

# Original Research

## Considering perspectives of others: A case study of intercultural learning among English language learners in Norway

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*The concept of perspective is embedded within the studies of culture and language, especially with regard to an intercultural orientation within EFL teaching and learning. However, researchers have rarely explored how perspective taking can be facilitated among language learners and what types of tasks can facilitate this process. This paper describes a case study in which English as a foreign language (EFL) learners (aged 14-15) engaged in focus group interviews conducted at the end of an E-portfolio of Intercultural Competence (EPIC) project. By foregrounding perspective taking within intercultural awareness, the paper explores connections between types of tasks implemented and the ways participants considered perspectives of others in their focus group interviews. The findings thus have implications for language teaching as the results highlight the need to support the pupils through adapted activities with a greater focus on the awareness of diversity of perspectives, storytelling, reading picture books, and reflection on narrative accounts of past events. In addition, an understanding of the differences and comparing ways of living of people from diverse cultures should be coupled with support from the teacher, allowing the learners to decentre from their perspectives.*

**KEYWORDS:** *perspective taking, perspective consciousness, intercultural awareness, EFL, e-portfolio, language learning, intercultural learning*



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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Foreign language teaching increasingly focuses on the interplay between languages and cultures as sites of interaction and learning. An intercultural orientation within language teaching seeks learners' transformation through a constant referencing of the language being learned with their own language(s) and culture(s) with the aim of encouraging students to decentre from their linguistic and cultural world to consider their own situatedness from the perspective of another (Scarino, 2010, p. 324). The intercultural orientation to teaching languages revolves around an overarching educational

goal, i.e., intercultural competence which generally requires that cognitive, affective and behavioural processes are at work and sustain an individual's understanding of diversity and interaction within intercultural encounters (Borghetti, 2011).

One way to 'decentre' (Scarino, 2010, p. 324) is to gain insights about alternative or unfamiliar perspectives. This can be done through the process which is referred to here as 'perspective taking' (PT). Perspective taking is the '*projection of oneself into another or unfamiliar frame of reference*' (Kearney, 2015, p. 170), which might lead to the acknowledgement that other

*'Intercultural awareness implies the ability to take on the perspective(s) of a conversational partner and of their cultural background (whether they be national, regional, ethnic, or social), and thus, to be able to understand and take into consideration the interlocutors' perspectives simultaneously'*

ways of understanding the world do exist and are worth considering or at least recognising (Thein et al., 2007, p. 55). Therefore, gaining new perspectives of other people is tied to the insight that one's own culture can appear to be 'odd' to an outsider (Broady, 2004, p. 69; Pshenichnyuk, 2021). Thus, PT is linked to the recognition of the diversity of perspectives, or 'perspective consciousness' (Tseng, 2002). Perspective consciousness is viewed in this study as the recognition of 'the malleability', or the diversity of perspective (Hanvey, 1982, p. 162).

Existing research suggests that perspective taking means that students not only need knowledge, but also skills (e.g., of identification, interpretation) that allow them to recognise perspectives (Kearney, 2012). Consequently, PT is closely tied with the concept of cultural awareness, which emphasises not information about a culture but skills in exploring, observing, and understanding difference and sameness (Broady, 2004). As stated by Broady (2004), central to this is the willingness to explore the ways in which normality is experienced differently by different people. Tomlinson (2019) uses the concept of intercultural awareness (ICA) to refer to similar conceptions. The term 'intercultural' has gradually replaced the term 'cultural' in foreign language and teaching, therefore, in this study, CA and ICA are not assumed to be mutually exclusive as these processes are to a large extent intertwined and often complementary in praxis (see Borghetti & Lertola, 2014, p. 425). In this paper, intercultural awareness has been used as a theoretical and methodological starting point. Intercultural awareness implies the ability to take on the perspective(s) of a conversational partner and of their cultural background (whether they be national, regional, ethnic, or social), and thus, to be able to understand and take into consideration the interlocutors' perspectives simultaneously.

There has been a growing interest in investigating the benefits of trying out diverse perspectives (see Dypedahl, 2020; Kearney, 2012; Thein et al., 2007;

Kopnina & Magirovskaya, 2019). However, despite this attention to PT, researchers have rarely explored what triggers this process and how the process of PT is induced among language learners. In order to address this, the present study explores manifestations of PT that emerge in focus group interviews in response to an e-portfolio-based intervention project specifically designed to facilitate PT. The following research question guided the analysis: how do the pupils consider the perspectives of others when reflecting on the EPIC entries in focus group interviews?

The current English curriculum in Norway calls for developing an intercultural understanding of different ways of living, ways of thinking and communication patterns. Thus, by recognising the relationship between PT and intercultural understanding in the EFL context, this study contributes to further understanding of how pupils can be supported in their building of awareness of 'different ways of living' through their practices at school.

