the research, and this could lead to me not gathering enough information about the topic I am researching. Another limitation connected to the guidelines is that it is easy to generalize. It is important for me to note that this is not my intention, and that I instead intend to offer reflection and discussions regarding the topic. My aim is to show critical humility, so it is also important for me to point out how I do not look for final answers but instead try to reflect on potential answers. Lastly, the ethical part of the thesis could be considered a limitation. Writing this thesis has been a journey for me where I have learned a lot about this topic and which ethical considerations I should make. This marks the beginning for me when it comes to truly understanding disability and the issues disabled people are facing. Because of this, I also feel the need to offer directions for further research. This is an invitation to both myself and others that are interested in this field of study to further explore the topic, which hopefully will allow for further understanding.

I believe that further research could lead to more understanding not only for us as educators, but for our students as well. As we have seen, the textbooks are inclusive of disability as a theme, but the diversity within disability can seem to be excluded. As mentioned earlier, exclusion could be used as a form of social oppression (Barnes & Mercer, 2003). When children are not being educated on a topic, they are not taught to be aware of it and to respect it. On the one hand, you could say that it is enough that children learn about disability in general, and that this will meet the goal of the English subject curriculum, which is to "...promote curiosity and engagement and help to prevent prejudices" (The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2021). I believe that more understanding leads to less prejudices, but the question is then; are the students being educated well enough on this topic? A fear with non-sufficient education on such a topic is that instead of preventing prejudices it might allow for new prejudices to come forth.

The role of the school is, among other things, to educate children so they can function as best they can in the society and the labor market. This includes giving them tools so they can respect and properly interact and communicate with different groups of people. One fear about the students not being exposed and taught enough about disability is that it might lead to children being taught to think and act in ways that are ableist. If you do not learn about privilege and how others may have a dis-advantage in our society, you are less likely to

consider their position and more likely to act in a way that creates greater separation in our community. At the same time, one might argue that since disability is so common, most of us learn about it without being exposed to it in school. We are all being educated through meetings in our everyday lives, but I think that it is important that the topics are introduced at school, because it allows us to make sure that all students have gotten the opportunity to reflect on and discuss issues. This way we know that our students are as equipped as possible to meet the diversity that exists in the world. To make sure that the students are getting the education they need, it is important to conduct further research on the topic. This way, one would know what mistakes to avoid when writing new textbooks, and what aspects to include to make sure the students are fit to explore and encounter the topic in- and outside of the classroom. Lastly, I would like to say that the topic of disability itself also needs more attention in teacher education, and that my hope is that further research and shedding light on the topic will make teachers pay more attention to the topic of disability in the classroom, specifically the Norwegian EFL English subject classroom.

Conclusion

I recently had a day off where I walked around in the city. I strolled through parks, went shopping in different stores and malls, explored some tourist attractions and visited some friends. I had a great day, but it got me thinking about how privileged I am to be able to experience all this without encountering any discrimination. I wonder, would I be able to do all this by myself if I had a disability? Half of the stores I visited were not accommodated for wheelchair users, and the parks had no path or similar accommodations that for instance would make it more accessible for visually impaired people. The bus had a sign with the name of the next stop, but the speakers were broken, making it hard for visually impaired people to navigate. These are just some examples on lack of accessibility in the modern society we live in today. Therefore, it is crucial to conduct research on topics like this to educate everyone, especially the students who are the leaders of the future.

It should be mentioned that analyzing the representation of disability in the EFL textbooks is a complex topic where there are several representations that could be interpreted differently, therefore making it hard to settle on one specific conclusion. However, based on my own reflections and analysis of the data I have collected, the textbooks I have chosen mainly represent disability in ways that reproduce stereotypes. At the same time, there are some representations in the books that are positive in the way that they show diversity and encourage the students to reflect on the topic. It is important to note that the receivers of these

textbooks are 5th- and 6th graders, and that they need guidance from teachers and educational resources to understand topics like disability. We, as readers, are participants in meaning making, but I think that children this young might not be educated enough on this topic to reflect independently, and therefore the emphasis should be on spreading awareness and displaying disability in authentic and complex ways

