

Rethinking Inclusion in Drama Pedagogy: Developing Indicators Within a 4R Holistic Framework

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Abstract

Contemporary research increasingly distinguishes between narrower and broader understandings of inclusion. Another perspective adopted in the recent literature is the 4R justice framework, which examines inclusion through four interrelated dimensions of justice—redistribution, recognition, representation, and relationality. Building on this framework, the study argues that, among pedagogical approaches associated with inclusive education, drama-based pedagogical approaches can be meaningfully interpreted across all four dimensions of justice and within both narrower and broader understandings of inclusion. However, the analysis reveals a key limitation in the existing research on drama-based pedagogical approaches: inclusion-related processes are predominantly examined in a fragmented manner, with individual dimensions addressed in isolation rather than as part of a coherent multidimensional construct. In response, the article proposes an integrative analytical framework for examining inclusion-related changes associated with drama-based pedagogical approaches. This framework is explored empirically through a preliminary set of teacher-informed indicators derived from the descriptions of inclusive practices associated with the use of drama-based approaches, based on written submissions collected through a structured form and follow-up semi-structured interviews with teachers. The proposed analytical framework thus adapts the existing 4R conceptualisation for the analysis of inclusion-related changes associated with drama-based pedagogical approaches and provides a preliminary operationalisation through practice-based, teacher-informed qualitative indicators that may inform future instrument-development aimed at systematically investigating inclusion in drama-based pedagogical approaches. The findings further suggest that the most critical challenge may concern representation, which emerged as the most difficult dimension to operationalise through teacher-informed indicators.

Keywords: drama-based pedagogical approaches; inclusion; redistribution; recognition; representation



Academic Editors: Joseph Mintz and
Norimune Kawai

Received: 22 May 2026

Revised: 31 July 2026

Accepted: 3 August 2026

Published: 5 August 2026

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1. Introduction

1.1. From Integration to a Broader Understanding of Inclusion

The concept of inclusion has evolved significantly over recent decades, particularly following the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action (UNESCO, 1994), which established inclusion as a fundamental principle of education and promoted the idea of 'schools for all'. The document emphasised the responsibility of mainstream educational

systems to accommodate learners with diverse physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic and cultural characteristics while fostering human dignity, equal opportunities and non-discriminatory communities. While earlier conceptualisations of inclusion were primarily oriented towards integration and targeted support for specific learner groups, more recent perspectives have increasingly framed inclusion as a broader transformative process. In this context, the concept of transformative inclusion (Rahman et al., 2026) extends beyond the issues of access and placement to encompass wider concerns of equity, participation, belonging and social justice for all learners. Contemporary debates, therefore, have increasingly distinguished between narrow and broad understandings of inclusion (Allan, 2025; Skubic Ermenc et al., 2019; Haug, 2017). Narrow understandings emphasise compensatory support for marginalised learners, particularly students with special educational needs, through measures aimed at facilitating adaptation to existing educational structures. In contrast, broader perspectives regard diversity as a valuable resource for learning and participation and emphasise the creation of genuinely inclusive educational environments. However, translating these broader principles into educational practice remains a significant challenge.

1.2. Inclusion from the Perspective of the Four-Dimensional Model of Justice (4R)

To better understand and promote inclusion, it is useful to conceptualise it through the dimensions of social justice, as the integrated consideration of these dimensions enables a more comprehensive understanding of inclusive educational practices (Kristl & Jeznik, 2024). In this study, inclusion is analysed through a multidimensional justice framework grounded in the work of Fraser and Honneth (2003) and further developed by Fraser (2007), Lesar (2013, 2019), Lynch et al. (2009, 2021) and Mincu and Mills (2026). This framework conceptualises justice as comprising four dimensions: redistribution, recognition, representation and relationality (hereafter referred to as the 4R justice framework).

Redistribution refers to the fair distribution of resources and opportunities, particularly in ways that address structural disadvantages affecting marginalised groups (Rawls, 1971). While redistribution has traditionally been understood primarily in terms of material goods and formal access to schooling, some contemporary authors extend this perspective towards the fair distribution of epistemic goods, particularly access to knowledge and opportunities for knowledge acquisition (Kurtulmuş & Irzik, 2017). Recognition concerns respect for diverse identities, experiences and worldviews, as well as opportunities for their public expression and acknowledgement (Fraser, 2007; Fraser & Honneth, 2003; Mincu & Mills, 2026). Representation addresses participation and voice in decision-making processes that shape social and institutional life (Akkan & Buğra, 2020; Fraser, 2007). Finally, relationality highlights the importance of emotional relationships, interdependence and care, which are often neglected in justice frameworks grounded in the notion of the autonomous individual (Lynch et al., 2021).

1.3. Drama-Based Approaches as Potential for Advancing Inclusion

1.3.1. Theoretical Considerations

The 4R justice framework contributes to a more holistic understanding of the conditions under which inclusive educational environments emerge, are sustained and further developed, while also directing attention towards pedagogical approaches that support all four dimensions of social justice among diverse learners. One such approach could be learning through drama-based pedagogical approaches, which use theatrical action as a medium for educational experience (Lešnik Jeras, 2023). These approaches involve a processual and collective mode of engagement within a symbolic space, in which role-taking,

improvisation and dialogue occur (Lešnik Jeras, 2023), thereby creating conditions that may support more inclusive educational practices.

Symbolic forms may create liminal spaces between fiction and social reality (Hughes & Wilson, 2004; Iser, 1978), potentially enabling participants to step beyond the conventions of everyday life and enter an imaginative world within which they can experiment with voice and agency beyond the limitations of ordinary reality. Role-taking has been argued to support reflective engagement with others' perspectives (Verducci, 2000), while improvisation may place individuals in unpredictable situations in which meaning can emerge through responsiveness and interaction rather than being reproduced in fixed forms (Jesenovec, 2023; Kroflič, 2023). Drawing on the metaphor of the 'hundred languages of children' (Malaguzzi, 1996), drama-based pedagogical approaches recognise multiple modes of expression and may therefore expand possibilities for participation. Embodied engagement has been associated with access to dimensions of experience beyond verbal articulation, including sensorimotor and implicit forms of memory (Fleischer, 2023; Fuchs, 2012; Koch & Fischman, 2011; Sheets-Johnstone, 2010).

Taken together, these theoretical perspectives suggest several points of conceptual convergence with the 4R justice framework. They highlight diverse and embodied forms of access to the learning process, engagement with multiple perspectives, opportunities for first-person agency, and collective meaning-making through dialogue. These concepts reflect ideas that may also be considered central to the four dimensions of the 4R justice framework, including equitable access to epistemic goods (redistribution), engagement with diverse perspectives (recognition), the influence of authentic voices (representation), and relational connectedness (relationality).

1.3.2. Empirical Observations

Building on these theoretical considerations, empirical research likewise reports findings that can be meaningfully interpreted across all four dimensions of the 4R justice framework, thereby supporting the claim that drama-based pedagogical approaches may contribute to inclusive educational practices in a comprehensive sense.

Studies on drama-based pedagogies have frequently reported increased student access to and engagement in learning processes, which can be associated with redistribution (of epistemic goods) (e.g., Ashraf & Bhat, 2024; Feng, 2022; Gascon, 2019; Garrett & MacGill, 2021; Hua et al., 2025; Wells & Sandretto, 2017).

Research further indicates the development of empathy, engagement with diverse perspectives and attention to marginalised or less visible narratives, which may be interpreted in terms of recognition (e.g., Feng, 2022; Massó-Guijarro et al., 2021; Kana & Aitken, 2007; Meedendorp & Deunk, 2025).

In addition, studies have suggested that drama-based approaches support higher forms of participation, in which students contribute to meaning-making, initiate ideas or influence the direction of activities, corresponding to representation (e.g., Garrett & MacGill, 2021; Messiou et al., 2025; Visky-Varga & Bartalis-Binder, 2024).

Finally, findings also point to outcomes related to relationality, particularly the development of community, belonging, trust and safety within learning environments (e.g., Garrett & MacGill, 2021; Massó-Guijarro et al., 2021; Mreiwed et al., 2017).

These dimensions are reported both in studies focusing on marginalised or disadvantaged groups (e.g., Ashraf & Bhat, 2024; Massó-Guijarro et al., 2021; Layachi et al., 2024; Visky-Varga & Bartalis-Binder, 2024; Wells & Sandretto, 2017) and in studies examining broader or mixed student populations (e.g., Beaumont, 2020, 2025; Feng, 2022; Garrett & MacGill, 2021; Gascon, 2019; Giera, 2025; Karaolis, 2023; Kana & Aitken, 2007; Lauss & Helm, 2025; Mreiwed et al., 2017).