## 2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

A common understanding is that perspective is 'what frames and defines our vision of reality and the meaning we give to it' (Giorgis, 2018, p. 34). PT thus starts from the premise that people inhabit a perspectival world, shaped by communication and shared histories (Glăveanu & De Saint-Laurent, 2018). Consequently, to take the perspective of someone whose position we never get to experience is a challenge. Hence, the lack of PT can become a stumbling block in all kinds of interactions, as the tendency of people to impose their frames onto others leads to increased misunderstanding (Friedman, 2014).

PT rarely occurs automatically; it should be facilitated and explicitly activated (Muradova, 2021). The potential for practising PT has been explored within different educational contexts and frameworks (see Hoyt, 2016; Kearney, 2015). Within the intercultural context, much work has been published to operationalise this concept in the classrooms with adults or university students. For example, Hoyt (2016) employed image-based activities with fifty students across three semesters at an American university. She examined the data through the lens of Byram's (1997) five domains of intercultural competence (IC) and used it as a framework to identify change in the development of students' IC. Both quantitative and qualitative data taken from ethnographic interviews and journal entries point to knowledge and skills associated with PT. However, Hoyt mostly related

her findings to the participants' self-reported perceptions as indicated in pre- and post-questionnaires not particularly highlighting the link to the ethnographic interview project itself.

A number of studies have exploited Kramsch's (1993, 2006) theoretical framework and the notions of *third place* and *symbolic competence*. *Third place* refers to a context or a way of teaching and learning primarily based on the notion of culture as an interpersonal process to understand otherness. The concept of *symbolic competence* is viewed as the ability to shape the very context in which language is learned and used (Kramsch & Whiteside, 2008, p. 664), which potentially leads to distancing from both the home and the target culture. In a study building on previous research into symbolic competence, Étienne and Vanbaelen (2017) introduced a Semiotic Gap Activity to French students in order to examine how they constructed meanings when watching a scene in a film. Based on answers from a post-viewing questionnaire and the instructor's notes, the findings showed the students' awareness of their own perspective and perspectives of others was enhanced. The participants moderated their own perspectives, deliberately taking the position of an observer (i.e., trying to see oneself as others do) (Étienne & Vanbaelen, 2017, p. 74).

A study by Kearney (2012) integrated both symbolic competence and critical literacy postulates (Lewison et al., 2002). Fourteen university-level learners of French were engaged in PT activities through texts of various cultural narratives related to WWII in France. The study focused on the learners' reflections on historical narratives, which provided a productive avenue for creating links with the students' personal lives or larger social questions (e.g., social inequality). The students displayed their willingness not simply to interpret others' meanings but to create meanings on their own (Kearney, 2012). Kearney (2015) calls for more studies showing how various pedagogical approaches can facilitate growth of personal meaning-making potentials among learners.

Other people's perspectives can be presented to learners by utilising literature in a foreign language class (see Vovou, 2019). PT, particularly as reconstructed in narrative, is one way of de-familiarising what we know, and, hence, providing new understandings. In a study of the use of multicultural literature with white EFL students, Thein et al. (2007) prompted eleventh- and twelfth-grade students from an urban high school to take on alternative perspectives by, for example, writing

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a letter to the class in the voice of one of the characters of a novel or constructing different versions of the same events based on differences in beliefs, experience, and age. The participants were able to see that our beliefs and perspectives arise from the historical, social, and cultural worlds in which we grow up and live (Thein et al., 2007, p. 57).

Despite a growing interest in studying taking the perspectives of others within (and outside of) the field of intercultural foreign language education, this topic has received only limited scholarly attention in the Norwegian educational context. Heggernes (2019) looked at how EFL learners at a lower secondary school engage with reading picture books through a dialogic approach aimed to enhance intercultural learning and PT skills. In another study, Normand and Savić (2018) focus on the use of process drama in EFL teacher education, aimed at increasing future teachers' ability to decentre and see multiple perspectives as a result of deeper reflection about their own and other people's feelings and perspectives.

There are numerous attempts to conceptualise and categorise ways of *taking* the perspectives of others. One categorisation is based on four types of commitment (or focus). Glăveanu and De Saint-Laurent (2018), who analysed online discussions in terms of the perspectives of refugees, propose Commitment to Similarity, Commitment to Difference, Commitment to Persons, and Commitment to Situations. In the present study, two main types of focus are adapted to the data, namely, Commitment to Difference and Commitment to Similarity. The former designates taking perspectives from the outside, building on existing representations of others without the possibility of position exchange because of a clear separation between self and other. The latter refers to perspectives taken from an inside position, a type of identification facilitated by imaginative efforts to approximate the other's experience of the world (Glăveanu et al., 2018, p. 446).

