Reel Life Methodology

Developing intercultural competence through film fragments and dialogue in South Africa

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Abstract

South Africa is a multicultural country; however, the politics of the past have resulted in teachers from diverse cultures being ignorant of the mores of others with whom they interact. Teachers thus risk transferring preconceived knowledge and attitudes into the classroom. The aim of this study was to explore to what extent the methodology of *Reel Life* can promote the development of intercultural competence among South African teachers. Film fragments were used to stimulate intercultural dialogue, and an environment was created in which teachers from different cultures could share their culture knowledge and begin to develop intercultural competence. Our results show that the teachers were able to shift their frames of reference in a movement between ethnic positions and a shared perspective of them all being South African.

Keywords: *Intercultural competence, South Africa, positioning, teachers, Reel Life*

Introduction

Interculturality refers to discourses that focus on diversity and "different aspects of subjectivity" that occur through encounters (Risager & Dervin 2015:9). Intercultural dialogue, based on mutual understanding and respect, is suggested as a way to navigate successfully in a world of cultural diversity through openness, respect, interest in each other, exchange of views, and a willingness to change perspectives. Byram, Gribkova and Starkey (2002:34) maintain that teachers are often not neutral about cultural issues therefore they need to be able to confront their own "stereotypes and prejudices" as these could subconsciously reflect in their own teaching. This study was designed to use dialogue in order to endeavour to develop intercultural competence in teachers who share a common goal (acquiring a post graduate qualification) but who come from diverse cultural backgrounds in South Africa. *Reel Life*,referring not to real life, but to life on screen,is a specific methodology that has been used internationally. Film stills and film clips are used as triggers to engender intercultural dialogue among teachers of different backgrounds so that they can confront their stereotypes and prejudices and develop intercultural competence.

The aim of this study is to explore to what extent the methodology of *Reel Life* can promote the development of intercultural competence through dialogue among culturally diverse teachers in South Africa. To this end we ask two interrelated questions:

- First, how do the teachers position themselves?
- Second, is there a change in their positioning?

Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

There is no consensus among researchers concerning an agreed definition for the term intercultural competence (Deardorff 2006; Odağ, Wallin & Kedzior 2015). Byram et al. (2002:10) define intercultural competence as the "ability to ensure a shared understanding by people of different social identities, and the ability to interact with people as complex human beings with multiple identities and their own individuality". They maintain that competence does not have to be complete and perfect to be identifiable. For this study we have combined the most commonly accepted attributes and suggest that intercultural competence refers to the "ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes", and the "ability to shift frame of reference appropriately" (Deardorff 2006:249).

To successfully engage in intercultural dialogue, the development of culture knowledge, attitudes and skills is crucial.

Byram et al. suggest that relevant knowledge should include:

> *knowledge of social processes, and knowledge […] about other people (Byram et al. 2002:12).*

They suggest that relevant attitudes should include:

> *curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own […] a willingness to relativise one's own values, beliefs and behaviours, not to assume that they are the only possible and naturally correct ones (Byram et al. 2002:12).*

Concerning skills, they suggest:

> *ability to interpret a[n] […] event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to […] events from one's own [and]*
> *ability to acquire knowledge of a culture (Byram et al. 2002:13).*

Byram et al. (2002:34) suggest that the journey towards intercultural understanding includes taking risks as participants air their beliefs and opinions about their attitudes and views.

Deardorff (2006:256) echoes Byram et al.'s propositions in her process model of intercultural competence. She devises a cycle starting with Attitudes (respect, openness, curiosity and discovery); moving through Knowledge and Comprehension (which includes cultural self-awareness as well as deep cultural knowledge and skills of listening, observing, evaluating and relating) to an Internal Outcome (informed frame of reference shift which includes flexibility and adaptability) and finally to an External Outcome (effective and appropriate communication and behaviour in an intercultural situation); and the cycle returns to Attitudes.