References

- Barnes, C., & Mercer, G. (2003). *Disability*. Polity Press.
- Bérubé, M (2015). Representation. In *Keywords for disability studies* (p. 151). New York University Press.
- Cariou, W. (2020). On critical humility. *Studies in American Indian literatures*, 32(3), 1–12.
<https://doi.org/10.1353/AIL.2020.0015>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2020). *Disability and health overview; What is disability?* Accessed February 17th from
<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/disability.html>
- Dunn, P. A. (2010). Re-seeing (dis)ability: Ten suggestions. *English Journal*, 100(2), 14-26.
- Fuchs, & Bock, A. (2018). *The Palgrave handbook of textbook studies*. Palgrave Macmillan.
<https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-53142-1>
- Jensen, M. S., Herrebrøden, M., & Andreassen, U. R. (2021). The invisible minority: why do textbook authors avoid people with disabilities in their books? *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 1-17.
- Leduc, A. (2020). *Disfigured: On fairy tales, disability, and making space*. Coach House Books.
- Maagerø, E. & Tønnessen, E.S. (2021). Multimodal literacy in English as an additional language. In Diamantopoulou, S. & Ørevik, S. (Eds.), *Multimodality in English language learning*. Taylor & Francis Group.
- Marcotić, N. (2021). Disability. In Nel, P., Paul, L., & Christensen, N. (Eds.). *Keywords for children's literature*, Second Edition. New York University Press.
- McKee, A. (2003). *Textual analysis: A beginner's guide*. Sage.
- Serlin, Reiss, B., & Adams, R. (2015). *Keywords for disability studies*. New York University Press.
- Solberg, C. & Unnerud, H.D. (2020). *Engelsk 5: textbook*. Cappelen Damm
- Solberg, C. & Unnerud, H.D. (2020). *Engelsk 6: textbook*. Cappelen Damm
- The Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family affairs (2022). *Hva er nedsatt funksjonsevne?* Accessed February 3rd from
https://www.bufdir.no/Nedsatt_funksjonsevne/hva_er_funksjonsnedsettelse/
- The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training (2022). *Curriculum in English*. Accessed April 19th from <https://www.udir.no/lk20/eng01-04?lang=eng>

Titchkosky, & University of Toronto. (2020). *Reading and writing disability differently:*

The textured life of embodiment. University of Toronto Press.

Vidal-Albelda, B., & Martinez-Bello, V. E. (2016). Representation of bodies with and without disabilities in secondary school physical education textbooks. *Sport in society*, 20(7), 957-968.

World Health Organization (2022). *Disability; Overview.* Accessed February 17th from

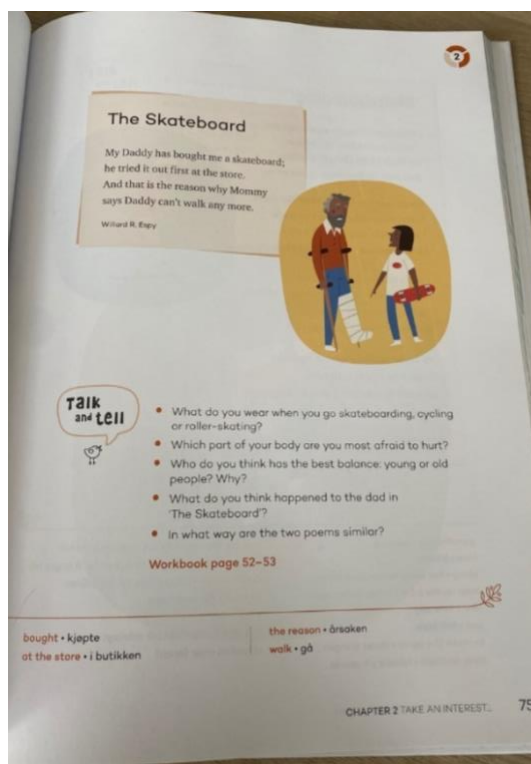
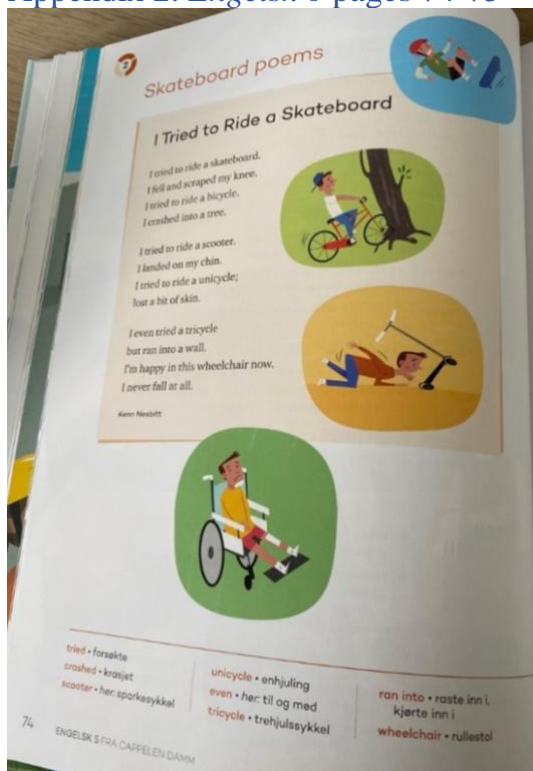
https://www.who.int/health-topics/disability#tab=tab_1

