Dealing with Diversity
in English Children's Books
in the Heterogeneous EFL Classroom

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Abstract: The use of children's literature in language teaching is very common. However, in view of heterogeneous English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms with learners of different interests, abilities, preferences, competences, identities, beliefs, etc., approaches to dealing with literature need to be supplemented by carefully selected scaffolds to cater to individual learner needs. Yet, it is not just the teaching methods that need to be (re)considered with regards to teaching a heterogeneous learner group, but also the topics that are covered in class should be carefully selected. Children's books offer a wide range of topics that are commonly dealt with in the EFL classroom with younger learners. Some books, classic as well as recent ones, also depict different aspects of diversity. Such pieces of literature offer the potential to discuss diversity with learners in the EFL classroom and can serve as a basis for negotiations of diversity at the content-level. Therefore, this article deals with a two-fold question on aspects of diversity:
(1) How do selected English children's books represent or mirror diversity?
(2) Can such books be used successfully in the heterogeneous EFL classroom?

Keywords: heterogeneity, EFL learners, diversity, children's literature, foreign language teaching

1   Introduction

In countries like Germany, it is the school's educational mandate at all levels to educate learners in values such as tolerance, equality, open-mindedness, respect, helpfulness, co-operativeness, politeness, fairness, reliability, consideration and appreciation from the very beginning (see, e.g., KMK, 2018; MSB NRW, 2019, p. 10). Already at an early age, learners should become aware of diversity and understand it as valuable as well as 'the norm' instead of deficit-oriented and 'out-of-the-norm'. The issue of 'norm' should be questioned early and critical discussions about this topic need to guide learners in recognising and becoming aware of the value of diversity. Given this complex task, teachers cannot ignore diversity issues in their daily teaching practice and should therefore cater to multiple situations that bare the potential to raise awareness of them.

Yet, Eßer, Gerlach & Roters (cp. 2018, p. 11) point out that the topic 'diversity' hardly plays a role in EFL teaching and researching contexts at the level of classroom contents. Standards for inclusive learning and teaching processes, as for example proposed by Reich (2014) and recited for the Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) context by Eßer et al. (cp. 2018, p. 11), have hardly been explicated for TEFL and often run the risk of being too broad and not specific enough for the TEFL-context. However, the TEFL-inherent topic of intercultural learning can hardly be separated from the topic of diversity (cp. Küchler & Roters, 2014, p. 240), which makes the EFL classroom a designated place to discuss diversity at the content-level.

Not only at the content-level, but also at the level of the composition of classes is diversity an ever-present topic in school practice. Heterogeneity[1] is a multifaceted phenomenon regarding the teaching of foreign languages in schools (cp. Bartosch & Rohde, 2014; Bongartz & Rohde, 2015; Chilla & Vogt, 2017; Roters, Gerlach & Eßer, 2018). EFL classes are very heterogeneous in their composition, for instance regarding learners' individual abilities, competences, language and cultural backgrounds, interests and aptitudes. With Germany signing the Convention of the United Nations on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2009, the heterogeneity of EFL classes increasingly moved into the centre of teachers', researchers' and societies' attention. Teachers and researchers are more than ever trying to find methods and approaches to teaching foreign languages in classes that are diverse in various respects (see, e.g., Kötter & Trautmann, 2018, pp. 139–141).

This article aims at these two desiderata in that a proposal for dealing with the topic 'diversity' in the heterogeneous EFL classroom is made in the context of the well-known use of children's books in classes with younger EFL learners. According to Koss (2015, p. 32), children's books "convey cultural messages and values about society and help children learn about their world." Additionally, literature can well be used "to reduce prejudice against a marginalized group of society"[2] (Smith-D'Arezzo & Moore-Thomas, 2010, p. 3) and "intervention at an early age might help to establish positive attitudes in children because they may be less resistant to change or differences" (Nasatir & Horn, 2003, p. 3). Therefore, this article examines diversity with a focus on its representation in English children's literature, that is picture books for the scope of this article. Also, the question of how picture books can be used successfully in heterogeneous EFL classes is discussed.

The target group for the suggestions in this article are younger language learners for whom children's books, particularly picture books, are not yet too simple and too childish. This equals roughly Years 1 to 6 in the German school system when the children are aged between about five and thirteen, which is similar to Pinter's (cp. 2017, p. 2) proposal of categorising young language learners as learners aged five to fourteen.

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[1]   The terms 'heterogeneity' and 'diversity' are used as synonyms in this article and are both used in a wide sense, i.e. any possible dimension of diversity. More details will be given in Section 2.1.
[2]   Direct quotes were left in their original, i.e., e.g., in American English.

This article starts with a discussion of diversity as found in English children's literature and presents a checklist of criteria to analyse such books, based on which three selected picture books are analysed critically. After that, the question of teaching diversity at the content-level in the EFL classroom is discussed. Bringing these two foci together, the last section explores whether and how children's books that deal with diversity can be used in heterogeneous EFL classes, followed by a critical conclusion and an outlook on future research and teaching.

2 Diversity in English children's books

Koss (2015, p. 36) sharply criticises that there has always been and still is a lack of diversity in children's books: "Despite increasing […] diversity, picturebooks [sic!] that feature nonstereotypically diverse populations remain a rarity." She complains that people with disabilities or other individual differences, characteristics or needs are all too often "portrayed in a negative and/or stereotypical way" (Koss, 2015, p. 33).

This section explores how children's books deal with topics that are related to the field of diversity. The focus is on picture books, which are characterised by "an interrelation of textual and visual elements, both of which are essential for full comprehension" (Reckermann, 2018, p. 159). Firstly, possible criteria for analysing children's books that depict diversity are outlined. Secondly, an exemplarily presentation and critical analysis of three different English picture books that could be used for teaching EFL to young learners follows.

2.1 Criteria for analysing children's books that deal with diversity

Nasatir & Horn (cp. 2003, p. 4) distinguish between two types of books that address disability as part of diversity: direct and indirect. An indirect presentation means that a person with a disability is part of the book, but the disability has nothing to do with the story and is not specifically focused on (cp. Nasatir & Horn, 2003, p. 4). In contrast, direct presentations refer to books that were "specifically designed to discuss a type of disability" (Nasatir & Horn, 2003, p. 4). This distinction into direct and indirect presentation can easily be broadened to different aspects of diversity and does not have to be limited to a possible disability.