Crucial to intercultural competence is the willingness to change perspectives, to understand the other's position. Günthner (2012:35) describes "positioning" as the activity through which speakers assign themselves and others to a category to which they ascribe certain characteristics and modes of behaviour. Bamberg (2004:224) maintains that positioning is always two-fold, "being positioned" and "positioning oneself". Through intercultural dialogue (which includes asking questions, responding, agreeing or disagreeing) participants show interest in and respect for each other's stance, positioning and alignment (Baynham 2015). Thus, through the engendering of intercultural discussion, seemingly entrenched cultural positioning could alter. According to Kazepides (2012:81) "our respect for others means that we care about other people and their views, are willing to listen to their points of view in order to understand them, that we are open to alternative perspectives and are prepared to modify our views accordingly". He

avers that "the purpose of dialogue is not to convince or influence the other person, but to understand his or her perspective, concerns, values, emotions, assumptions and goals" (ibid.).

Culture, it is said, consists of concrete acts (Jensen 2011:57). Even so, when discussing culture and related concepts, one often turns one's gaze from the personal to the abstract. Film counteracts this as it gives viewers the possibility to move from the abstract to the concrete. Film is an arena where people from different cultural backgrounds meet as individuals. Film shows abstract cultural concepts in motion, what people do when they orientate themselves towards certain values. Conceptual knowledge risks remaining at a superficial level. To prevent such superficiality film can be used as it involves emotions and sparks imagination, a prerequisite for being able to experience the concrete meaning of intercultural concepts. Film enables viewers to take part in other people's worlds and to become aware of themselves, their own values, social identities, and individualities. It can thus be argued that film is a good tool to develop intercultural competence (see also Schumann 2009; Smith Rorrer & Furr 2009).

The Study

Description of *Reel Life*

In the film-based method, *Reel Life*, intercultural dialogue is fostered with the aim to promote intercultural competence. In a *Reel Life* site participants are placed in situations where they are moved, where their curiosity is kindled, and where they start looking for cultural clues as answers, both individually and together.

Reel Life builds on Bergala's (2002) method of combining different film fragments and linking them together by chosen criteria. Bergala's method, designed for the teaching of film aesthetics and techniques, is adapted in *Reel Life* for promoting intercultural competence. We use film fragments with the same situation from different films. The fragments illustrate what values the protagonists try to live up to in concrete situations and how the protagonists act differently, even though they may share value orientation. The fragments illustrate the value orientation from different perspectives, preventing stereotyping.

The film fragments constitute a "hypertext" – a collocation of fragments removed from their original context, linked through a thematic strand. This hypertext, obliterating all linearity of the original film stories, is the core of the teaching in *Reel Life*. It steers the participants' focus to the selected situations and value orientations, and it encourages active use of imagination and creativity. In between the hypertext's fragments and around them there are gaps. Iser (1980:282) defines a gap as "a vacancy in the overall system of the text", and these gaps he argues, "trigger acts of ideation on the reader's part". In *Reel Life* the acts of ideation are performed by viewers, but the argumentation is the same. The gaps have the potential to engage our participants' imagination. Iser explains how this works, claiming that gaps have "no determinate content of their own […]. As an empty space they are nothing in themselves, and yet as a 'nothing' they are a vital propellant for initiating communication" (Iser, 1980: 195).

The thematic intercultural strand chosen for the fragments in this study was "marriage", as we presumed all participants would have some experience or standpoint, albeit different, on the topic. The three films used included fragments showing the wedding, the proposal and a visit in a parental home, all seen from different perspectives. The fragments are from two German-Turkish films *Head-On* (Akin, Schubert & Schwingel 2004), *Evet, I Do!* (Akkus, Ruzicková-Steiner, Lohmann & Lohmann 2008), and one South African film *White Wedding* (Turner, Nkosi, Siephemo, Whittaker, Msutwana & Follett 2009).These fragments demonstrate, on the one hand, what people may do when their value orientation is towards honour, often linked to the behaviour of women, towards respect for parents and elders, towards obedience and loyalty. On the other hand, they illustrate how people may act when their value orientation is more towards gender equality, towards independence and towards individual freedom. In real life cultural challenges and different value orientations are difficult to pin-point; however the methodology of *Reel Life* could make this possible.

By *Reel Life* withholding the whole story, the participants are provoked into creating storylines themselves and questions arise. What has happened prior to the fragment? What will happen after? The way in which the blanks are filled depends on the participants' individual cultural backgrounds, and gives rise to a kaleidoscope of perspectives. Following the method of *Reel Life* the researchers first ask participants for their associations with "marriage" (step 1). Then they show film stills of the wedding (step 2), continue to film fragments of the proposals (step 3), and finish with fragments from parental homes (step 4) (for more details, see "to be inserted after review").