To sum up, while previous research has investigated the role of PT in relation to ICA, it is not certain how language learners perceive these experiences. Most of the studies cited above foreground either Byram's (1997) model of IC or Kramsch's (1993) theoretical framework. The present study responds to the need to provide an empirically driven approach by designing a classroom intervention which foregrounds PT within intercultural awareness and provides an in-depth insight into how PT unfolds when engaging with specifically designed e-portfolio entries with a focus on the language learners' group discussions about these entries. Additionally, this study adds the Norwegian setting into the growing field of intercultural studies.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1. The study

The present research is an exploratory case study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) based on a pedagogical intervention involving the implementation of e-portfolio entries within the English language instruction pro-

gramme. During the eight-week study, three EFL teachers implemented the e-portfolio of Intercultural Competence (EPIC) in their five EFL classrooms in a lower secondary school on the west coast of Norway. The pedagogical foundations of the EPIC project are grounded in constructivism, which suggests that gaining knowledge is a continuous interactional process in which the learners acquire knowledge in their own subjective ways and by means of tacit, meaning-making processes (Taber, 2011). Practices related to intercultural teaching and learning within this approach relate to a shift from teaching a static culture as isolated facts to developing in learners a capacity to engage with the perspectives of others always in relation to their own (Liddicoat et al., 2003, p. 43). The purpose behind the EPIC was thus to promote self-awareness, awareness of others, and perspective taking. Specifically, the present study explores the participants' reflections prompted by seven EPIC entries in focus group interviews following the project. Figure 1 gives an overview of the timeline and the main data collection instruments of the study.

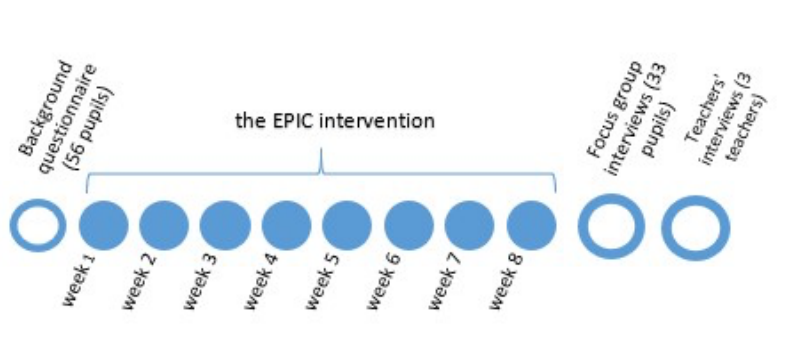


Figure 1. The study timeline

The pupils spent two 1.5-hour class periods per week over an eight-week period on the project. All the participants used iPads and G-Suite (free online Google Classroom application). The latter was used to distribute the EPIC entries.

#### 3.2. The participants and context of the study

A convenience sample consisting of 33 EFL learners (23 girls and 10 boys) participated in focus group interviews. Based on the discussion with the teachers and due to time constraints, it was decided to conduct five focus group interviews (one group per class). The groups consisted of 6-7 pupils. Four participants out of 33 were born outside of Norway. As reported by the teachers, the expected English proficiency level of the participants was ranged between A2 and B2 (CEFR,

2018). That is why the pupils were given an option to use either English or Norwegian in the focus group discussions when they felt Norwegian would help them to express themselves better.

#### 3.3. Focus group interviews

This study draws on data collected from five focus group interviews with 33 pupils who had consented to participate. The focus group interview as the main method for eliciting information was chosen to access more varied interpretations of the phenomena under study and identify links between the EPIC and the way the participants considered perspectives of others. In addition, focus groups were considered less threatening for young participants than individual interviews (Eder & Fingerson, 2002, p. 183). Finally, the interactions in



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groups closely mirror classroom interaction, which may increase their willingness to communicate and share their viewpoints.

Seven EPIC entries (*Sunglasses Story*, *Fractured Fairy Tales*, *If I Were... I’d Be...*, *Interview Room*, *This Is How We Do It*, *History Corner*, and *The Other Side*), all specifically designed to enhance PT, served as prompts for discussion during the focus group interviews (see Appendix for more details). The interviews were semi-structured, the exact formulations of questions varied (for the interview guide, see Appendix). Based on their relevance to promoting perspective taking, two main parts of the focus group interviews were included in the data set: Self and Others, and Perspective Taking. In total, 209 minutes of audio recordings were transcribed, of which 85.5 minutes, covering the two parts described above (41.5 minutes related to Self and Others and 44 minutes related to Perspective Taking), comprise the data for the current study.