The literature review on the question of what criteria to apply when analysing children's books dealing with diversity soon showed that most sources do not focus on diversity in general, as this article attempts to, but usually look at selected aspects of diversity, e.g. disability or cultural background. The article at hand attempts to adapt the criteria that are found for specific aspects of diversity and broaden them to a more general picture. This expansion is supposed to draw attention to a more holistic picture of individual differences among people in order to cater for a broad range of diversity, implying that *everyone* is unique and has individual needs, characteristics and differences. This concurs with a broad understanding of inclusion, as for example outlined by Doert & Nold (cp. 2015, p. 24), which avoids categorisations into groups such as disabled vs. non-disabled and includes not only the question of disability, but more so refers to various aspects of heterogeneity, i.e. gender, ethnic group affiliation, first and second languages, social status, religion, and so on.

When choosing and analysing books to be used in the classroom, primary school EFL teachers use well-established criteria (see, e.g., Brewster & Ellis, 2002, or Cameron, 2001). Among these criteria are the aspects of 'moral' and 'values': "Do we agree with the values and attitudes projected in the story? […] Will the story help children become aware of and question important values? Are they acceptable?" (Brewster & Ellis, 2002, pp. 190–191). A book chosen for use in class should thus ideally convey a moral and values, and both should be socially acceptable and conform with current norms and ideals.

Focussing on disability, Smith-D'Arezzo (cp. 2003, p. 76) developed four core criteria that teachers should focus on when choosing a book about children with disabilities (see appendix for the original criteria). These criteria were broadened for the article at hand in order to not only focus on people with a disability[3], but to focus on any individual person who might, for some individual need or characteristic, be different from another person. Nasatir & Horn (cp. 2003, pp. 7–8) have also compiled a checklist of nine criteria which can be used to analyse whether a book that indirectly includes a person with a disability is a quality book or not (see appendix for original criteria). Again, these criteria have been adapted for the context at hand to focus on diversity in general.

These three sets of criteria mostly supplement each other and were synthesised and transformed into a checklist, which is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Checklist for analysing children's books about diversity

Criteria	Extent to which the criterion is fulfilled or met				Comment
	Fully	Partly	Not at all	Not applicable	
The structural elements and the story of the book are well-developed.					
The message is woven subtly into the telling of the story.					
The book appeals to children (and teachers/adults).					
Any character is shown in a realistic light, well-rounded and with distinctive features.					
People with a disability or any other individual characteristic or need are cast in a positive light.					
People with a disability or any other individual characteristic or need take part in the action and possess power just as any other character in the story. They are not just observers.					
People with a disability or any other individual characteristic or need are not the core of the problem in the scope of the storyline.					

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[3] It is difficult, anyhow, to talk about disabilities in a context where inclusion should be understood in a broad sense, implying that everyone is individual and has his/her own individual needs and traits of character. Stigmatisation or characterisation based on 'disabled' or 'not disabled', likewise 'ordinary' and 'out of the ordinary' should actually be avoided (also see Dannenbeck, 2015).

Oversimplified stereotyping and token-ism are avoided.					
Special education issues and issues relating to diversity are presented accurately.					
Standards for success are the same for every character.					
Individual differences are not accompanied by negative value judgements.					
Any reader is able to identify with a character of the story as a positive role model.					
The author has background knowledge that enables him/her to contribute knowledgably to diversity.					
The story does not contain loaded words.					
The book is up-to-date concerning language use, values, etc.					

➔ **Note: The benchmark for the number of criteria that are fully met should be very high when using this book in the context of teaching young learners.**

(based on: Brewster & Ellis, 2002, Nasatir & Horn, 2003, and Smith-D'Arezzo, 2003)

This checklist serves as an aid for teachers and educators to analyse children's books critically that are somehow concerned with diversity. It is supposed to supplement other checklists that are more generally used in order to analyse children's books for EFL classroom use. Not every book can or must fulfil all criteria, as this is hardly feasible. However, the fact that diversity can be a very sensitive topic and negative examples of diversity could lead learners to form undesirable attitudes and values implies that the benchmark of fulfilled criteria for a book to be used in class should be high.

2.2 A short and exemplary analysis of three EFL classroom picture books

This section briefly analyses three different English picture books that were chosen as follows:

- All three represent different aspects of diversity: homosexuality, being an outsider and using a wheelchair.
- All three were recommended to me by EFL teachers or researchers for being used in the primary school EFL classroom.
- One represents a recent publication, the other two are older.

The analysis was done via the checklist (see table 1) and validated via a peer debriefing process (cp. Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 308; Steinke, 2000, p. 326) with a second researcher in the field of teaching English language and literature.[4] The filled-in schemes

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[4] Special thanks goes to Silvia Sporkmann for discussions of the checklists and for her valuable comments on the books as well as the topic 'diversity' as such.

are found in the appendix, while the text explains the points that were central to each book's analysis in more detail.

2.2.1 *And Tango Makes Three* (Richardson, Parnell & Cole, 2005)

This book is based on the true story of two male penguins in New York's Central Park, who are "a little bit different" (Richardson et al., 2005, n.p.). They are in love and wish to have a penguin baby, just as all the other penguin couples. As nature would not allow them to have one, the zookeeper enables them to "adopt" a penguin egg that turns out to be "the very first penguin in the zoo to have two daddies" (Richardson et al., 2005, n.p.).

The book is therefore all about family, family routines and parents raising their little ones, but displays the concept of family from the point of view of a homosexual (penguin) couple. The book and its content are up-to-date, which is supported by the fact that the book is based on a true story. Obviously, the authors use penguins instead of human beings to tell the (true) story, an approach often used in books for children. This approach can decentralise the discussion about homosexuality and adoption and make the animal characters of the book the focus of attention and thus creates a third space. The language used in the book is appropriate and not stigmatising. What is more: possible tokenism or oversimplified stereotyping is avoided and not found in the story. Also, no negative value judgements are found about the homosexual couple; just the opposite is true: they are cast in a very caring, loving, positive and fun way.