Appendices

Appendix 1: Engelsk 6 pages 54-55



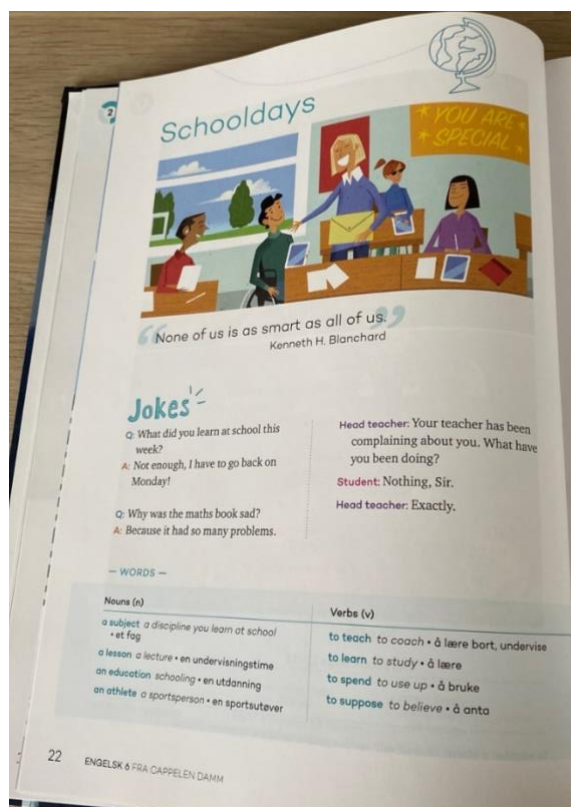
Appendix 2: Engelsk 6 pages 74-75



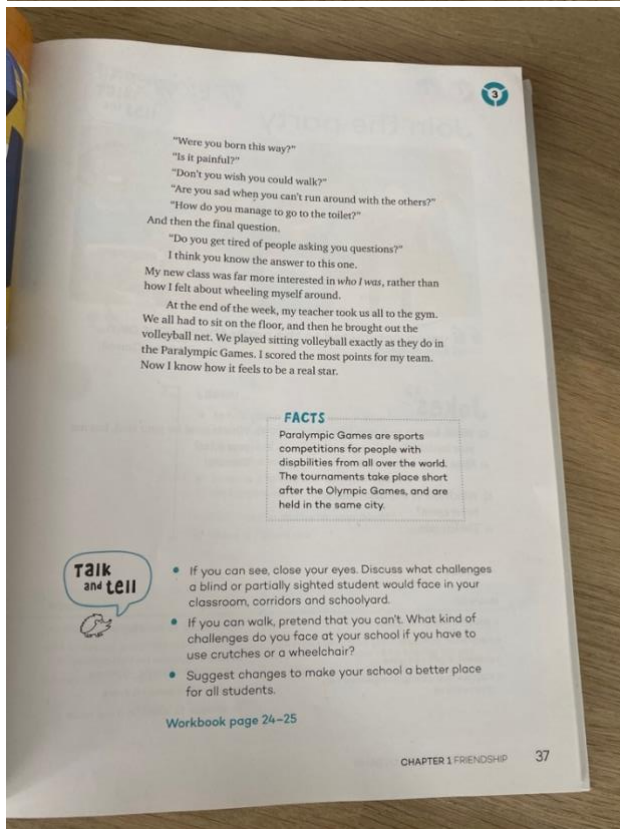
Appendix 3: Engelsk 5 pages 6-7



Appendix 4: Engelsk 6 page 22



Appendix 5: Engelsk 6 pages 35-37



Appendix 6: Engelsk 5 pages 50-51



Appendix 7: Engelsk 6 pages 174-175