Taken together, these studies indicate specific outcomes that may be associated with particular dimensions of justice related to inclusion, across both narrower and broader understandings of inclusion. While they point to processes connected with redistribution, recognition, representation and relationality, these dimensions are typically addressed separately and remain analytically implicit. Consequently, inclusion tends to be approached through dispersed indicators rather than as a multidimensional phenomenon.

In this context, Karaolis' (2020) study is particularly relevant, as it highlights increased student participation in learning activities, greater engagement with diverse perspectives, enhanced student initiative and improved classroom relationships in mainstream educational settings in which drama-based approaches are employed. These findings may be interpreted in relation to all four dimensions of the 4R framework: redistribution, recognition, representation and relationality. However, this connection is not made explicit in the study, where such outcomes are instead discussed within a more general and undifferentiated understanding of inclusion.

1.4. The Present Study

To address this gap, the present exploratory qualitative study proposes an integrative analytical framework for examining inclusion-related changes associated with drama-based pedagogical approaches, and provides a preliminary operationalisation of this framework through teacher-informed practice-based qualitative indicators. The study is grounded in the 4R framework, which conceptualises inclusion through redistribution, recognition, representation and relationality. Within the proposed analytical framework, each of the four dimensions is examined across both narrower and broader understandings of inclusion, thereby incorporating two important strands in contemporary debates on inclusion and strengthening the analytical distinctiveness of the framework. By bringing these dimensions together, the study seeks to move beyond fragmented accounts of inclusion and to offer a more systematic and holistic approach to analysing inclusion within drama-based pedagogical approaches.

Following the proposal of the conceptual framework, which integrates the four dimensions of the 4R framework with narrower and broader conceptualisations of inclusion, the empirical study was guided by the following research question: How do teachers, drawing on their own practice, perceive and narrate examples of positive inclusion-related changes associated with the use of drama-based pedagogical approaches within this analytical framework?

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Study Design

This study adopted a qualitative exploratory design to examine how teachers who implement drama-based approaches in their pedagogical practice perceive the contribution of these approaches to inclusion. The study was guided by an interpretivist epistemological position. Teachers' accounts were treated as situated interpretations of their experience rather than as objective evidence of student outcomes. The study was also phenomenologically informed, as it focused on how teachers experienced, perceived and made sense of inclusion-related changes in concrete drama-based pedagogical situations (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). However, the analysis was not designed as a full phenomenological analysis; rather, these reflective accounts were analysed through a framework-guided qualitative procedure aimed at further operationalising the 4R framework.

The study was conceptually grounded in the 4R framework of justice, which conceptualises inclusion through redistribution, recognition, representation, and relationality, with each dimension examined across both narrower and broader conceptualisations of

inclusion. In line with the theoretical framing of this article, inclusion was approached as a multidimensional phenomenon that extends beyond compensatory support for particular learners and encompasses questions of equitable access (to epistemic goods), recognition of diversity, higher forms of participation and the quality of relationships within the learning community.

The study did not involve an intervention introduced for research purposes, nor did it require any additional modification of ongoing pedagogical processes. Instead, it relied on retrospective and reflective descriptions of practices that the participants had already implemented. Consequently, the study does not seek to establish causal effects of drama-based pedagogical approaches on student outcomes, but to analyse teachers' perceptions and interpretations of inclusion-related changes associated with these practices.

Ethical approval for the study was granted in March 2026 by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Arts (Protocol Nr. 506-2026). The approved ethics protocol covered the collection and analysis of teachers' retrospective, anonymised reports of student-related pedagogical cases. Students were not directly recruited, contacted, interviewed, observed, assessed or otherwise involved as research participants. No new data were collected from students. The ethics approval was granted on the basis that student anonymity would be protected and that the study would not create additional consequences or burdens for students.

2.2. Participants and Procedure

The participants consisted of 10 teachers from Slovenia ($n = 5$), Croatia ($n = 3$), and Italy ($n = 2$) working in primary education. They represented a range of subject areas (science, mathematics, physics, philosophy, languages, and primary education.), and all had previously participated in one or more educational programmes focused on drama-based pedagogical approaches. Participants from three educational systems were included in order to broaden the contextual range of practice examples within a shared professional development framework. The study was not designed as a cross-national comparison, and country was not treated as an analytic category in the coding or interpretation of indicators.

All teachers, with the exception of one, reported having students with special needs in their classrooms. Most frequently, they mentioned students with attention disorders, autism, dyslexia and physical disabilities, as well as students from different cultural backgrounds or whose language in the classroom was not their native language.

The participants were recruited through criterion-based purposive sampling combined with voluntary response sampling. The principal inclusion criterion was the use of drama-based pedagogical approaches in the participants' own educational practice. To identify potential participants, individuals who had participated in professional development activities organised within the ACIIS project (Academy for Creative, Innovative and Inclusive Schools¹) were invited to participate, as this provided access to a relevant pool of practitioners. Teachers were invited to share one or more examples from their own practice in which they had used drama-based approaches. Although the invitation allowed for additional examples, each participant submitted one written form. The final dataset therefore comprised ten written submissions, ten corresponding practice examples and ten follow-up semi-structured interviews. The written submissions were typically approximately two pages in length, depending on the amount of contextual detail provided by the participant and the formatting of the submitted form. Invitations were distributed by e-mail through project partner institutions and the protected mailing list associated with the ACIIS learning management system. All participants provided signed informed consent.

The authors were members of the research team within the ACIIS project, through which the recruitment of participants was organised. The participants were practitioners who

had taken part in professional development activities related to drama-based pedagogical approaches, whereas the authors' role in the project was primarily research-oriented. Although recruitment took place through project networks, the researchers conducting the interviews had not previously communicated directly with the participants; the interviews represented the first direct interaction between the researchers and the participating teachers.

The sample was considered appropriate for the exploratory aim of the study because it consisted of a highly specific group of teachers who had participated in professional development related to inclusion and drama-based pedagogy and who had implemented drama-based approaches in their own practice. However, the small and selective sample limits the transferability of the findings and supports the interpretation of the proposed indicators as preliminary.

Data were collected through two complementary sources: written submissions gathered through a structured form and follow-up semi-structured interviews. The written submissions constituted the primary data source, while the interviews served to clarify ambiguities, deepen reflection and expand upon the contextual details of the practices described. Because the submission form included a brief explanation of the 4R framework and invited the participants to reflect on inclusion through this conceptual lens, the data are understood as conceptually informed reflective accounts rather than wholly spontaneous narratives. The participating teachers were thus treated as practice-based contributors to the further operationalisation of the framework. Accordingly, the analysis focused not simply on whether the participants explicitly named the four dimensions but on how they described the enactment of change within concrete pedagogical situations.

Data collection was conducted remotely in two stages in March 2026. In the first stage, the participants completed the submission form, a structured instrument developed to collect reflective descriptions of pedagogical practice. The form contained open-ended prompts inviting the participants to describe the educational context, the learner group, the selected drama-based activity, their own role in the activity, the roles and reactions of the participants, the intended or perceived goals and outcomes, any available supporting evidence, the perceived contribution of the practice to inclusion and possible directions for further development. On each form, participants were invited to focus on one concrete example that, in their view, most clearly illustrated the inclusive potential of drama-based pedagogy.

In the second stage, each participant took part in an individual semi-structured online interview lasting approximately 30 min. The interview guide followed the thematic structure of the submitted form and was used to clarify unclear points, elicit richer descriptions and deepen the participants' reflections. In the interviews, particular emphasis was placed on identifying and articulating perceived inclusion-related changes in individual students. The participants were asked to compare the pedagogical process in which the drama-based pedagogical approach was used with their usual practice, to specify what had improved in terms of redistribution, recognition, representation and relationality, and to explain how these changes were manifested within the pedagogical process. These prompts were used to support focused reflection on perceived change, not to require participants to categorise their examples according to the framework. This focus was introduced because the participants initially tended to describe observable features of the activity rather than the changes it produced, and therefore, required additional prompts to distinguish between what was present and what had changed.

To reduce the risk that participants would provide only general or confirmatory accounts, the interview questions included several probing prompts. Participants were asked how they knew that a change had occurred, how the change was manifested in a concrete example, how the described process differed from their usual practice, whether

similar changes were absent or less visible in other pedagogical approaches and whether the same change might plausibly have been achieved through another method. These prompts were used to encourage more specific, situated and critically reflective accounts rather than general positive evaluations of drama-based pedagogy.