The story itself is well developed and the message that homosexuality is nothing extraordinary, except that two male penguins cannot lay an egg, is subtly woven into the story. Homosexuality and the "adoption" of a baby are portrayed as normal and the homosexual penguins are not at the core of the storyline's problem. In fact, it is the other way around: the homosexual penguins act like all the other penguins and are good parents to their baby. Referring to queer studies and the question of heteronormativity (see, e.g., Degele, 2005, p. 19), however, this can also be seen as problematic, in that the story leaves no room for alternative lifestyles but portrays the life of the homosexual couple as similar to or the same as that of heterosexual couples. The homosexual penguin couple pretty much copies what the heterosexual penguin couples do. Issues relating to diversity in terms of sexual orientation are thus portrayed realistically, but not critically in light of heteronormativity. Nevertheless, all (penguin) characters are shown in a realistic light and all have distinctive features, while the homosexual penguin couple is at the centre of attention and possesses power. It seems that children can easily identify with one of the story's characters, also because the book and its story, including the visualisations, seem appealing to children (and adults).

However, in the visualisations the homosexual penguin couple is always somehow separated from the rest of the penguins. This could have been done intentionally in order to make them the focus of the story and of the pictures, but it might support the notion of them being somehow different.

2.2.2 *Something Else* (Cave & Riddell, 1994)

This book is about the interesting-looking[5] character Something Else, who tries to make friends. The other characters of the book, all of them different animals with uncommon colours and clothes, also look quite rare and unusual. Although Something Else does "his best to be like the others", s/he is constantly told "You don't belong here, […] you're not like us" (Cave & Riddell, 1994, n.p.). One night, another interesting-looking creature called Something knocks on Something Else's door, and after Something Else realised "You're not like me, BUT I DON'T MIND" (Cave & Riddell, 1994, n.p.; capitalisation

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[5] A YouTube video that displays the book and its characters can be retrieved from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aFOhsJydjNE; date of access 20.06.2020. This gives the reader an impression of how the characters look like.

in original); they become friends: "They were different, but they got along" (Cave & Riddell, 1994, n.p.). At the end of the book, they make friends with a little human boy, who is portrayed without any absurdities just as a 'normal' boy, but the book says that he "really WAS weird-looking" (Cave & Riddell, 1994, n.p.; capitalisation in original).

In this book, the aspect of diversity, namely being different and what is colloquially known as having the role of an outsider, is the focus as well as the core problem of the storyline. Something Else does not find friends and is constantly told that s/he is different. Her/his life as an outsider is displayed very realistically. The story is well-developed, and all characters are shown realistically with very distinctive features. However, Something Else is not really cast in a positive light, which is supported by the fact that s/he hardly solves the problem of being an outsider him/herself, but needs Something to come and fix it for him/her. The humour of the story, the way it is visualised as well as the fact that the problem is eventually solved, however, makes the story appealing to children (and adults) and seems to allow children to identify with at least one of the characters. Although Something Else possesses power only to a limited extent, s/he still takes a central part in the action of the story. Oversimplified stereotyping or tokenisms as well as judgmental language are avoided, while Something Else is displayed with very loving traits of character instead.

The message of the book, however, is questionable in various respects. Firstly, being different seems in many ways limited to visual appearance, particularly when Something Else and Something eventually make friends with the "weird-looking" human boy. Yet, the story also tries to show that particular actions and character traits of Something Else are different, which, taken together, shows how arbitrary and random exclusion can be. It might be the looks, the way one speaks, the way one plays, or any other difference that leads others to exclude someone. It is interesting in this respect that the group of animals that outcasts Something Else and tells her/him that s/he is not like them is very heterogeneous itself. This only supports the notion that exclusion often is purely arbitrary.

What is more in light of a doubtful message is that the solution to Something Else's outsider-life is that another outsider needs to come and that eventually the two outsiders become friends. This suggests that outsiders cannot find friends that are not outsiders themselves and that an outsider only needs to wait long enough until another outsider passes his/her way. It might be a more suitable message if Something Else would somehow manage to make friends himself and in his desired peer group, which would also allocate more power to him.

2.2.3 *Susan Laughs* (Willis & Ross, 1999)

This book is about a young girl, Susan, who is shown in 32 different daily-life situations that are typical for children. For example: "Susan dances, Susan rides, Susan swims, Susan hides" (Willis & Ross, 1999, n.p.). Only the very last page is different. It says: "That is Susan through and through – just like me, just like you" (Willis & Roos, 1999, n.p.) and is accompanied by a picture of Susan sitting in a wheelchair.

This book hardly tells a story that follows a continuous storyline, but is rather a concept book with a 'surprise' or 'problem plus solution' at the very end. Its message, however, is valuable in that it shows what Susan can do although one part of her life is using a wheelchair as a mobility aid. Yet, this is by no means the focus of the story. The very last page urges the reader to turn back the pages and see whether there was any indication for Susan's use of a wheelchair on the previous pages (in fact, there hardly is). The book therefore shows that although a child needs a wheelchair, he or she can and does still do many things that also non-disabled people would. The wheelchair is not in the foreground, at least not until the very last page.

It is doubtful, however, whether Susan is depicted realistically. She is indeed cast in a very positive light, possesses power and is the centre of the action, but it seems slightly oversimplified that she can do anything without the wheelchair being a restriction to her.

The book might downplay a person's life with a wheelchair as it suggests that Susan swings, swims or dances without any difficulties. Only at a second look the reader sees that she, for example, never stands on her feet by herself. In sum, this might suggest that wheelchair users do not face any difficulties in their everyday lives and might leave young readers with the impression that a wheelchair and a physical disability does not bring any difficulties or restrictions. This might be a too simplistic representation of the life of a wheelchair user and, although not found in the pictures, might be a negative example of the attempt to avoid stereotyping. In fact, the book is the opposite of stereotyping, tokenism or inappropriate language.[6]

On the other hand, it is right this easiness and impartiality that shows the reader how similar Susan is to any other child her age and that using a wheelchair is one of her features, but only one of many and not the most important one. It illustrates that wheelchair users can be just like the others and do many things others can do as well. The possible need for support, for example when climbing onto a swing, however, is not shown, which serves to the oversimplification elaborated on above. The focus of the book seems to be on similarities and not on differences, so that possible differences might have been intentionally left out. Showing Susan in a wheelchair on the last page then seems a very harsh way of revealing the 'truth'. Yet, this is just the benefit or advantage of this book: the focus is *not* on her physical disability, but on anything she *can* do.