Participants

The sample for the study was a group of 18 teachers ranging in age from 30 to 60 years who were studying for a post-graduate university qualification in education in South Africa. They were all practising teachers from various ethnic and social backgrounds. They came from different parts of the country and some of them had travelled up to 300 kilometres in order to participate. In spite of studying for the same programme, they did not know each other well since they had only met a few times earlier in connection with lectures. The researchers are not all from South Africa so the participants felt that they had to be specific in their explanations and descriptions as they had to present their cultural positions to an international audience. One factor that at times made communication difficult was the fact that the level of English varied considerably among the participants. The discussion took place for three hours on one Saturday morning.

Data

The session was videotaped and transcribed by the researchers separately for triangulation. We transcribe the data according to a simplified GAT model (see appendix). In the transcripts included here the participants have been given fictitious names to ensure anonymity. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from both the Dean of the Faculty of Education and the Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Research and Development of the South African university concerned.

Data analysis

We analyse the data to ascertain what the teachers have filled the gaps with, and whether it appears that the methodology of *Reel Life* has engendered intercultural competence. We focus in particular on the positioning of the teachers during the discussions, and to what extent there is a shift of their frame of reference. In order to investigate how the participants position themselves and others we draw upon Conversation Analysis, an approach to data that aims at reconstructing what interlocutors do when interacting with others. Conversation Analysis helps reconstruct the process of an interaction.

Findings

In order to answer the main research question, (to what extent can the methodology of *Reel Life* promote the development of intercultural competence through dialogue among culturally diverse teachers in South Africa) we focus on analysing the dialogue around step 1 (associations with marriage) and step 2 (film stills of wedding scenes).

When asked about their own perceptions concerning "marriage" (step 1), participants offer *commitment*. This immediately leads to one participant explaining the concepts of marriage and commitment according to her Xhosa culture, positioning both herself and others:

Excerpt 1: Marriage in our culture

Zoleka:	((talking to the foreign researchers)) as much as it is a legal commitment but in our culture it's the taking of both families both sides and making them one ((gestures express the making of one))
Researcher 1:	mm

Zoleka:	because so our with US in marriage
Researcher 1:	yes yes
Zoleka:	you can go to (.) to court and get married but if the family is not part of the situation it's not marriage
Researcher 2:	yes
Zoleka:	with us (.) so it includes the whole family both parents both brothers and sisters uncles and everybody is put into that situation (.) and the ancestors as well
Researcher 2:	what do you mean that's interesting ( ) commitment ( ) what does commitment mean to you that the two families are becoming in a way one family?
Zoleka:	yes they become one big family because what I say is that you bring that family and bring the other family and you make one family now we are related whatever happens in your marriage you do not have to solve it on your own you ( ) can tell those people to come and help you solve the problem that is how WE deal with marriage in OUR culture
Researcher 2:	what is your culture
Zoleka:	Xhosa and Sotho I am both

From her body language it is obvious that Zoleka speaks almost exclusively to the two foreign researchers. This may be due to her contextual knowledge of the researchers being foreigners, lacking culture specific knowledge about Xhosa marriages. In line with Günthner and Luckmann (2001) we suggest that she assumes "asymmetries of knowledge" in the sense that others lack her cultural knowledge and, as a result, she has to convey such knowledge explicitly. By doing so, she signals her assumption of different cultural affiliations in the classroom and thus establishes a cultural difference between herself and others.

Zoleka positions herself by assigning herself to a (social) category (*in our culture*). She contrasts her position to that of others verbally by using a marker *but* (*but in our culture*), and non-verbally by tone of voice. Throughout her following explanation she continues stressing her belonging verbally (*with us*) and non-verbally (stress pattern), With *that is how we deal with marriage in our culture* she closes her explanation, bringing it back full circle to the initial positioning of herself, stressing once more her position in relation to others.

One researcher asks a question (*what is your culture*) displaying a lack of knowledge of the individual ethnicities in the group, thereby accepting the positioning established by Zoleka. The naming of the ethnic groups (*Xhosa*, *Sotho*) finishes this scene.