The submission forms and interviews were conducted either in Slovenian or English. Slovenian participants completed the forms and interviews in Slovenian, whereas participants from Croatia, and Italy used English. Since English was not the first language of participants, the follow-up interviews were also used to clarify meanings, examples and possible ambiguities in the written submissions. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Written submissions were included in the corpus as written texts.

During data preparation, after transcription and before coding, all materials were prepared in Slovenian as the common working language for analysis. English-language materials were translated into Slovenian by members of the research team who were fluent in Slovenian and English. Coding was conducted on this common Slovenian analytic corpus, while the original-language material remained available throughout the analysis. Where formulations were ambiguous or analytically important, especially in borderline cases between recognition and relationality, translations were checked against the original wording and discussed within the research team; where necessary, meanings were further clarified with participants during the follow-up interviews. The excerpts presented in the results are either translated or original excerpts from written submissions and interviews and have been lightly edited for clarity.

2.3. Data Analysis

The completed forms and interview transcripts were treated as a single qualitative corpus and analysed using framework-guided qualitative analysis drawing on the Framework Method (Gale et al., 2013), since the study combined theoretically predefined analytical categories with preliminary, inductively generated lower-level indicators across cases. The analysis was primarily deductive in orientation, as it was guided by the 4R framework as a sensitising and organising concept. The four dimensions were therefore not treated as independently emergent categories, but as theoretically predefined analytical lenses.

To facilitate the development of the conceptual framework, the four dimensions were deliberately distinguished.

- Redistribution (R1) was defined as students having better access to learning content and/or educational activities.
- Recognition (R2) focused on changes in students' expression of first-person experiences and their capability to hear second-person experiences².
- Representation (R3) was defined as changes in students taking a more active role or exerting greater influence in planning, shaping, or carrying out educational activities.
- Relationality (R4) captured changes in interpersonal relationships, reflected in more relaxed atmosphere, greater acceptance and increased connectedness between individuals and within the community.

The procedure was also informed by directed qualitative content analysis, insofar as the 4R framework provided the initial theoretical coding frame. However, the analysis was not limited to assigning data to predefined categories: after relevant meaning units had been identified, preliminary codes were generated from teachers' accounts and then compared, merged and formulated as teacher-informed indicators within each 4R dimension. For this reason, the analytic process is best described as deductive framework coding with an inductive indicator-generation component.

Cases were excluded when participants described changes only at a general or abstract level without supporting their claims with a concrete example of an observed change in an

individual student. All remaining cases were firstly included in the analysis and assigned to one of the analytically delineated dimensions.

Table 1 presents illustrative examples of the inclusion and exclusion criteria applied during data analysis.

Table 1. Illustrative examples of the inclusion and exclusion criteria applied during data analysis.

Example	Decision	Reason
«They were more relaxed, including those who usually are not.»	Excluded	General statement without a concrete example of a perceived change.
«Students encouraged and helped one another. They prompted each other during the performance if someone forgot their lines and quickly came to help when needed.»	Excluded	Describes observed behaviour but not a perceived change.
«For comparison, I will take the example of a round-table discussion we had about relationships. In that activity, the students discussed the topic as ‘experts’, but their ideas were often very radical, unrealistic, and disconnected from reality, reflecting things they had heard from the media or their parents. However, when they enacted these same ideas in a dramatic scene, it immediately became apparent which ideas held up and which did not. Through this process, they came to understand the world much more deeply.»	Included	Concrete, contextualised example illustrating a perceived change.

The unit of analysis was therefore a meaning unit referring to a teacher-articulated perception of change in a student, a group of students or the classroom process. A meaning unit could consist of a sentence, several sentences or a longer excerpt from a written submission or interview, provided that it described a perceived change in relation to a concrete pedagogical example.

The analytic process proceeded in several stages. First, all written submissions and interview transcripts were read repeatedly to develop familiarity with the corpus as a whole and with the specific pedagogical contexts described in each case. Next, relevant meaning units were identified and coded. Particular attention was paid to passages in which the participants described concrete changes observed in students.

In the process of coding no specialised qualitative analysis software was used. Coding tables were prepared and revised in Microsoft Word.

In the next phase, a second interpretive layer focused on how the participants conceptualised inclusion itself. Accounts were interpreted as reflecting a narrower understanding of inclusion when they framed inclusion primarily in terms of support, accommodation or improved access for specific learners or groups perceived as disadvantaged, marginalised or vulnerable. By contrast, accounts were interpreted as reflecting a broader understanding of inclusion when they presented diversity as a constitutive feature of the learning community and as a pedagogical resource for all participants, rather than as an issue attached only to particular students otherwise perceived as disadvantaged, marginalised or vulnerable. This distinction made it possible to analyse not only which 4R dimensions were reflected in teachers’ accounts of perceived inclusion-related changes but also the conceptual horizon within which such changes were understood. The distinction between narrower and broader understandings of inclusion was applied at the level of meaning units rather than whole participants. This allowed the same participant or practice example to contain both narrower and broader framings of inclusion, depending on how a specific change was described.

To enhance analytic transparency and consistency, the coding process was documented through a coding table linking meaning units, preliminary codes, 4R dimensions, understandings of inclusion and final indicators. Initial coding was divided between two authors,

each of whom coded approximately half of the practice examples and the corresponding interview material. This procedure was sequential and not based on independent double coding. A third author reviewed the coding across the corpus, focusing on the consistency of the application of the 4R dimensions, the distinction between narrower and broader understandings of inclusion and the formulation of indicators. Ambiguous cases and differences in interpretation clustered primarily around the boundaries between redistribution and representation, recognition and representation, and recognition and relationality. These borderline cases concerned whether increased engagement reflected improved access or genuine influence; whether the expression of personal experience also involved influence over the pedagogical process; and whether the acknowledgement of such experience was better interpreted as recognition or as a change in relational quality. The three researchers returned to the original excerpts and resolved these cases through repeated comparison and collective discussion until consensus was reached, considering whether each account described a sufficiently substantiated perceived change, which 4R dimension or dimensions were most appropriate, and whether the code should be retained, merged, differentiated, or excluded.

Finally, patterns across cases were compared to identify recurring emphases and areas that remained less visible in the participants' reflections.

The research team approached the study with prior theoretical and professional interest in inclusion and drama-based pedagogical approaches. This position supported theoretically informed interpretation but also created a possible risk of confirmation bias, particularly the risk of interpreting teachers' accounts as confirming the inclusive potential of drama-based pedagogy. Several steps were taken to address this risk. During interviews, participants were asked to substantiate perceived changes with concrete examples, to compare drama-based practices with their usual practice and to consider whether similar changes might also have been achieved through other pedagogical methods.

3. Results

The following sections present the proposed teacher-informed indicators for each of the four dimensions. The indicators should be regarded as preliminary qualitative operationalisation emerging from an exploratory qualitative study. In interpreting these findings, it is important to recognise that the distinctions between the four dimensions are analytical rather than ontological. Because the dimensions were operationalised through deliberately narrow analytical definitions, some empirical examples could plausibly have been classified differently had alternative or broader conceptual definitions been adopted. Such overlap is to be expected in conceptual frameworks that seek to capture complex and interconnected phenomena. The conceptual proximity between the four dimensions can be understood through the notion of sibling constructs, that is, constructs that are conceptually and/or empirically closely related but not identical as they still retain distinct meanings. [Lawson and Robins \(2021\)](#) argue that such constructs should not be treated through a simple same/different dichotomy, but require systematic and transparent handling of both their overlap and their distinctiveness. This is relevant for the 4R framework, because redistribution, recognition, representation and relationality are theoretically distinct dimensions of justice, while in concrete pedagogical situations they may appear simultaneously and mutually reinforce one another. The aim of the present study is therefore not to eliminate all overlap between the dimensions, but to clarify the primary analytic focus of each dimension and to make the coding decisions transparent.

For example, if [Hart's \(1992\)](#) ladder of participation had served as the primary conceptual reference for the dimension of representation, students' more active engagement in educational activities or their increased expression of personal views—regardless of

whether these views ultimately influenced pedagogical decisions—could have been interpreted as lower levels of representation. Within the present framework, however, these forms of participation were deliberately differentiated. Increased engagement in educational activities was conceptualised as redistribution, reflecting improved access to learning opportunities, while greater expression of students' own experiences was conceptualised as recognition. Representation was reserved for qualitatively different cases in which students' voices exerted a genuine influence on the planning, shaping, or carrying out educational activities. In this respect, representation is understood not simply as participation through expression, but as participation through influence.