The book's visualisations are appealing to children and it is likely that they can identify with many of Susan's actions and feelings. Still, the lack of a plot makes this book very easy and would probably be read and enjoyed by a young audience. Finally, one might also want to question whether the title (Susan *laughs*) and the eventual fact that Susan uses a wheelchair might in combination reveal the message that she is a wheelchair user, but can still laugh. Is it something special to still be able to laugh when one uses a wheelchair? This point clearly needs critical discussion when the book is used in a learner group.

The analysis of the three books shows that *And Tango Makes Three* seems to be the book that best fulfils the criteria elaborated on in section 2.1. This is also the most recent book, while the other two books are already quite old. All three were only chosen based on the points mentioned above and not to perfectly fit with the checklist's criteria. *Something Else* and *Susan Laughs* also have very positive aspects, but clear downsides as well. Thus, teachers need to consider carefully whether and how they would want to use such books in their EFL classes. When using the books, critical discussions about the questionable pitfalls of each book should be part of classroom negotiations.

3   The question of teaching diversity in the EFL classroom

This section will explore the question of whether diversity should be (part of) a teaching topic in the EFL classroom at all, followed by a discussion of how the books presented and discussed above could be used in heterogeneous EFL classrooms.

Since modern foreign language teaching is based on a topic-based syllabus (see, e.g., Cameron, 2001), the question arises of whether diversity should and/or could be made the topic, or at least the sub-topic, of teaching. Reich (cp. 2014, p. 32) suggests for general school pedagogy that topics and themes dealing with diversity are approached in a constructive, critical and reflective way. Along the same line, Dannenbeck (cp. 2015, p. 242) argues that an acknowledgement and appreciation of diversity presupposes the actual identification of differences, which can only take place when facets of diversity

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[6]   In this context, for example, it would be inappropriate if the book used words like "suffers" from a disability or is "bound to a wheelchair" or similar, framing disabilities as burdens or even diseases. Examples of so-called "inclusive language" can, for instance, be found at https://www.and.org.au/pages/inclusive-language.html; date of access: 20.06.2020.

are made the topic of teaching. Focussing on homosexuality, for example, Reich (cp. 2014, p. 33) proposes that in order to aim for equality, diversity in gender and sexual orientation should be present in classroom contents, texts and examples in a non-discriminating way. Similarly, Auernheimer (cp. 2012, p. 133) suggests making diversity, particularly regarding cultural differences, a topic instead of keeping silent about obvious or hidden differences.

In contrast to this, Diehm (cp. 2002, pp. 167–168), for example, is very careful about an explicit thematisation of diversity, because thematising differences, particularly those that might be present in class, might stigmatise a certain learner or group of learners and might split the class into "us" and "them". The latter, of course, should be avoided by all means when aiming at an understanding of diversity and inclusion that presupposes that all learners are individually different and that learners should not (negatively) be classified into different groups based on certain characteristics. Yet, Diehm (cp. 2002, pp. 167–168) admits that directly making diversity a topic is sometimes necessary.

Focusing on the EFL classroom, the urge to develop critical cultural awareness and intercultural competence seems to be the argument that almost forces EFL teachers to explicate diversity at the content-level. Given the fact that intercultural competence and understanding self- and otherness are core elements of foreign language pedagogy (cp. Bredella, 2010; Eßer et al., 2018, p. 12; Grimm, Meyer & Volkmann, 2015, p. 158; Hallet, 2007; Risager, 2012; Volkmann, 2010), the EFL classroom seems the perfect place to approach diversity as a topic. Bredella (cp. 2010, p. 120) explains that understanding otherness means understanding something that someone had not known before and that was hence new to him or her. In order to foster awareness towards self- and otherness, with the eventual goal of understanding as well as tolerating self- and otherness, learners need to be guided towards becoming aware of otherness (cp. Volkmann, 2010, p. 12). Differences between people are hence a precondition for understanding self- and otherness (cp. Bredella, 2010, p. 122), and such differences are, for instance, found to a lesser or greater extent in heterogeneous classes that consist of a number of different, individual learners.

Cultural aspects and aspects of diversity are not only an inherent part of foreign language teaching concepts, but also mirrored in current EFL curricula in Germany as topics for teaching. Taking North Rhine-Westphalia's curricula as an example, they suggest topic areas such as "a world for everyone" or "children of the world" (MSW NRW, 2008, p. 76; translation by the author) for primary EFL teaching and "education towards values" or "gender-sensitive education" for secondary level (MSB NRW, 2019, p. 10; translation by the author).

However, one should not forget that in order to raise critical cultural awareness and overcome prejudices and intolerance towards differences, not only differences but also similarities should be discussed with learners. Bennett, Bennett & Allen (cp. 2003, p. 34) argue that particularly in stages where learners see differences as a threat, the focus should be on similarities and aspects all people of a particular group have in common. Although their model focuses on culture and intercultural competence, this is not limited to objective culture such as institutions or artefacts (Big C), but also contains 'little c', the latter of which implies patterns of everyday behaviour and a worldview that is constructed by values, beliefs, assumptions or style (cp. Bennett et al., 2003, pp. 18–19). It is easy to see that what they understand as 'little c' can be transferred to diversity more generally and that accepting diversity is a kind of cultural value.

Interestingly, most articles discussing the question of how to deal with diversity in EFL teaching settings circle around general preconditions for an inclusive EFL pedagogy, methods of differentiation, supportive devices, approaches to open teaching formats, such as task-based language learning, or learners' and teachers' attitudes (see, e.g., Bartosch & Rohde, 2014; Bongartz & Rohde, 2015; Chilla & Vogt, 2017; Roters et al.,

2018). To the present, few publications focus on the use of 'diversity topics' in heterogeneous EFL classrooms. Except for literature and research on teaching culture, a construct that is hardly separable from diversity, only Küchler and Roters (cp. 2014) have so far very briefly explicated ideas for teaching diversity. They suggest using two different books for addressing the topic "We are all different" at the content-level in middle and upper secondary school (cp. Küchler & Roters, 2014, pp. 242–243).[7] Additionally, Küchler & Roters (cp. 2014, p. 243) mention three films that could also be used in upper classes for approaching diversity at the content-level.

The same desideratum, anyhow, holds true for general pedagogy, where publications mostly circle around approaches on how to deal with diversity at the level of teaching methods or attitudes, but hardly focus on how to teach diversity at the content-level. Focussing on the question of teaching diversity in general pedagogy, Diehm (cp. 2002, p. 166) describes two approaches of how to make (or how not to make) diversity the core content of teaching: direct and indirect thematisation. Direct thematisation means to explicitly use an aspect of diversity as the topic for teaching, while indirect thematisation refers to implicitly including aspects of diversity, e.g. in teaching materials, so that diversity is present but not the actual topic of teaching (cp. Diehm, 2002, pp. 167–168).