The next excerpt indicates a participant's curiosity about Zoleka's explanation of two families becoming one in Xhosa culture. Michael has obviously been mulling about this as he returns to the topic to ask questions. Thereby he contributes to the ongoing positioning among the ethnic groups. Michael and Zoleka engage in an intercultural dialogue as he obviously wishes to understand fully what she tries to explain.

Excerpt 2: The clan issue

Michael:	can I just ask a

Researcher 1:	[yes
Michael:	[thing? ((pointing at Zoleka))
Michael:	this situation that you´ve now described isn't this related to the the clan issue or ( )?
Zoleka:	no
Michael:	( )
Zoleka:	no the clans remain the clans but with us the Xhosas the Sothos and the Zulus ( ) all of us ( ) we do that it is our culture
Michael:	so what is a clan then?
Zoleka:	a clan? that is the name of my grand-parent ( ) it's the name of the grand-parent's great-great grand-parents that is a clan name.
Pumeza:	((confirming gestures))
Michael:	is it that in the clan all members of the clan are family members?
Zoleka:	yes ((nodding))
Michael:	so so if you get married then that would be just an extension of the clan wouldn't it be so?
Zoleka:	<<hesitant> no
Michael:	if you get married now, listen here, if you get married now the two families now get one ((brings his hands together))
Zoleka:	yes
Michael:	they come from different clans
Zoleka:	((affirming nod)) different clans okay Nelson Mandela we call him Madiba that is not a surname it is a clan name it's the name of the grandfather great great
Michael:	those clans aren't they now connected?
Zoleka:	yes they are they become one family ((brings her hands together))
Michael:	so if you get married then that would be just an extension of the clan wouldn't it be so?
Zoleka:	yes it is when I am a person from the Ngwenya clan that's the name of my clan the name of my grandparents and married to a Maciki then it becomes one of two families because whenever we talk about the Ngwenyas and the Macikis there is a relationship between them and the two persons becoming one big family whenever I see a Maciki that is my respected clan name on the other side of my marriage and my

	husband whenever he sees a Ngwenya he respects them wherever he goes because we are one big family
Michael:	it's like a maiden surname a combination of two clans

Michael asks for clarifications (*can I just ask a thing*?), then links the information given earlier by Zoleka to a concept he has heard of (*isn't this related to the clan issue*). This shows that he lacks knowledge of Xhosa culture, but is curious to learn more. Thus he also assumes "asymmetries of knowledge" by signalling his differing affiliation, and thus contributing to the ongoing positioning. His understanding is not the same as Zoleka's. This makes him ask about her understanding of the clan concept (*so what is a clan then*?). He wants to make sure that his newly gained understanding of the concept is correct. In his next comment, he signals the conclusion he has drawn and asks for confirmation (*so if you get married then that would be just an extension of the clan wouldn't it be so*?). He really wants to understand Zoleka's explanations, something that is also obvious in his request (*now listen here*). Zoleka adds a concrete example of what *clan* means to her (*my husband, whenever he sees a Ngwenya he respects them wherever he goes because we are one big family*), telling the group about recurring events. Her narrative exemplifies conventionalized behaviour and adds to the clarification of the clan concept.

All these actions, such as asking questions and rephrasing, signal that Michael does not belong to Zoleka's culture. However, they also indicate his interest in her culture. Further, Zoleka gives explanations, she responds to his comments, agrees, disagrees and tells a story for further illustration. Both show interest in and respect for each other, thus exemplifying attitudes necessary for intercultural competence to develop.

The last excerpt from step 1 is one example of how the participants become inquisitive about the cultures of other participants. They make comparisons between different cultures, thus demonstrating their knowledge of others' cultures, and continuing to position themselves and others as belonging to different ethnic groups. The participants have returned to the discussion about who pays for what for a wedding:

Excerpt 3: Same as yours

Tanya:	now we've seen what the black people do how do the coloured people do it how do you people do it?
Thomas:	Zandre is married he has experience ((general laughter))
Zandre:	ok same as yours and with the more modernised situation today you really can't say who's paying I can't really say sometimes it is fifty-fifty I'm just thinking in terms of a negotiator in our case it is more religious-like because in the church where you get married the reverend or the pastor he has a prominent role whenever there's trouble for instance you can go and see him and get assistance from him ja
Tanya:	and in (.) also with ours I mean if we have problems we can go to the pastor we can go to the minister because what they do now a lot of them follow a marriage counselling course yes you follow this marriage counselling course before you get married it's a religious thing you go to church for a six or ten week course