A comparable conceptual decision was made in distinguishing between recognition and relationality. Some examples ultimately assigned to relationality could equally have been interpreted as recognition if the latter had been defined more broadly to include not only opportunities to express one's own experiences and to engage with the perspectives of others, but also the experience of having those perspectives acknowledged and valued. Instead, we deliberately conceptualised this latter aspect as relationality. Relationality therefore captures not merely students' increased capacity for self-expression, but the extent to which such expression is reflected in reported improvements in the quality of interpersonal relationships and the social climate of the learning community. In this sense, recognition can be understood as a sibling construct of both representation and relationality, while a certain degree of conceptual overlap may also occur between redistribution and representation. These conceptual overlaps are further illustrated through the borderline cases presented in.

To further illustrate how ambiguous cases were ultimately assigned to individual dimensions, Table 2 presents the core analytical questions that guided the final stage of the coding process. These questions served as the final decision criteria when determining the dimension to which each empirical example was assigned.

Table 2. Core analytical questions used for the final coding of empirical cases.

Dimension	Core Analytical Question
Redistribution	Did the student gain better access to learning?
Recognition	Did the student become more able to express or understand lived experiences?
Representation	Did the student gain genuine influence over the educational process?
Relationality	Did the quality of interpersonal relationships improve?

The analytical process also identified several false positives, particularly within the dimension of representation. These were cases that initially appeared to indicate change in the dimension of representation but, upon closer analysis, did not meet operational definition of genuine representation because students' increased activity primarily reflected greater engagement with teacher-initiated tasks rather than students exercising influence over educational processes. Such a false positive is also presented in Table 3.

Table 3 presents the identified indicators and indicates whether they appeared in accounts reflecting a narrower or broader understanding of inclusion. In accounts reflecting a narrower understanding, inclusion was mainly framed as support for specific learners perceived as disadvantaged, vulnerable or at risk of exclusion. In accounts reflecting a broader understanding, inclusion was described in terms of changes among students who were not necessarily perceived as belonging to vulnerable groups. The same indicator could, therefore, appear in both types of accounts, albeit with a different conceptual emphasis.

Table 3. Indicators of perceived inclusion-related changes in students across the 4R dimensions and understandings of inclusion.

Dimension (4R)	Indicator of Perceived Change	N	B
R1—Redistribution	Easier entry into the learning process of knowledge acquisition ^{R3}	•	•
	Increased engagement in learning processes ^{R3}		•
	Improved retention of learning content	•	•
	Deeper understanding of learning content		•
R2—Recognition	Easier expression of first-person experiences ^{R3}	•	•
	Easier understanding of diverse second-person experiences		•
	More in-depth reflection and expression of first-person experiences ^{R3}		•
	More in-depth understanding of second-person experiences	•	•
R3—Representation	More active contribution of ideas to the learning process	•	
	More active (co-)leading of the learning process	•	•
	Greater participation in carrying out teacher-designed activities		•
R4—Relationality	Greater recognition of the importance of each individual for the community ^{R2}	•	•
	A stronger sense of being acknowledged within the community ^{R2}	•	
	Improved well-being within the community		•
	Stronger sense of connectedness	•	•
	Improved mutual negotiation and agreement-making within the community	•	•
	Stronger sense of being understood by others in relation to one's first-person experience ^{R2}	•	

Note. R1–R4 refer to the four dimensions of the 4R framework. N = narrower understanding of inclusion; B = broader understanding of inclusion. A superscript R1–R4 indicates a borderline case that could also plausibly have been assigned to the referenced dimension but was classified under the reported dimension according to the analytical distinctions adopted in this study. A strikethrough entry labelled FP denotes a false positive identified during the analytical process. The symbol • indicates that the respective indicator was identified in teachers' accounts coded as reflecting the corresponding understanding of inclusion. The four dimensions were theoretically predefined and organised deductively according to the 4R framework, whereas the indicators were derived inductively from coded descriptions of perceived inclusion-related changes in students. The symbols indicate presence within the analysed accounts and do not represent frequency or statistical significance.

Throughout this article, the term indicator refers to a preliminary qualitative descriptor generated from the present corpus, rather than to an established operationalisation of the 4R dimensions.

The examples presented below are translated excerpts from teachers' written submissions and interviews; they have been lightly edited for clarity.

3.1. Redistribution

In the descriptions, four types of perceived inclusion-related changes were identified in the domain of redistribution: easier entry into the learning process and knowledge acquisition, increased engagement in learning, improved retention of learning content and deeper understanding of learning content. In this dimension, redistribution was not primarily articulated in terms of material resources or formal access to schooling but rather in terms of equitable access to epistemic goods, reflected in access to learning

content and/or activities. The focus of this dimension was already oriented towards these aspects, as both existing theoretical discussions and empirical findings indicate considerable potential for change precisely in the accessibility of learning content and activities. Furthermore, the study explored practices taking place within already established structures of formal access and material resources. Teachers' accounts indicated that drama-based pedagogical approaches were perceived as making learning more accessible by enabling students to enter the activity, remain engaged in it, remember the content more effectively and understand it in greater depth. In this sense, redistribution refers to the reallocation of opportunities for meaningful participation in knowledge acquisition.

3.1.1. Easier Entry in the Learning Process of Knowledge Acquisition

The first indicator refers to students' easier entry into the learning process. In teachers' accounts, drama-based approaches were described as lowering barriers to the accessibility of the learning process, either for specific students who usually experience difficulties in engaging with school activities or for individual students who are not typically perceived as belonging to vulnerable groups. This form of change was, therefore, identified in both narrower and broader understandings of inclusion.³

For example:

[N] Students with special educational needs and limited language abilities, who otherwise have difficulties engaging in the pedagogical process, were described as being more actively involved in the activities when drama-based approaches were used. [P7]

[B] When other activities were used to address the same topic, some students did not wish to participate. In contrast, when drama-based approaches were used, no student remained merely an observer; all students participated in the learning process. [P1]

3.1.2. Increased Engagement in Learning

The second indicator concerns increased engagement in the learning process. While the previous indicator refers mainly to students' inclusion in the activity, this indicator captures a further shift: students were not only involved but became more focused, motivated and invested in the learning task. This indicator appeared in accounts reflecting a broader understanding of inclusion, where the emphasis was on the transformation of the learning process for all students.

For example:

[B] When the content was taught through frontal instruction, some students found it boring and felt disengaged from the subject. However, when drama-based approaches were used, all students were described as being focused on solving the problem and on how to represent it with their bodies. [P10]

[B] Students enthusiastically asked not to be taught only through writing on the board and reading from the textbook but to approach other content through drama-based approaches as well. [P10]

3.1.3. Improved Retention of Learning Content

The third indicator refers to improved retention of learning content. In teachers' accounts, drama-based pedagogical approaches were described as supporting students' ability to remember what had been learned, either in relation to specific students who usually have difficulties with retention or in relation to students more generally, including those who are not typically perceived as vulnerable. This indicator was, therefore, identified in both narrower and broader understandings of inclusion.

For example:

[N] A student with learning difficulties, who found it very hard to remember content through discussion and reading, appeared to remember the material much better when

drama-based approaches were used. During assessment on a topic previously taught through drama-based approaches, the student did not experience difficulties. [P1]

[B] The majority of students were perceived to memorise a poem more quickly through drama-based approaches than when other approaches were used. [P6]

3.1.4. Deeper Understanding of Learning Content

The fourth indicator refers to a deeper understanding of learning content. It appeared in accounts reflecting a broader understanding of inclusion, where drama-based approaches were described by teachers as enabling students to engage with learning content not only at a superficial level but in a more in-depth way.

For example:

[B] At the end of a learning unit, students wrote an essay. Students who had learned the material through drama-based approaches reflected a deeper understanding in their essays compared to those who had learned the content through other approaches. [P10]

3.2. Recognition

In the descriptions, four types of perceived inclusion-related changes were identified in the domain of recognition: easier expression of first-person experiences, easier understanding of diverse second-person experiences, more in-depth reflection and expression of first-person experiences, and more in-depth understanding of second-person experiences. While redistribution referred primarily to access to the learning process, recognition concerned the extent to which students' experiences, perspectives and ways of making meaning became visible, expressible and understandable within the group. In this dimension, drama-based approaches were described by teachers as creating conditions in which students could more easily express their own experiences, encounter the experiences of others and develop a more differentiated understanding of both self and others.