A suggestion of how diversity can be taught focuses on the use of literature that deals with diversity, so that the following section will explore this notion in more detail (cp., Küchler & Roters, 2014; Smith-D'Arezzo, 2003).

4   Using children's books on diversity in the heterogeneous EFL classroom

Based on the children's books discussed above as well as the elaboration on the question of whether and how to use diversity as a topic in the EFL classroom, this section explores practical approaches of whether and how to use books that thematise diversity in heterogeneous EFL classes with younger learners. The elaborations firstly discuss the use of books that deal with diversity and then explore teaching methods as well as means of differentiation for dealing with children's books in heterogeneous EFL classes.

4.1 The potential of children's books for dealing with diversity

As outlined above, researchers and teachers hardly agree on whether and how to teach aspects of diversity explicitly or implicitly. Given the fact, however, that the EFL classroom should develop learners' intercultural competences, including an awareness of self- and otherness as well as tolerance towards differences, the EFL classroom and its tradition to deal with topics such as cultural values can hardly circumvent the topic of diversity. The question is therefore not *whether* diversity should be taught at the content-level, but rather *how* it can be done skilfully.

As indicated in section 3, researchers suggest the use of fictive figures, as for example found in literature, in order to deal with different aspects of diversity. Smith-D'Arezzo (2003, p. 75) refers to professionals from the field of special education and recommends that "teachers use children's literature to attain the same goal set by multicultural literature experts: reduce prejudice and educate children about diversity." The idea is that not only face-to-face encounters, but also literature or other cultural artefacts can confront learners with otherness and initiate processes of or discussions on understanding individual differences and diversity. Eickhorst (cp. 2007, pp. 108–109), for instance, suggests using a fictive figure of the same age as the learners, as for example found in children's literature, in order to deal with that particular figure's individuality in an exemplary way. Such an approach can serve for situations that allow learners to understand

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[7]   Their suggestion for using *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (Alexie, 2007) goes back to Thaler (2012).

aspects of diversity that are not present in their respective learner group (cp. Auernheimer, 2012, p. 129). Moreover, Koss (2015, p. 33) argues that children need to "see themselves in what they read" and therefore need to see themselves reflected or mirrored in literature. She says that "one way to acknowledge the presence of diverse students is to include representations of them in the literature used" (Koss, 2015, p. 38).

However, using literature on diversity requires careful teacher preparation and its use cannot per se guarantee success. For instance, Müller-Hartmann & Schocker v.-Ditfurth (cp. 2014, p. 115) bring forward the argument that learners often consider texts as pure fun and hardly see any notions of ideological subscripts or hidden messages. This point includes that teachers need to sensibly guide learners' critical enquiries with diversity in literature and underlines the need for careful planning and preparation. Similarly, Smith-D'Arezzo (cp. 2003, p. 92) mildly warns that if books are used in order to help children develop sympathy, tolerance and understanding towards diversity, then the learners will need to be guided in some way. When children are allowed to discuss their reactions to a book that depicts diversity and when the teacher provides additional background information, the teacher could be in a position to influence the attitudes children have towards diversity and their peers positively (cp. Smith-D'Arezzo, 2003, p. 92). Smith-D'Arezzo & Moore-Thomas (cp. 2010, p. 5), for example, suggest small group discussions on such books to attempt improving the children's attitudes towards their peers.

However, in an explorative study with $N = 14$ Year 5 learners, Smith-D'Arezzo & Moore-Thomas (2010) investigated the participants' attitudes towards children with learning disabilities via a pre- and post-design in the context of reading and discussing books that dealt with learners who had a learning disability. They found that the participants' "perception of students with learning disabilities were not significantly, positively affected by the presented books and accompanying discussions" (Smith-D'Arezzo & Moore-Thomas, 2010, p. 12). A limitation of this study is certainly its small sample-size. Still, it shows that the mere use of books plus discussions on diversity is not a sure-fire success and does not guarantee positive outcomes such as increasing tolerance. The authors suggest that teachers should not limit their classroom work with such books to only one book, but they should expand it to a number of different, carefully chosen books, provide positive role-models, carefully examine learners' prior knowledge and preconceptions and guide the reading of such books through careful discussions (cp. Smith-D'Arezzo & Moore-Thomas, 2010, p. 12).

The question of whether to use a book that depicts a certain aspect of diversity in a class including a child with exactly that characteristic is extremely difficult and so context-specific that it can hardly be answered in general. Yet, teachers may wish to consider the following points:

- To what extent does the child feel comfortable with his/her individual difference? Is he/she self-confident about it?
- Would the child with an individual difference want to identify with a book character of the same characteristic?
- Can the discussion about a specific individual difference as found in a picture book shift the focus of attention onto the picture book character?
- Does using the book awake the impression that it is only used because of the respective child of the same need?
- Is the child with the individual difference showcased and possibly humiliated by using the book? (also see Küchler & Roters, 2014, p. 242)
- Can the child be asked whether he/she is fine with using the book in class? But: Would a young child dare to tell the teacher that he/she is not fine with it?
- Would the child feel comfortable when the book is discussed in his/her presence? To what extent might the child feel ashamed?

- When using a certain book, can the teacher be sure that no child is affected by the aspect of diversity explicated in the book and do teachers know all their learners well enough?
- How much privacy should be part of teaching contents and topics? Where is the boundary between privacy, catering to the learners' interests, connecting to the learners' previous knowledge and the school's educational mandate?

The scope of this article does not allow any further considerations and is not meant to answer of these questions. However, one can easily see that the issue is so difficult and multifaceted that more (context-bound) research is necessary.

Up to this point, the question still unanswered is that of whether the three books explicated in section 2.2 should be used in the EFL classroom. In fact, there is neither a 'yes' nor a 'no' to this question either, but the answer would be 'it depends'. It depends on the actual class, on the composition of that class, on how teachers feel about the books, on what aim the teachers want to achieve with the books, on what content aspects the teachers want to discuss, on the classes' previous knowledge and experiences, and so on. This article can only provide an example of how books that deal with diversity can be analysed critically and what aspects teachers should consider when planning the use of a particular book.