By naming two ethnic groups (*the black people*, *the coloured people*), Tanya positions herself and others once more along ethnic lines. She signals that she does not belong to either group – referring to other cultures in the third person, addressing her coloured fellow participants as belonging to a separate category (*how do you people do it*?). Her bluntness and bigoted language (Martin 2014) could be construed as being disrespectful, but no one voices an objection in this instance. With this question she

signals her lack of knowledge regarding coloured wedding cultures, and voices her interest in learning more about their traditions, something that may well be interpreted as an evidence of interest, and thus an important aspect of intercultural competence. However, her stereotyping Xhosa culture practices as black culture bears witness of a lack of awareness of the diversity of black cultures.

With *same as yours*, Zandre presents himself as knowledgeable of Tanya's cultural practices, thus capable of comparing the cultures. He states that the distribution of costs may be *fifty-fifty*, and swiftly returns to the previous topic of how to solve marriage problems. He positions himself (*in our case*), acknowledging Tanya's positioning of coloureds as differing from whites, and refers to recurring events and conventionalized behaviour. Tanya responds with an acknowledged similarity (*also with ours*) and also talks about conventionalized behaviour (*a lot of them follow*). In this excerpt Zandre and Tanya have found common ground. From their different positions they recognize that their frames of reference also have traits in common – they share a familiarity and collective understanding about an issue.

To sum up, the gap, created by asking the participants about their interpretations of the term marriage in step 1, was filled by the participants' explanations of the concept from within their own experiences. They discovered diverse knowledge about culture specific issues, thereby demonstrating different positions. Their attempts at acquiring and conveying more knowledge can be considered part of intercultural learning, leading in some cases to a move of position as they also see similarities. In some instances their willingness to know and understand was expressed in disrespectful terms, but the tone used was not dismissive, so a willingness to share culture specific information prevailed. During the information sharing, groups re-positioned themselves as they discovered similarities in their cultural practices.

Below we analyse the dialogue from step 2 where the participants were shown film stills from the three films and were asked to fill the gaps. What did they think was happening in and around the film stills? Here the participants filled the gaps with personalized stories. Their stories show how the emphasis has moved from the trigger of the film still to incidents in their own lives. They are prepared to take risks as they share their personal narratives, including their beliefs and views.

The still from the film *Head-On* triggered the following excerpt of a personal story about a third person known to one of the participants. Earlier in the discussion the participants commented on the bride and the groom: *they do not look happy* and *something is wrong*. Andrew interprets what he sees in the film still, commenting on a general idea of an ideal marriage and on there being different purposes to a marriage. He finishes with a story about a friend:

Excerpt 4: An agreement

Andrew:	most people have this perception of of life as an ideal type of a a especially marriage.
Other participants:	<<confirming sounds>
Andrew:	and without making it too complicated I I do see that sometimes when looking at other people especially when we are on campus in seminars or at church or whatever and uhm there is an agreement between the two parties but each will still be ( ) doing his own thing so after this situation here uhm (.) I'm reading it as after they've got married and uhm but ( ) there was some agreement before the time it's not it´s not the idealistic marriage that we agree uhm think of there's some agreement here and and they have done the thing now so
Zoleka:	that´s it
Andrew:	ja that´s it ( ) some of those things have a purpose maybe uhm they had to get married to uhm to can I make an example?

Researcher 1:	[yes of course
Researcher 2:	[yes of course
Andrew:	in my school there's a certain guy he applied for a bond for his house a single guy like Hermann here he applied for a bond for his house but uhm the Department informed him and the bank that uhm his liability and his salary doesn´t allow him so he goes into an agreement with another lady right? and after that now he can buy a house so there is a purpose to the ( )

Andrew claims that a large majority (*most people*) have notions about what a perfect life should entail (*life as an ideal type*), and what a marriage should mean (*especially marriage*). This is a conclusion he has reached through observing people in public places (*campus seminars church*). In this way he brings his own life into the equation, positioning himself as an observer and interpreter of human life, as an academic, teacher (*campus seminars*), and a Christian (*church*).