3.2.1. Easier Expression of First-Person Experiences

The first indicator refers to students' easier expression of their own experiences. In teachers' accounts, drama-based approaches were described as opening up forms of expression that were less dependent on conventional modes of communication. This was particularly evident in accounts reflecting a narrower understanding of inclusion, where the focus was on students who usually experience barriers to self-expression. However, it also appeared in broader accounts, where the emphasis was on greater overall openness in expressing personal experiences among all students in the class.

For example:

[N] A student with a cognitive impairment, who otherwise found it difficult to express their first-person experience, was described as expressing their experience related to the topic more easily when drama-based approaches were used. [P2]

[B] Students rarely express their own ideas and experiences during regular lessons. However, when drama-based approaches were used, students appeared to incorporate their first-person experiences into the learning content to a greater extent. [P3]

3.2.2. Easier Understanding of Diverse Second-Person Experiences

The second indicator refers to students' easier understanding of the interpretations or perspectives of others. This indicator appeared in accounts reflecting a broader understanding of inclusion, where the emphasis was not on vulnerable students but on the general emergence of a plurality of perspectives among all students in the classroom.

For example:

[B] The use of drama-based approaches created more opportunities for exploring different interpretations of a poem compared to the interpretation of literary works through other approaches. [P6]

3.2.3. More In-Depth Reflection and Expression of First-Person Experiences

Compared to the first indicator, which concerns easier expression, this category captures a qualitative shift in the depth and complexity of students' self-reflection. It appeared in accounts reflecting a broader understanding of inclusion, where drama-based approaches were described by teachers as enabling students to move beyond general statements and to engage more critically with their own initial responses.

For example:

[B] When other approaches are used, students discuss their experiences at a more general level. However, when drama-based approaches were used, students appeared to approach their initial responses in a more in-depth and critical way, taking contextual circumstances into account. [P3]

3.2.4. More In-Depth Understanding of Second-Person Experiences

This form of change was identified in both narrower and broader understandings of inclusion. In the narrower account, it concerned a student whose previous behaviour had harmed others and who came to better understand the perspectives of those affected. In the broader account, it concerned the group's more nuanced understanding of a classmate who had previously been viewed in a one-dimensional way.

For example:

[N] A student who had been violent towards classmates did not understand the perspectives of victims when other approaches aimed at reducing violence were used. However, when drama-based approaches were applied, the student came to understand how the victims he had harmed felt. [P2]

[B] Students who had previously experienced violence from a classmate understood this student only from a one-dimensional perspective—as someone who was violent towards them—when other approaches were used. However, when drama-based approaches were applied, students became aware of his life circumstances and recognised the multidimensionality of this individual. [P2]

3.3. Representation

In the descriptions, two types of perceived inclusion-related changes were identified in the domain of representation: more active contribution of ideas to the learning process and more active (co-)leading of the learning process. While redistribution concerned access to learning and recognition concerned the expression and understanding of personal experiences, representation referred to students' ability to influence the direction, content or organisation of the learning process. In this dimension, drama-based approaches were described as enabling students to move from participation in a teacher-defined activity towards a more active role in shaping what happens during the lesson. Compared to redistribution, recognition and relationality, the dimension of representation was less extensively articulated in teachers' accounts.

3.3.1. More Active Contribution of Ideas to the Implementation of Lessons

The first indicator refers to students' more active contribution of ideas to the learning process. This form of change appeared in accounts reflecting a narrower understanding of inclusion, where the emphasis was on a student who usually participates less actively but became more agentic during the drama-based activity.

For example:

[N] A student who otherwise rarely participates took the initiative and proposed an idea for a performance, which was subsequently taken into account. [P6]

3.3.2. More Active (Co-)Leading of the Learning Process

The second indicator refers to students' more active co-leading of the learning process. This indicator was identified in both narrower and broader understandings of inclusion. In the narrower account, it concerned a student with special educational needs who assumed a coordinating role. In the broader account, it concerned a more general redistribution of agency between teacher and students.

For example:

[N] A student with special educational needs, who had previously not put themselves forward, volunteered for the main coordinating role when drama-based approaches were used and carried out this role successfully. [P7]

[B] When using other approaches, it is easier to predict students' responses. However, when drama-based approaches were used, students responded in ways that the teacher had not anticipated. They took on greater leadership of the learning process more autonomously, drawing on their own life experiences. [P1]

3.3.3. Greater Participation in Carrying out Teacher-Designed Activities

During the analysis, several cases were initially considered potential examples of representation but were ultimately excluded following further conceptual clarification. These cases shared certain characteristics with representation, such as greater student independence or responsibility, yet did not involve a genuine influence over the pedagogical process.

For example:

[FP] Students appeared to exert greater influence over the pedagogical and creative process. [P8] However, further clarification showed that although they worked more independently than usual, they did so within a structure and sequence of activities predetermined by the teacher. Nevertheless, additional description indicated that the overall direction and final outcome remained substantially shaped by teacher-directed expectations.

[FP] Students appeared to exert greater influence over the development of the performance. [P4] However, further clarification revealed that the overall direction and intended outcome remained substantially shaped by teacher-directed expectations.

These cases highlight an important conceptual distinction. Representation was not understood as students' active engagement or independent completion of teacher-designed activities. Rather, the examples retained within this dimension involved students contributing ideas that were taken into account, assuming coordinating roles, or influencing the direction of the learning process in ways that were not fully predetermined by the teacher.

3.4. Relationality

In the descriptions, six types of teacher-perceived inclusion-related changes were identified in the domain of relationality: greater recognition of the importance of each individual for the community, a stronger sense of being acknowledged within the community, improved well-being within the community, a stronger sense of connectedness, improved mutual negotiation and agreement-making within the community, and a stronger sense of being understood by others in relation to one's first-person experience. While the previous dimensions focused on access to learning, recognition of experiences and participation in shaping the learning process, relationality concerned the quality of relationships within the student group. Although some of these aspects may at first appear to overlap with the dimension of recognition, they were conceptualised as relationality based on a deliberate

analytical distinction. While recognition was understood as involving opportunities to express one's own experiences and engage with the perspectives of others, the experience of having those perspectives acknowledged and valued was treated as relationality, as it reflects the quality of interpersonal relationships within the learning community.

3.4.1. Greater Recognition of the Importance of Each Individual for the Community

The first indicator refers to students' greater recognition of the importance of each individual within the group. This form of change was identified in both narrower and broader understandings of inclusion. In the narrower account, the emphasis was on students who are usually overlooked because of special educational needs or language barriers. In the broader account, the emphasis was on a general shift in how students listened to and valued one another.

For example:

[N] Students in the classroom usually overlook the importance of individuals with special educational needs and language barriers for the community. However, when drama-based approaches were used, the teacher reports that through staging a scene, students recognised that these individuals are also an important part of the community. [P7]

[B] During conventional self-introductions in front of the group, students often had difficulties listening to one another. However, when drama-based approaches were used, students were described as listening to each individual more attentively and respectfully. [P5]

3.4.2. A Stronger Sense of Being Acknowledged Within the Community

The second indicator refers to students' stronger sense of being acknowledged within the group. This indicator appeared in accounts reflecting a narrower understanding of inclusion, where the focus was on students who usually feel overlooked or insufficiently recognised in classroom interaction.

For example:

[N] Students with special educational needs and language barriers usually feel overlooked. However, when drama-based approaches were used, these students appeared to have a stronger sense of being acknowledged and subsequently showed greater willingness to participate. [P7]

3.4.3. Improved Well-Being Within the Community

The third indicator refers to improved well-being within the group. Such a change appeared in accounts reflecting a broader understanding of inclusion, where the emphasis was on the overall atmosphere and affective quality of interaction among students.

For example:

[B] It is usually difficult to establish a relaxed and playful atmosphere in the classroom when discussing difficult topics. However, when drama-based approaches were used, the classroom atmosphere was described as more relaxed and playful, with students interacting with one another in a playful manner despite addressing a difficult topic and leaving the classroom with smiles. [P5]

3.4.4. A Stronger Sense of Connectedness

The fourth indicator refers to a stronger sense of connectedness among students. This indicator was identified in both narrower and broader understandings of inclusion. In the narrower account, it concerned the integration of a student who had recently joined the school and was not yet integrated into the group. In the broader account, it concerned students' general movement beyond established friendship groups.