4.2 Approaches to dealing with children's books in the heterogeneous EFL classroom

As outlined above, EFL classes are heterogeneous in their composition, so that when teachers use a particular book in class, they need to cater to the learners' heterogeneity not only at the level of content and interest, but also at the level of competence. This last section will thus outline approaches of how books can be used in EFL classes with younger learners and how these approaches can be differentiated in order to support and challenge learners of different and individual needs.

Broadly speaking, there are two different ways of using children's literature with (young) EFL learners: storytelling and reading. Storytelling means that the teacher reads out or tells the story to the learners (cp. Böttger, 2005, pp. 85–86; Cameron, 2001, p. 160; Schmid-Schönbein, 2008, p. 90). Reading implies that the learners read the books themselves, either silently for comprehension or aloud to some sort of audience (cp. Brewster & Ellis, 2002, p. 111; Klippel & Doff, 2007, p. 89). While it is inherent in the method of storytelling that the teacher reads the same book to all learners, independent reading can also include that learners read different books.

In view of heterogeneous EFL classrooms with learners of very different individual needs, characteristics, competences and preferences, storytelling as well as reading activities need to be scaffolded and differentiated in order to cater to the learners' individual differences. Such scaffolds are broadly speaking to be used to support the learners' production as well as comprehension of the foreign language (cp. VanPatten & Benati, 2010, pp. 144–145) and serve to create a balance between task demand and task support (cp. Cameron, 2001, p. 26). For each learner, tasks should neither be too easy nor too challenging, but just at a level where their individual competence can be furthered; an issue also known for working in a learner's zone of proximal development (cp. Vygotsky, 1978, pp. 84–86). Therefore, different means of scaffolding and differentiation will be outlined in the following paragraphs to provide an overview of how the use of children's books can be differentiated for young learners.

To begin with, embedding storytelling as well as reading into a meaningful cycle of pre-, while- and post-activities can greatly support the learners' comprehension and learning processes (cp. Aristov & Haudeck, 2013, p. 48). Pre-activities raise the learners' interest in the books and prepare them for the books' content and language (cp. Gehring, 2004, p. 74). While-activities focus the learners' attention as well as support the actual

comprehension processes (cp. Klippel & Doff, 2007, pp. 84–85). Post-activities are used as follow-ups to serve for a creative and further use of the books' language and content for consolidation, opinion-making and application or transfer of knowledge (cp. Müller-Hartmann & Schocker-v. Ditfurth, 2014, p. 82).

Additionally, teacher- as well as peer-support in terms of point-of-need scaffolding, that is support spontaneously provided when needed (cp. Sharpe, 2001, p. 33), can assist learners in reading or listening to a children's book. The teacher carefully guides the learners in the learning processes, acts as a facilitator and is present to provide help or explicit instruction whenever needed (cp. Westphal Irwin, 2007, p. 17). Likewise, the supportive notion of peer cooperation in language learning is generally acknowledged by teachers and researchers (cp. Brüning & Saum, 2009). For instance, learners can co-operatively discuss a story's content or message, an unknown word, a comprehension strategy or ways to decode a difficult sentence (cp. Reckermann, 2018, p. 374–379).

Furthermore, the choice of a book and the placing of the book in a meaningful teaching unit can serve for support through contextualisation (cp. Cameron, 2001, p. 27). Teachers should ensure that the learners are already familiar with a book's topic and have prior knowledge about its content and language (cp. Legutke, Müller-Hartmann & Schocker-v. Ditfurth, 2009, p. 83; Pulido, 2007, p. 161). More so, learners should ideally have a genuine interest in the books to ensure their motivation and allow them to identify with a book's story or character(s). Such interest can possibly best be supported by allowing the learners choice in the selection of books, as for example suggested by approaches of extensive reading (cp. Harmer, 2007, p. 283).

As defined above, children's books or rather picture books as used in the scope of this article, are characterised by an interrelation of visual and textual elements. The visualisations play an important role in supporting the learners' comprehension as the pictures help learners to create meaning and can compensate for possible difficulties at the language level (cp. Kolb, 2013, p. 35). A number of empirical studies (e.g., Kolb, 2013; Reckermann, 2018) could show the importance of visualisations for young EFL learners' learning processes with picture books. As the pictures are inherently present in such books, learners can use them to a lesser or greater extent, depending on how much they need and favour visual support.

Support at the language level can be provided by re-using language items and structures that have already been mastered (cp. Cameron, 2001, p. 27) or by pre-teaching selected lexical items (cp. Mihara, 2011, p. 51). A common strategy is also the use of word banks or dictionaries that allow learners to look up unknown words or phrases. Reckermann (cp. 2018, p. 322), for instance, could show that word lists that were explicitly created for a certain book and contain selected lexical items of the respective book can greatly support learners in the pre-, while- and post-activity phase when reading a picture book for comprehension.

Another means that has been found as supportive in reading is an audio recording in addition to the reading text that allows learners to read a book's text while at the same time listening to the story from, e.g., an MP3 player (cp. Diehr, 2010; Kolb, 2013, p. 37; Reckermann, 2018, p. 335). This, of course, only applies to reading picture books. With the method of storytelling, the teacher already reads the story out to the learners and there is no need for further audio support.

Generally, in storytelling, the teacher uses carefully prepared storytelling techniques when reading the book to the learners (cp., e.g., Böttger, 2005, pp. 87–88; Brewster & Ellis, 2002, pp. 196–197): the purposeful use of the teacher's own voice, an alternation of voices for different characters, pointing to the visualisations, body language, emphasising important parts, bringing story props, etc. These techniques are used in order to support the learners' comprehension of a book and are provided and practised by the teacher in advance as designed-in scaffolds (cp. Sharpe, 2001, p. 33).

As stated above, reading aloud is a different activity than reading a book for comprehension. Reading aloud practises pronunciation, fluency as well as expressive speaking (cp. Nuttall, 2005, p. 2) and has the potential to raise language awareness, particularly phonological awareness and the development of a foreign language inner voice (cp. Diehr, 2010, p. 53). Reading comprehension is not implied in reading aloud and comprehension should generally precede oral reading, so that learners first get the chance to understand a text at the content-level to then be engaged in reading aloud activities (cp. Klippel & Doff, 2007, p. 89). Regarding scaffolding, reading a children's book aloud can well be supported through audio recordings of the respective book. In the context of a reading competition with Year 4 learners, Diehr & Frisch (cp. 2010) could show that the young learners could well read picture books aloud to an audience after explicit practise, including listening to the book via an audio-recording several times. Reading aloud can also be supported through making recordings of one's own reading, for example with a Dictaphone, listening to one's own performance and self-correcting possible inaccuracies or stumbles. Again, also peers or teachers could serve for support through correction and repeated recordings. Empirical evidence, however, is still due at this point.