Andrew sees an agreement between the bride and the groom (*there is an agreement between the two parties*), explaining that it seems that this marriage does not correspond to (*but*) what he earlier has referred to as ideal. However, he concludes, the deed is done (*I'm reading it as this is after they've got married*). He then develops his argument (*it's not the idealistic type of marriage that we think of*), suggesting that the participant group shares his understanding of ideal marriage (*we*). He concludes that there is still a reason for this marriage (*those things have a purpose*).

The participants agree that marriage is not always for idealistic purposes. The film still coalesces their thoughts and they nod sagely during Andrew's story. They share similar views about a pragmatic reason for a couple to choose marriage, thereby sharing a frame of reference beyond the previous positioning into different ethnic groups.

The next excerpt shows how a speaker uses a personal past experience story to fill the gap created by the film still.

Excerpt 5: All these speculations

Michael:	you could interpret these in different ways it's just a moment in time ( ) it could be a lot of things
Susan:	yes I'd actually say that's exactly it you can't be certain with all these speculations
	<<agreement from the group)>
Susan:	from my experience if you look at I've been married 16 years if you look at my wedding photos my husband was petrified and while waiting for me at the altar because he was thinking what the hell am I doing? and he doesn't like having photos taken he'd chipped his front tooth was chipped so he didn't want to smile he didn't smile in any of my photos
Some participants:	((laughing))
Susan:	so he doesn't look like a happy chappy (.) and in our wedding ceremonies somewhere afterwards when there are speeches and even in the church usually when our families get together we remember who have passed on
	<<agreeing sounds from the group>

Susan:	so many times there are sad moments in your marriage proceedings before during and after because you think of my mother isn't here anymore or my father isn't here anymore and it's part of the speeches at the wedding that you drink a toast to the ones who have passed on and and so in many weddings and in photos there will be sad moments for whatever reasons good or bad

Susan agrees with Michael, that it is impossible to know what lies behind a picture (*you can't be certain with all these speculations*), and she offers a first person narrative (*from my experience*). It is a story about her wedding in which she shares a vivid interpretation of her husband's thoughts (*what the hell am I doing?*). She describes him as non-smiling (*he doesn't look like a happy chappy*), and gives the reason why (*his front tooth was chipped*).

Susan then offers a second narrative to support her argumentation. This is a story about recurring events. Weddings bring about thoughts of relatives that are no longer alive (*we remember who have passed on*), creating sad moments in festivities. Such moments are ritualized into marriage procedures (*you drink a toast to the ones who have passed on*). She finishes by concluding that such moments are caught by the camera (*there will be sad moments for whatever reasons good or bad*), supporting Michael's argumentation – it is impossible to argue for one correct interpretation of a film still.

The participants relate to Susan's narratives. They murmur agreement and nod to each other. This is a cultural general moment that is familiar in all their cultures. They position themselves together with Susan. They empathise and understand.

The gaps created by the film still of *White Wedding* serve more to trigger personal stories than to elicit interpretations of the still. Participants comment on what they see – a white minister, a black groom and a coloured bride. There are many immediate comments related to key concepts such as interracial, intercultural, and multicultural. Researchers' questions prompt participants to bring their personal narratives to the table, something that contributes to leaving the film still behind.

Grace initiates a subtle shift from the former positioning of separate ethnic groups to a less rigid division. She shares a very personal story, something that contributes to establishing an atmosphere of trust in the room:

Excerpt 6: Father's affair

Grace:	can I be very personal?
Researcher 1:	[yes
Researcher 2:	[yes
	<<participants nod in agreement>
Grace:	my father had an affair with a coloured lady and that ended up breaking my parents' marriage apart so I mean ja that's how close to home these things happen to us
	<<agreement from the group>

Grace asks permission to be frank (*can I be very personal?*). She thereafter launches into a private first person narrative including three other characters, her father, his lover, and her mother. She presents three events. First she describes the situation (*my father had an affair with a coloured lady*). The second event is the result of the situation, divorce, described in quite dramatic terms (*breaking my parents' marriage*

apart). The third event is an evaluation that shows the emotional impact that the event has had on her (*that's how close to home these things happen to us*). What the personal pronoun *us* refers to is vague, it could include all South Africans. If so, the former positioning of the participants into ethnic groups shifts, and there is now a divide between the position of the South Africans as a group, and the foreign researchers.