For example:

[N] A student who had recently joined the school and could not be integrated into the group through other activities. However, when drama-based approaches were used, classmates were seen to connect with this student more effectively and began to socialise with them (also outside school). [P8]

[B] Students initially socialised only with their close peers, but through the use of drama-based approaches, they began to interact with others in the group as well (also outside the activity setting). [P4]

3.4.5. Improved Mutual Negotiation and Agreement-Making Within the Community

The fifth indicator refers to improved mutual negotiation and agreement-making between students. Such a change was identified in both narrower and broader understandings of inclusion. In the narrower account, the emphasis was on the inclusion of quieter students in group decision-making. In the broader account, the emphasis was on the group's ability to reach agreement by allowing each individual to have a voice.

For example:

[N] During discussions, students usually do not take quieter classmates into account. When drama-based approaches were used, however, students included these quieter individuals in their decision-making. [P1]

[B] Students in the classroom often argue when they need to reach an agreement. However, when drama-based approaches were used, students were described as allowing each individual to have a voice, while also reaching a shared agreement. [P1]

3.4.6. A Stronger Sense of Being Understood by Others in Relation to One's First-Person Experience

The sixth indicator refers to students' sense that their own experience was not only expressed but also received and understood by others. This indicator appeared in accounts reflecting a narrower understanding of inclusion, where the focus was on a student who usually does not feel understood in regular classroom interaction.

For example:

[N] A student who usually did not feel understood during regular lessons could express his feelings through drama-based approaches and reported feeling understood by his classmates. [P7]

3.5. Illustrative Case Study

The indicators presented above were derived from a diverse range of empirical examples and should not be interpreted as co-occurring within every case. Most teachers described perceived changes that were assigned to only one or several dimensions of the 4R framework. However, the analysis also identified one particularly illustrative case study in which a single drama-based learning sequence was associated with perceived changes across all four dimensions, with these changes observed across both narrower and broader conceptualisations of inclusion. Although some excerpts from this case had already been used as particularly illustrative examples of specific teacher-informed indicators, they are revisited here to illustrate how teacher-perceived inclusion-related changes unfolded within a single drama-based learning sequence across the proposed analytical framework, encompassing both the four dimensions of justice and narrower and broader conceptualisations of inclusion.

As part of the thematic unit *Life Then and Now*, a second-grade teacher designed a full-day interdisciplinary lesson integrating social studies, language, visual arts, and physical education. The lesson began with the creation of a floor plan of a historical home using adhesive tape, after which students selected and positioned household objects, developed

fictional family members, imagined their biographies, wishes, and concerns, and explored their everyday lives through role, pantomime, and discussion.

The dimension of redistribution was reflected in students' broader access to learning. According to the teacher, every student found an active role within the activities. She contrasted this with her usual teaching, explaining that in other activities some students would immediately refuse to participate. She further described how one student with significant learning difficulties, who had not yet received formal educational support, appeared to engage with the topic in a way that reflected a substantially deeper understanding than during reading or classroom discussion. The teacher also emphasised that students could still recall the activities and the associated content at the end of the school year, whereas content taught through more conventional instruction was often forgotten within a very short time.

The dimension of recognition became evident through students' engagement with lived experience. By speaking and acting from the perspective of fictional characters, students explored the everyday realities of families in the past while simultaneously relating them to their own lives. The change became particularly visible during the concluding activity, *The Fateful Message*, in which electricity was introduced into the fictional household. Rather than merely identifying practical changes, students reflected on broader consequences for family relationships and everyday life by relating these to their own lived experiences. According to the teacher, this represented a marked change compared with other approaches, in which students were much less likely to connect the content with their own everyday experiences.

The dimension of representation was reflected in students' genuine influence over the direction of the learning process. Rather than following a predetermined sequence of teacher-selected examples, students chose which household objects were meaningful, where they belonged within the house, which characters would use them, and what stories would emerge from them. The teacher explained that she could not anticipate either the objects students would select or the conversations these choices would generate. As she noted, unlike in other approaches, where she would largely determine the direction of the discussion, in this lesson »the children guided you, and you adapted to them«.

Finally, the teacher identified changes in the dimension of relationality. During object presentations and subsequent discussions, students accepted that classmates could assign different meanings to the same object without attempting to impose a single correct interpretation. The teacher contrasted this with ordinary group work, in which disagreements frequently escalated into conflict. Within the drama activities, however, students listened more attentively, accepted differing viewpoints, and collaborated more constructively. She also observed that quieter students contributed ideas that were acknowledged by the group and that classmates made a greater effort to cooperate regardless of their usual interpersonal relationships.

4. Discussion

Previous empirical studies have reported findings that can be meaningfully interpreted through all four dimensions of the 4R justice framework, within both narrower and broader understandings of inclusion. However, a key limitation of this field is its fragmentation, as, to the best of our knowledge, no comprehensive framework has yet been established for the systematic examination of inclusion within drama-based pedagogical approaches.

To address this gap, the present study proposes an integrative analytical framework for examining inclusion-related changes associated with drama-based pedagogical approaches. Building on the 4R framework (Fraser, 2007; Fraser & Honneth, 2003; Lynch et al., 2009, 2021; Mincu & Mills, 2026), the proposed framework examines inclusion through the

four dimensions of redistribution, recognition, representation and relationality, while considering each dimension across both narrower and broader understandings of inclusion (Allan, 2025; Skubic Ermenc et al., 2019; Haug, 2017). This allows for a more analytically distinctive examination of inclusion-related changes. The study also provides a preliminary operationalisation of this framework through teacher-informed, practice-based qualitative indicators, which provide an initial basis for further development and validation within future research.

To achieve greater conceptual clarity and analytical precision, the four dimensions were deliberately distinguished through relatively narrow operational definitions that enabled the identification of analytically distinguishable teacher-informed indicators. Accordingly, redistribution was defined as changes in students' access to learning content and/or educational activities; recognition focused on changes in students' expression of first-person experiences and in their capability to hear the other; representation referred to changes in students taking a more active role or exerting greater influence in planning, shaping, or carrying out educational activities; and relationality captured changes in interpersonal relationships, reflected in a more relaxed atmosphere, greater acceptance, and stronger connectedness within the learning community. Within this framework, the distinction between narrower and broader understandings of inclusion served as an analytical lens for examining whether teacher-perceived changes concerned students experiencing barriers in relation to a particular dimension of justice or students not typically perceived as vulnerable in relation to that dimension.

The analysis of the collected examples is consistent with initial hypothesis, grounded in theoretical considerations and previous research, that inclusion-related changes associated with learning through drama-based pedagogical approaches may be meaningfully examined across all four dimensions of the 4R framework namely redistribution (e.g., Ashraf & Bhat, 2024; Feng, 2022; Gascon, 2019; Garrett & MacGill, 2021; Hua et al., 2025; Wells & Sandretto, 2017), recognition (e.g., Feng, 2022; Massó-Guijarro et al., 2021; Kana & Aitken, 2007; Meedendorp & Deunk, 2025), representation (e.g., Garrett & MacGill, 2021; Messiou et al., 2025; Visky-Varga & Bartalis-Binder, 2024), and relationality (e.g., Garrett & MacGill, 2021; Massó-Guijarro et al., 2021; Mreiwed et al., 2017). The findings suggest that teachers' accounts can be interpreted across all four dimensions of justice even within a relatively small sample of teachers, and not only in relation to narrower (N) but also broader (B) understandings of inclusion.

In particular, the results suggest that distinct teacher-informed indicators emerged across the four dimensions of justice. Within each dimension, different patterns of teacher-perceived inclusion-related changes were identified. In the dimension of redistribution, the identified indicators included easier entry into the learning process, increased engagement, improved retention of learning content and deeper understanding. In the dimension of recognition, the identified indicators included easier expression of first-person experiences, more in-depth reflection and expression of one's own experience, easier understanding of others' experiences, and more in-depth understanding of second-person experiences. In the dimension of representation, the findings were more limited but pointed to students' more active contribution of ideas and, in some cases, their more active (co-)leading of the learning process, with students' ideas leading to changes in the direction of educational activities. Finally, in the dimension of relationality, the identified indicators included greater recognition of the importance of each individual for the community, a stronger sense of being acknowledged within the community, improved well-being within the community, a stronger sense of connectedness, improved mutual negotiation and agreement-making within the community, and a stronger sense of being understood by others in relation to one's first-person experience.