In sum, a lot of different means, techniques and methods can support young EFL learners in dealing with English picture books, either in storytelling or in reading. It is important to note, however, that the learners' need for support is very individual and that not one scaffold is useful for all learners. Teachers therefore need to prepare a range of different supportive means, designed-in as well as point-of-need scaffolds (Sharpe, 2001) in order to cater to various individual differences and needs and thereby allow all learners to successfully deal with foreign language books. In heterogeneous EFL classrooms, English children's books can only be used effectively when teachers are sensitive to all learners' levels, competences and interests and manage to serve for a balance between task demand and task support for each learner. Last but not least, the teacher's expectations need to be differentiated in that the teacher allows for different outcomes, e.g. different levels of comprehension, based on the learners' different abilities (cp. Doms, 2012 p. 61).

By applying a range of the supportive means outlined in this section, teachers can use the picture books explicated in section 2.2 and ensure that the learners can understand them and work with them at their individual levels.

5   Conclusion

This article first explored how diversity is mirrored in children's literature, particularly in three different picture books, which were analysed critically with the help of a checklist specifically designed for the purposes of this article. In a second step, the question of whether and how to teach diversity at the content-level in the EFL classroom was discussed, followed by an explication of whether and how books that deal with diversity can be used in heterogeneous EFL classes with young learners.

The two guiding questions as stated in the abstract (How do selected English children's books represent or mirror diversity? Can such books be used successfully in the heterogeneous EFL classroom?) can be answered as follows at this point: There are children's books on the market that deal with different aspects of diversity, either direct and explicitly or indirect and implicitly, but the number of such books is still low. When critically analysing three exemplary picture books about diversity based on the checklist that was developed for this article, one soon finds that the books do not always concur with the synthesised quality criteria and that a careful analysis is needed to discover possible downsides. Children's books that depict diversity can, when chosen carefully, be used to explicitly deal with diversity as a topic in the EFL classroom and might have the potential to positively influence learner's attitudes and opinions, but teachers need to

well-prepare and guide the use of and discussions around such books. In practice, children's books can be used either via the method of storytelling or via methods of independent reading. To cater for individual needs and interests in heterogeneous EFL classes, careful scaffolding and different means of differentiation are necessary in order to make such books accessible to young learners, at the language as well as at the content-level. The question of whether a particular book can or should be used in a particular class can hardly be answered in general because classes and their composition are so individual that the answer to this issue circles around a number of guiding questions that need to be answered based on the specific contexts.

However, the considerations and suggestions in this article stay at a conceptual level and still need back-up from empirical research in heterogeneous classroom contexts. In particular, empirical research that supports (or rejects) the claim that the use of books dealing with diversity can reduce prejudices is rare and much needed (see, e.g., Smith-D'Arezzo & Moore-Thomas, 2010, p. 4). Yet, as different learning groups can differ immensely, any suggestion and approaches might work well in one context but pose a problem in others. This, again, remains up to empirical and context-specific classroom research. Still, the hope is that by teaching values of diversity in educational contexts from an early age, for example through children's literature, prejudices will be reduced and stereotypes will be questioned (cp. Koss, 2015, p. 32; Smith-D'Arezzo & Moore-Thomas, 2010, p. 3). The three exemplary books analysed in this article also still need to be tested empirically in different heterogeneous classrooms in order to investigate their actual potential for thematising diversity. Two of the books analysed might be outdated, going back to 1994 and 1999. For possible empirical studies as well as for classroom practice, researchers and teachers might want to consider using more recent and modern books, like *And Tango Makes Three*.

Intentionally, the analysis and discussion of the books in section 2.2 was done in a critical and sensitive way. The topic 'diversity' is an important and at the same time delicate topic, and teachers cannot be critical enough to carefully choose books and discussion subjects when aiming at the development of acceptance and tolerance instead of denial and prejudices. To my mind, such a critical and sensitive analysis serves for the well-grounded selection of a good book that has the potential to motivate the learners to question possible previous attitudes and stereotypes critically. A sensitive topic needs a sensitive treatment and analysis.

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Appendix

Smith-D'Arezzo's (2003) criteria for analysing a children's book that deals with disability:

- The structural elements of the book should be well-developed if not outstanding. This implies that themes with significant messages should subtly be woven into the telling of a story and that the message does not need to be spelled out word for word on every page (cp. Smith-D'Arezzo, 2003, p. 86).
- The book should be appealing to children and the characters of the book should be well-developed to show children with a disability in a realistic light. Smith-D'Arezzo (cp. 2003, p. 76) adds that characters with disabilities should generally be cast in a positive light, but are still characterised realistically with all their flaws. The "reader is able to believe the plot" (Smith-D'Arezzo, 2003, p. 88) and the character is developed well-rounded and non-stereotypical (cp. Smith-D'Arezzo, 2003, p. 88).
- The book should strike a positive emotional chord in the teacher as well as in children (based on reader-response from adults and children).
- The book should present special education issues and any other issues related to disability accurately. For example: "If the book contains a character with a learning disability, is the disability presented accurately?" (Smith-D'Arezzo, 2003, p. 79)

Nasatir & Horn's (cp. 2003, pp. 7–8) criteria to analyse a children's book that deals with a person with a disability:

- The illustrations should display all characters without oversimplified stereotyping.
- Tokenisms in illustrations should be avoided in that all characters should be genuine individuals with distinctive features (e.g., a visible disability, whatever that might be, is only part of an individual, who at the same time has other distinctive features just as any other character).
- The person(s) with a disability should not be portrayed just as observer(s) but take part in the action.
- Standards and chances for success should be the same for every character; no character needs outstanding competences in a certain area in order to compensate for possible weaknesses in another area.
- The person with a disability should not be the problem in the scope of the storyline.
- If a character is depicted as 'different', this should not be accompanied by negative value judgements.
- There should be a clear balance of roles and the person with whatever disability should possess power just as any other character of the story.
- The reader with whatever disability should be able to identify with a character of the story as a positive role model.
- The author (and/or illustrator) of a book should somehow have qualities that help him/her to contribute knowledgeably to disability. When a book, for instance, deals with a certain disability, does the author have experience with or knowledge about people with that disability?
- The story should not contain 'loaded words' which have offensive overtones (e.g. 'retarded').
- The book should be appropriate for the readership concerning age and development and should not be outdated or contain what is nowadays considered as offensive, disrespectful language.