Excerpt 7 demonstrates how this subtle change in positioning is reinforced in favour of transcending ethnic groups. Before the excerpt, Hermann tells the group about his German great grandmother, and that his family includes many members of German descent. The story about the grandmother goes back in time before apartheid. He presents the physical features of his ancestors (*their bodies, certain features that were more German*), while the other side of his family *was more coloured*. Another participant comments on his German sounding name, eliciting Hermann's conclusion *I'm really mixed*:

Excerpt 7: I am South African

Hermann:	((talks to the foreign researchers)) my brother well in spite of how I look my brother's got a red beard he's got a red and brown and blond beard ((turns to participants)) you know what I'm saying
	<<affirmation from the group>
Hermann:	((talks to both the foreign researchers and other participants)) (( )) I'll just be a bit personal you see about being coloured ((turns to the researchers)) it's something that always bothers me when people start boxing South Africans into ( )
Other participants:	yes yes
Hermann:	because for example I've got a white guy on my staff we're very good buddies and he refuses to tick
Some participants:	((laughing))
Hermann:	white South African he says because he's born here so by definition he's [a South African
Some participants:	[yes South African
Hermann:	the two of us were discussing and we were saying that on the ballot representations and official forms they've changed it now into. black South African. coloured. Indian. white South African. so he can no longer say he's South African he's now being pushed back into his ethnic group but I always feel that people have difficulty in answering that question because I AMSouth African
Other participants:	oh yes

Hermann uses the different looks of his brother and himself as his point of departure. He addresses the researchers directly, informing them about South African life and positioning himself and fellow participants on one side and the foreigners on the other side. He then turns to his fellow participants, asking them for confirmation (*you know what I'm saying*?). Affirmative reactions from them show that the group shares the insight he has exemplified with his family background, thus indicating that the participants move from ethnic divisions into a position of communality. Hermann continues with a topic that he finds problematic (*a bit personal*). He is taking a risk in exposing events in his past. As with Susan, he feels safe enough in the present company to be honest and open.

Stating the topic – the classification of South Africans into ethnic categories (*boxing South Africans*) – he addresses the researchers, perhaps with the assumption that the foreign researchers lack knowledge of this fact (asymmetries of knowledge). He explains that the problem is recurring (*always bothers me*), thereby positioning himself as opposing the practice. His new story is a third person narrative, featuring a white friend and colleague of his. This friend refuses to conform to the standard categorization, not ticking *white South African* as he belongs to an over-arching, national category (*South African*). Judging by the other participants' reactions this is an issue that is well-known to them, and they agree with Hermann's protagonist's stand-point. Hermann takes up the issue of power abuse and continues by criticizing the authorities' reactionary, ethnic categorizations (*he's now being pushed back into his ethnic group*). He concludes his argumentation by taking a clear stand for the over-arching view of ethnicity (*I AM South African*). The positioning has changed. The participant group is in agreement that they are positioned as South Africans rather than along ethnic lines. At this point the discussion has moved the participants to a sense of a shared perspective.

Discussion

The research question posed for this study was: To what extent can the methodology of *Reel Life* promote the development of intercultural competence through dialogue among culturally diverse teachers in South Africa? To this end we looked into how the teachers positioned themselves, and whether there was a change in their respective positioning when filling the gaps of *Reel Life*'s hypertext. The blanks created by the film stills were filled and served, as Iser argues, as "a vital propellant for initiating communication" (Iser 1980:195). As our analysis shows the methodology of *Reel Life* triggered a discussion about cultural issues between participants from very diverse backgrounds. The gaps made it possible for them to draw on their individual and cultural experiences. However, the intended focus on values remained implicit throughout, probably due to the participants enthusiastic sharing of quite concrete knowledge.

They started by sharing culture specific knowledge, thereby positioning themselves and others firmly in ethnic groups. During the initial sharing, narratives were generalized overviews of what occurs in their respective cultures concerning marriage. From the beginning it became clear that there were "asymmetries of knowledge" (Günthner & Luckmann 2001) in the sense that the white students in particular had very little cultural knowledge of Xhosa marriage customs, while non-white students were familiar with white customs. However, the non-Xhosa students were curious to learn more, and asked many questions, something that is a prerequisite for developing intercultural competence (Byram et al. 2002; Deardorff 2006).