The distinction between narrower and broader understandings of inclusion proved important for interpreting these findings. In accounts reflecting a narrower understanding, teachers tended to describe drama-based pedagogical approaches as supporting students who usually encounter barriers in the areas of redistribution, recognition, representation and relationality. In accounts reflecting a broader understanding, the same pedagogical approach was more often described as supporting changes among students who are not typically perceived as vulnerable in relation to the aforementioned dimensions of the 4Rs. In this respect, the findings corroborate previous research indicating that drama-based pedagogy can address inclusion in both narrower (e.g., [Ashraf & Bhat, 2024](#); [Massó-Guijarro et al., 2021](#); [Layachi et al., 2024](#); [Visky-Varga & Bartalis-Binder, 2024](#); [Wells & Sandretto, 2017](#)) and broader ways (e.g., [Beaumont, 2020, 2025](#); [Feng, 2022](#); [Gascon, 2019](#); [Giera, 2025](#); [Garrett & MacGill, 2021](#); [Karaolis, 2023](#); [Kana & Aitken, 2007](#); [Lauss & Helm, 2025](#); [Mreiwed et al., 2017](#)).

The primary aim was to develop a conceptually rich set of teacher-informed preliminary indicators for each dimension rather than to examine their prevalence or co-occurrence across cases. Consequently, indicators were not quantified or reported in terms of frequency. Most empirical examples in this study contributed to the development of preliminary indicators for only one or several dimensions of the framework. Nevertheless, the analysis also identified one particularly illustrative case in which perceived changes were associated with all four dimensions, suggesting that the four dimensions may co-occur within a single drama-based learning sequence. Some teacher-reported changes from which the preliminary indicators were derived could plausibly have been interpreted across more than one dimension, reflecting the fact that the four dimensions function as sibling constructs ([Lawson & Robins, 2021](#)); conceptually distinct yet closely related constructs that may overlap in practice. This was particularly the case for changes underlying the indicators of recognition and representation, as well as recognition and relationality, while a smaller degree of overlap was also apparent between redistribution and representation. The aim was therefore not to eliminate these overlaps, but to clarify the primary analytical focus of each dimension and thereby increase the transparency of the analytical framework.

Notably, the dimension of representation proved to be the most analytically challenging during the development of the framework and indicators, as changes associated with this dimension were considerably more difficult to identify than those associated with the other three dimensions. A recurring pattern was that teachers frequently described students becoming more actively involved in learning activities or expressing their own experiences more openly than during other pedagogical approaches.

Within the present framework, however, these changes were not interpreted as indicators of representation. Greater engagement in the learning process was conceptualised as redistribution, as it reflected improved access to the learning process, whereas increased opportunities for students to express their own experiences were conceptualised as recognition. Representation, by contrast, referred to a qualitatively different form of participation, namely students exercising genuine influence over the planning, shaping, or direction of the pedagogical process. It was precisely this form of participation that proved difficult to identify. When teachers were invited to describe such situations, they either did not provide examples or referred to cases in which students' activity remained embedded within teacher-defined structures. These cases were therefore treated as false positives, as students responded to pedagogical opportunities created by the teacher but did not meaningfully influence the pedagogical process itself.

Representation may be particularly challenging to capture within drama-based pedagogical approaches because these approaches are inherently active and participatory while at the same time being largely structured around predefined pedagogical aims and guided activities. In such contexts, high levels of learner engagement may easily be interpreted as

evidence of participation, even when learners have limited opportunities to influence the direction, processes, or outcomes of the learning experience. This highlights the importance of conceptually distinguishing between visible engagement and genuine participation, and greater conceptual attention to this distinction may therefore be important for both empirical research and educational practice. It is important to note that the present findings do not allow us to determine whether the relative absence of representation-related indicators reflects limitations in pedagogical practice itself, teachers' difficulties in recognising and articulating such changes, or limitations in the design of the present study, including the analytical framework and the interview prompts, which may not have sufficiently elicited examples of representation-related changes.

If future research were to show that the relative absence of representation-related indicators primarily reflects limitations in pedagogical practice, rather than teachers' difficulties in recognising and articulating such changes or limitations in the design of the present study, this may point to a broader systemic issue concerning the understanding and enactment of representation in contemporary educational contexts.

This interpretation would be consistent with theoretical perspectives that have questioned the scope for students' genuine agency in contemporary schooling. In this regard, [Biesta's \(2022\)](#) critique of over-structured educational environments is particularly relevant. He argues that educational processes are often organised in ways that leave limited space for students' genuine agency, as teaching is predominantly oriented towards predetermined learning outcomes and carefully structured pedagogical trajectories. Biesta's argument can be further understood through [Pantazidis' \(2026\)](#) concept of the schoolized mind. This concept refers to a sedimented understanding of schooling based on the transmission of predefined knowledge, whose acquisition is subsequently evaluated against predetermined educational objectives. Within such a conception, the teacher is understood as the primary organiser of the educational process and the legitimate authority responsible for directing students towards these predefined goals. This understanding also resonates with what [Kroflič \(2020\)](#) describes as a deeper pedagogical imaginary that conceptualises the child as a being who must first be shaped, disciplined, and guided before being recognised as a subject. Such an understanding legitimises the strong structuring of educational processes and may consequently reduce opportunities for students to exercise genuine influence over the planning, shaping, and direction of pedagogical activities.

This interpretation is also consistent with empirical findings suggesting that achieving representation—understood here as students exercising genuine influence over educational processes—remains challenging in educational practice. [Levine et al. \(2022\)](#), for example, report that teachers who explicitly support more democratic approaches to teaching and participate in related professional development programmes nevertheless tend to formulate classroom questions in ways that guide students towards predetermined educational goals. Consistent with this interpretation, [Pantazidis \(2026\)](#) found that although teachers often endorse more democratic conceptions of students, these coexist with internalised assumptions characteristic of the schoolized mind. Taken together, these studies suggest that higher levels of participation, as conceptualised in the present study through the dimension of representation, remain difficult to realise in (contemporary) educational practice.

If similar patterns were to be confirmed in larger samples within drama-based pedagogical approaches, this would point to the importance of more deliberately orienting the development of drama-based learning approaches towards practices that enable higher levels of representation. In particular, it may be valuable to look beyond conventional school-based frameworks and draw on fields that already report higher levels of representation. [Pringle \(2002, 2009\)](#), for example, examined the work of artists involved in educational processes and found that working with artists differs from working with teachers partly in

that it is less oriented towards the achievement of predefined learning outcomes and the standardisation of knowledge, which often dominate contemporary school environments. The significance and effectiveness of learning processes led not by teachers—where students often follow predetermined instructions—but by artists are also emphasised by authors who have studied projects such as *Inhabit Artists* (Mesías-Lema, 2019) and *artist-in-residence programmes* (Šešek, 2022). A possible direction for addressing this challenge may also be found in the work of Levine et al. (2022), who suggest that, under particular pedagogical conditions, teachers can shift from the position of epistemic authority towards one of authentic inquiry, thereby opening greater space for the co-construction of educational processes beyond predetermined trajectories.

The proposed framework, together with the preliminary teacher-informed qualitative indicators, may provide a reflective tool for educational practice. It may support educators in evaluating existing drama-based pedagogical approaches by considering which dimensions of inclusion are, or are not, fostered within a particular learning sequence and whether these are evident across both narrower and broader understandings of inclusion. Such reflection may, in turn, inform the planning and further development of drama-based pedagogical approaches that more comprehensively support inclusion across all four dimensions of justice, while also encouraging educators to consider both students who experience barriers in particular dimensions of justice and the broader learning community.

At the same time, the proposed framework and preliminary indicators also provide an initial analytical contribution for future research on inclusion in drama-based pedagogical approaches. Given that the proposed teacher-informed indicators should be understood as preliminary qualitative indicators derived from an exploratory qualitative study, it is important to recognise that they represent an initial analytical contribution rather than a final or validated operationalisation. Accordingly, the following section discusses the limitations of the present study and outlines how future research may further refine and validate these preliminary indicators.

5. Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings.