Filled-In Checklists for the Three Books

Book: And Tango Makes Three (Richardson et al., 2005)					
Criteria	**Extent to which the criterion is fulfilled or met**				**Comment**
	Fully	Partly	Not at all	Not applicable	
The structural elements and the story of the book are well-developed.	x				Based on a true story.
The message is woven subtly into the telling of the story.	x				Homosexuality not in the foreground.
The book appeals to children (and teachers/adults).	x				Lovely visualisations, good story.
Any character is shown in a realistic light, well-rounded and with distinctive features.	x				All penguins are portrayed as individuals.
People with a disability or any other individual characteristic or need are cast in a positive light.	x				
People with a disability or any other individual characteristic or need take part in the action and possess power just as any other character in the story. They are not just observers.	x				The homosexual penguin couple is at the centre of the action.
People with a disability or any other individual characteristic or need are not the core of the problem in the scope of the storyline.	x				Yet, they cannot lay an egg which is a problem in the scope of the story.
Oversimplified stereotyping and tokenism are avoided.	x				
Special education issues and issues relating to diversity are presented accurately.				x	
Standards for success are the same for every character.	x				Supported by the fact that they adopt a penguin egg.
Individual differences are not accompanied by negative value judgements.	x				

Any reader is able to identify with a character of the story as a positive role model.	x	x			As far as the learners can identify with animal characters.
The author has background knowledge that enables him/her to contribute knowledgably to diversity.		x			Certainly, the author does not need to be homosexual to write the story! Yet, the author has knowledge about the true story.
The story does not contain loaded words.	x				Written in a time where authors were already very aware of appropriate language.
The book is up-to-date concerning language use, values, etc.	x				Same as above.

Book: Something Else (Cave & Riddell, 1994)					
Criteria	Extent to which the criterion is fulfilled or met				Comment
	Fully	Partly	Not at all	Not applicable	
The structural elements and the story of the book are well-developed.	x				Based on a true story.
The message is woven subtly into the telling of the story.			x		The message of Something Else being an outsider is in the foreground.
The book appeals to children (and teachers/adults).	x				Something Else portrayed as a very lovable character.
Any character is shown in a realistic light, well-rounded and with distinctive features.	x				All characters have very distinctive features.
People with a disability or any other individual characteristic or need are cast in a positive light.		x			Something Else is portrayed as a lovable character, but is an outsider and cannot solve her/his problem.

People with a disability or any other individual characteristic or need take part in the action and possess power just as any other character in the story. They are not just observers.		x			Something Else (and Something) are central characters to the action, but particularly Something Else hardly possesses power.
People with a disability or any other individual characteristic or need are not the core of the problem in the scope of the storyline.			x		The two outsider characters are the core of the problem.
Oversimplified stereotyping and tokenism are avoided.	x				
Special education issues and issues relating to diversity are presented accurately.				x	
Standards for success are the same for every character.			x		Clearly not for Something Else.
Individual differences are not accompanied by negative value judgements.		x			Indirectly they are, as the waySomething Else is different is displayed as negative by the other animals.
Any reader is able to identify with a character of the story as a positive role model.		x			As far as the learners can identify with animal characters and as far as a character can be understood as a POSITIVE role model.
The author has background knowledge that enables him/her to contribute knowledgably to diversity.				x	It is unknown whether the author has knowledge about being excluded.
The story does not contain loaded words.	x				
The book is up-to-date concerning language use, values, etc.		x			True concerning language use, but it is certainly not a positive value that someone is excluded, although it is realistic.

Book: Susan Laughs (Willis & Ross, 1999)					
Criteria	Extent to which the criterion is fulfilled or met				Comment
	Fully	Partly	Not at all	Not applicable	
The structural elements and the story of the book are well-developed.			x		The book does not tell a story or follow a plot.
The message is woven subtly into the telling of the story.		x			The last page reveals the message and urges the reader to turn back the pages.
The book appeals to children (and teachers/adults).	x				Actions are displayed that children do in their everyday lives.
Any character is shown in a realistic light, well-rounded and with distinctive features.		x			The character of Susan is well-rounded and shows distinctive features, but she is not necessarily shown in a realistic light. Her being a wheelchair user is shown in an oversimplified way.
People with a disability or any other individual characteristic or need are cast in a positive light.	x				Susan might even be cast in a too positive light, but certainly positive. The title is questionable concerning the combination of wheelchair and laughter.
People with a disability or any other individual characteristic or need take part in the action and possess power just as any other character in the story. They are not just observers.	x				Absolutely. Susan is in the centre of attention, possesses power and takes part in all actions despite the wheelchair. Again, this depiction might be oversimplified.
People with a disability or any other individual characteristic or need are not the core of the problem in the scope of the storyline.	x				Susan is by no means presented as being the problem, but then the book does not follow a storyline but is rather a concept book.
Oversimplified stereotyping and tokenism are avoided.	x				Absolutely, as they are not found at all.

Special education issues and issues relating to diversity are presented accurately.		x			The book shows a girl in a wheelchair who takes part in many everyday actions that children would participate in. But the ease with which this happens, apparently without any restrictions, is probably not an accurate depiction.
Standards for success are the same for every character.	x				Yes! But possibly in parts unrealistic.
Individual differences are not accompanied by negative value judgements.	x				
Any reader is able to identify with a character of the story as a positive role model.	x				Children can easily identify with Susan and with what she is engaged with. Wheelchair users, however, might in parts identify with the message and with Susan, but might miss a depiction of possible restrictions that a wheelchair might mean to them.
The author has background knowledge that enables him/her to contribute knowledgably to diversity.				x	Unknown.
The story does not contain loaded words.	x				
The book is up-to-date concerning language use, values, etc.		x			The language use is up-to-date, does not bear any difficulties, but the message and value portrayed in the book might be an oversimplification of life in a wheelchair and cast Susan in a too positive light.

Information on the article