South Africa is a multicultural nation something that was also mirrored in our classroom. Even so, the participating white teachers displayed an almost complete lack of knowledge about other cultures than their own. Lack of knowledge evidently risks leading to stereotyping and prejudice. This is serious when teachers have a responsibility to contribute to developing intercultural competence among their students with different ethnic backgrounds. If they themselves lack such competence, how are they to convey it to the young generation? In this study, there were few verbal indications of stereotyping during the class discussion. However, there were several non-verbal reactions that could be interpreted as indicating stereotypical thinking, for example surprised facial expressions, eye movements and body posture.

During the participants' sharing of culture specific knowledge, a rapport was gradually established and trust began to build in the group as there occurred a shift from knowledge exchange, to the exchange of very personal stories where attitudes of respect, openness and curiosity were evident. One such very

personal story led to a shift in the positioning of the participants to a shared position of sameness in being South African. In this part of the group discussion we see how the teachers agree on the evils of apartheid categorization of ethnic groups, and how they, as one, reject the perpetuation of such a practice. They position themselves together against this. Here is a glimpse of how the participants discover how they may also share a position. While still different they are also similar.

In South African universities at present there has been a strong move towards both decolonisation of university curricula and removal of all forms of colonial influence. This has positioned students along ethnic lines once more with concomitant racial tensions and clashes. Recognizing similarities, focussing on what unites us more than what differs between us may lead to a reduction of conflicts between people of different ethnic backgrounds (Maalouf 1998). Initiating programmes, such as *Reel Life* could lead towards greater understanding and empathy between students sitting together in university halls.

This study shows that by using the hypertext the participants' knowledge, attitudes and skills were teased out in order to "ensure a shared understanding by people of different social identities" (Byram et al. 2002:10). The dialogue reported indicated that the teachers were able to shift their frames of reference, while positioning themselves in diverse ethnic groups they also reached a shared understanding of being South African. They demonstrated attitudes of curiosity and openness and although some exchanges could be construed as disrespectful, they were prepared to take risks by sharing intimate details about their lives without fear of judgment, quite in line with Deardorff's cyclical process model starting with Attitudes, moving through Knowledge and Comprehension to an Internal Outcome (Deardorff 2006:256). Whether the participants moved to the next step in Deardorff's model, an External Outcome, is however a moot point.

Our study has obvious limitations – the teachers' discussion took place on only one occasion for a mere three hours. As discussed above there are indications of increased intercultural competence in the group. However, whether a three hours session can have long-lasting effects is questionable. In this group it was the first time that they discussed issues such as these across racial borders according to the participants.

In order to promote intercultural competence and thereby social change, the formal educational system must make mandatory the promoting of intercultural competence, and give enough room for such a competence to develop. Such room, it seems, is not made available today.

Conclusion

As we have shown, the methodology of *Reel Life* succeeded in initiating the development of intercultural competence among the participating teachers. The white students displayed an almost complete lack of knowledge of non-white customs. In order to rectify this, the Xhosa participants in particular conveyed a wealth of culture specific knowledge, thereby positioning themselves and others firmly along ethnic lines. This divided positioning was reinforced by the other participants' questions as they wished to acquire more knowledge. However, during the dialogue they also discovered a shared positioning as South Africans, realizing that at the same time as they were different, they were also similar.

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Appendix

Transcription conventions (Based on GAT)

[ ] overlap

[ ]

(.) pause

ACcent main accent

? pitch rising

. pitch falling

((nodding)) non-verbal actions

<<surprised> interpreting comments

( ) unintelligible passage

(such) presumed wording

((…)) omissions in transcript

About the Authors

Eva Lambertsson Björk and Jutta Eschenbach are both associate professors at Østfold University College, Halden, Norway. They teach Intercultural communication at various levels. Their academic work includes the development of a teaching method based on film fragments, *Reel Life*, for which they have been awarded Østfold University College's prize for innovative teaching (2013). The method has been introduced to institutions of higher education throughout the world. They worked together with Lyn Webb at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, Port Elizabeth, in South-Africa with *Reel Life*. Webb's research interest lies in multilingualism in mathematics and mathematical literacy. She is the recipient of the 2016 Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University Researcher of the Year award for the Faculty of Education. Further Björk, Eschenbach and Webb are now working jointly with projects concerning construction of identity.

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