First, the sample was based on criterion-based purposive sampling combined with voluntary participation and included teachers who already used drama-based approaches in their practice and were willing to reflect on them. In addition, the participants were recruited through networks connected to the ACIIS project and were asked to describe examples they perceived as successful in relation to inclusion. Together, these features created structural positive-selection bias at both the participant and case levels. The sample, therefore, likely overrepresents teachers who are positively disposed towards drama-based approaches and have sufficient experience and confidence to report favourable cases, while unsuccessful, neutral, ambivalent, contradictory or exclusionary experiences are likely to be underrepresented. Although the follow-up interviews encouraged participants to consider alternative explanations and whether similar changes might have occurred through other pedagogical approaches, these prompts could strengthen the specificity and criticality of their reflections but could not remove the bias created by participant selection and the positive-case framing of the task. Consequently, the study cannot establish whether the same indicators, a different balance of indicators across the four dimensions, or additional and contradictory indicators would emerge from a more heterogeneous sample, from teachers less committed to drama-based approaches, or from accounts of unsuccessful, neutral, ambivalent or exclusionary experiences. The resulting indicators should therefore be understood as a preliminary set generated under the specific sampling and elicitation conditions of

this study, rather than as an exhaustive or sample-independent account of inclusion-related change. Second, the study employed a qualitative design with a relatively small, non-random sample. Its purpose was to generate in-depth, context-sensitive insight rather than statistically generalisable claims about the prevalence or effectiveness of drama-based approaches. Third, while the study used two data collection methods—written submissions and follow-up interviews—and the submission form could include supporting materials such as student feedback, student products or other evidence of pedagogical effects, the dataset remained primarily grounded in teachers’ retrospective reflections on their own practice. Because such supporting evidence was not gathered systematically or independently across all cases, the findings should be interpreted mainly as teacher-mediated accounts of perceived inclusive effects rather than as triangulated or independently validated outcomes. The study did not include systematic student data, classroom observations, student interviews, peer perspectives, independent assessments or standardised outcome measures. Fourth, the submission form explicitly introduced the 4R framework, which supported focused reflection but may also have shaped how participants articulated their accounts. Accordingly, the findings should not be interpreted as independently validating the 4R framework or as establishing an operationalisation of its dimensions, but as offering a preliminary, framework-guided set of teacher-informed qualitative descriptors. The framework may thus have foregrounded some inclusion-related changes while making others less visible, meaning that experiences not readily aligned with redistribution, recognition, representation or relationality may have remained outside the scope of the analysis. Fifth, the corpus was not independently double-coded. Although a third author reviewed the coding and ambiguous cases were resolved through consensus, the study does not provide evidence of the consistency with which independent researchers would apply the proposed analytical distinctions and indicators. Future studies should therefore examine their interpretive consistency across independent coders, research teams, and empirical contexts. Sixth, some reported changes may also reflect characteristics that are not unique to drama-based pedagogical approaches, including the novelty of the learning experience. Moreover, because the comparison point was teachers’ self-defined “usual practice”, which in some accounts involved frontal or otherwise less interactive instruction, the reported differences may partly reflect novelty or the broader effects of active and participatory pedagogy rather than mechanisms specific to drama-based approaches. Although participants were invited to compare their experiences with other pedagogical approaches they use, and only cases in which teachers perceived the reported changes as specific to drama-based pedagogical approaches were included in the analysis, the possibility that broader pedagogical features that are not unique or intrinsic to drama-based pedagogical approaches contributed to these changes cannot be fully excluded. Consequently, the findings do not allow conclusions about whether the proposed indicators are specific to drama-based pedagogical approaches or whether they reflect broader characteristics of inclusive pedagogical practice that may also emerge through other pedagogical approaches. Seventh, the proposed indicators should not be interpreted as a ready-made instrument, validated measurement items or an established operationalisation of the four dimensions. The study generated preliminary teacher-informed descriptors of perceived inclusion-related change, but it did not examine their content validity, comprehensiveness, conceptual distinctiveness, or applicability across educational contexts, nor whether the same descriptors can be identified using data sources other than teacher reports. If these descriptors are subsequently developed into measurement items, their discriminant validity, reliability, measurement invariance, criterion-related validity and other psychometric properties will require separate examination. Their possible use in future quantitative research would require a separate, multi-stage instrument-development process, including expert and stakeholder review, student input,

cognitive interviewing, pilot testing and psychometric evaluation. Finally, the retrospective and cross-sectional nature of the data does not allow causal conclusions about whether drama-based pedagogy produced the reported changes, nor does it make it possible to assess the longer-term sustainability of the perceived inclusive outcomes.

These limitations also point to several directions for future research. If future research seeks to further develop the proposed preliminary candidate indicators, with the long-term aim of informing the development of a quantitative instrument, this would require a separate, multi-stage instrument-development process, including further refinement of the indicators, expert and stakeholder review, student input, cognitive interviewing, pilot testing, and psychometric evaluation. On a theoretical level, further work is needed to continue refining the proposed framework by elaborating the individual dimensions of justice, clarifying their conceptual boundaries, further examining how they complement one another in the context of drama-based pedagogical approaches, and remaining open to inclusion-related experiences that do not readily align with current definitions of redistribution, recognition, representation or relationality, potentially warranting further refinement of the framework or the incorporation of additional dimensions. This may help identify dimensions and indicators of inclusion that remained outside the scope of the present framework and support its further conceptual development. Such openness would be consistent with the evolution of the 4R framework itself, as seen, for example, in the incorporation of relationality as its most recent dimension in response to evolving theoretical understandings of social justice. On an empirical level, future studies should examine the proposed framework and indicators across larger and more heterogeneous samples, including different educational contexts and teachers with varying levels of experience with drama-based pedagogical approaches, as well as accounts of successful, unsuccessful, neutral, ambivalent, and contradictory practices. Such research should also incorporate student perspectives, classroom observations, independent assessments and, where appropriate, longitudinal designs in order to triangulate teachers' accounts and examine whether the reported changes are reflected in students' lived experiences and observable pedagogical processes. Future studies should examine the content validity and applicability of these preliminary descriptors across educational contexts and, if they are subsequently developed into measurement items, their discriminant validity and other psychometric properties. They should also investigate whether the same descriptors can be identified in student accounts, classroom observations, and other data sources independent of teacher reports. In addition to such triangulation, future research should also consider using different types of prompts, particularly when exploring representation, by asking not only whether teachers perceived individual students as taking a more active role or exerting greater influence in planning, shaping or carrying out educational activities, but also, for example, about moments in which lesson plans were renegotiated. Such triangulation and diverse prompts may help clarify whether dimensions that appeared less frequently in teachers' accounts, particularly representation, are genuinely less prevalent or simply more difficult to recognise, articulate or elicit through the current research design. Future research may also investigate how specific characteristics and mechanisms of drama-based pedagogical approaches are associated with the emergence of different dimensions and indicators of inclusion. Comparative studies involving other pedagogical approaches may also help determine whether the proposed indicators are shared across other inclusive pedagogical practices or are more closely related specifically to drama-based pedagogical approaches.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, K.V.S., P.Č., N.K. and K.J.; methodology, N.K.; formal analysis, K.V.S., P.Č. and K.J.; investigation, K.V.S. and P.Č.; resources, P.Č., K.J. and N.K.; data curation, K.V.S. and P.Č.; validation, K.V.S., P.Č., K.J. and N.K.; visualisation, K.V.S., N.K. and P.Č.; writing—original draft preparation, K.V.S., P.Č., K.J. and N.K.; writing—review and editing, K.V.S., P.Č., K.J. and N.K.; supervision, K.J. and N.K.; project administration, P.Č., K.J. and N.K.; funding acquisition, N.K. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research was funded by the European Union under the Erasmus+ Teacher Academies project ACIIS—Academy for Creative, Innovative and Inclusive Schools, grant number 101104564, and by the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency, grant number P5-0174. The APC was funded by the ACIIS—Academy for Creative, Innovative and Inclusive Schools project, grant number 101104564.

Institutional Review Board Statement: The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana (protocol code 506-2026, approved on 12 March 2026).

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

Data Availability Statement: The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the corresponding author.

Acknowledgments: The authors gratefully acknowledge the support of Društvo ustvarjalcev TAKA TUKA, in particular Veronika Gaber Korbar, in facilitating the collection of examples of good practice in drama-based pedagogy and in supporting access to a relevant network of teachers and practitioners. The authors also thank the participating teachers for generously sharing their practices, reflections, and experiences. The authors further wish to express their sincere gratitude to Robi Kroflič for his important guidance in the design and implementation of the research, as well as for his insightful comments and continued support throughout the further research process and the writing of this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Notes

- 1 ACIIS is an Erasmus+ Teacher Academies project aimed at establishing a network of teacher trainers and schools and promoting innovative teaching methods based on drama techniques and digital drama tools to support inclusive education. Further information is available at <https://aciis.net/> (accessed on 2 August 2026).
- 2 First-person experience refers to an individual's own lived experience, whereas second-person experience refers to the lived experience of the other engaged in communication. The terminology follows communicative pedagogy (Kroflič, 2022; Medveš, 2022).
- 3 Throughout the Section 3, the phrase »for example« indicates that the excerpt is presented as an illustrative example rather than as an exhaustive representation of all cases associated with the indicator.

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