#### **3.4. Ethical considerations and the role of the researcher**

Data gathering adhered to strict ethical procedures and written consent was collected from the three teachers, pupils, and parents, since not all the participants were over the age of 15. The researcher anonymised the data by changing each participant’s real name to a pseudonym. In addition, as the interviews were recorded, the researcher tried to lead the discussion over to a different topic when instances of revealing personal information occurred, which may have led to inconsistencies across the interviews. Furthermore, as the focus of the study is on how individuals interpreted their experiences and understandings with respect to perspective taking, this research was guided by the principles of interpretivism, namely, social inquiry that derives knowledge from the interpretation of lived experiences

of individuals. Correspondingly, the researcher recognises the subjectivity of her interpretations. The researcher alternated the roles of an informed outsider and participant observer (Woodin, 2016) as, on the one hand, she was not a member of teaching staff and, on the other hand, she had observed the instruction and therefore talked to the pupils during the EPIC project. In the analysis, the researcher acknowledges this dual role as well as the unequal power relations between the adult and minor (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

#### **3.5. Data analysis**

Focus group interviews were analysed following thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), by using a qualitative data analysis software, NVivo 12 Pro (version 12.6.0.959). NVivo was utilised in order to search for patterns, generate initial codes and sort the codes and categories into potential themes. In the software, interviews were transcribed, cases created for each participant and for each group. Code labels were displayed in various colours which delineate which portion of data is assigned a particular code. However, the software ‘does not actually code the data’ (Saldaña, 2016); therefore, the researcher is still the driving force behind the analysis. Overall, the analysis process was guided by the six phases outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006): familiarisation; coding; generating initial themes; reviewing themes; defining and naming themes and writing up. All the instances where a pupil both (a) considers the perspectives of others and (b) reflects on the EPIC entries were coded. The codes related to utterances where the participants projected themselves into another or unfamiliar frame of reference were grouped under the sub-theme Specific PT (e.g., one of the codes was ‘activating PT’). The utterances where pupils took a general, or an outsider, perspective of the situation and did not actively take or consider perspectives of others were grouped under the General PT theme. The codes under General PT included ‘awareness of stereotypes’, ‘meaning-making’, and ‘conflict resolution’. Codes related to the enhanced awareness of the diversity of perspectives were grouped under the theme of Perspective Consciousness (PC). All coded instances referring to ‘awareness of differences’ and ‘awareness of similarities’ were labelled as Commitment to Similarity and Commitment to Difference themes. Table 1 shows a detailed overview of the final themes, their description and example quotes. The information in the example quotes included the pupil’s name, group (FGI) and the EPIC entry.

Table 1  
Final themes and example quotes

THEME	SUB-THEME	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLE QUOTE
Perspective Taking	Specific Perspective Taking (Specific PT)	Projection of oneself into another or unfamiliar frame of reference (Kearney, 2015, p. 170), hence, taking a situation-specific perspective	<i>'I guess I don't think I would have called the police'</i> (Seline, Group 4, History Corner)
	General Perspective Taking (General PT)	A pupil takes a general, or an outsider, perspective of the situation	<i>'You can't only hear one point of view, because that's not all true'</i> (Christina, Group 5, History Corner)
Perspective Consciousness		Recognition that one has a view of the world that is not universally shared and that others have views of the world that can be different from one's own (Tseng, 2002), i.e., the awareness of the diversity of perspective	<i>'Even though somebody thinks that she did the right thing, somebody thinks that she did the wrong thing, there were many ways to see it'</i> (Ella, Group 2, History Corner)
Commitment to Difference		Recognition of the opposition between self and other (Glăveanu & De Saint-Laurent, 2018)	<i>'The music is different, food is different, um, and yeah, pretty much everything is different'</i> (Frida, Group 1, Interview Room)
Commitment to Similarity		Recognition of the likeness between the self and other (Glăveanu & De Saint-Laurent, 2018)	<i>'That colour doesn't matter, I guess. People are completely just like you'</i> (Arne, Group 5, The Other Side)

At the end of the coding process, all the themes were grouped in accordance with the EPIC entries they refer to. The following sections will describe the occurrences and frequencies of the themes found divided into two subsections: (a) a sub-section on PT and PC themes; (b) a sub-section on Commitment to Similarity and Commitment to Difference themes.

#### 4. FINDINGS

##### 4.1. Perspective taking/Perspective consciousness

The analysis of all five focus group interviews yielded 46 instances (Table 2). The most recurrent theme across all groups was PC (n=17), followed by General PT (n=6), Commitment to Similarity (CSim) (n=10) and Commitment to Difference (CDif) (n=10). Specific PT is represented by 3 instances.

Most pupils considered the perspectives of others through PC (n= 17). Table 3 shows that the numbers of identified manifestations of PT (General PT and Specific

PT) and PC across the EPIC entries are varied, and most opportunities for perspective taking are concentrated under the entry History Corner (n=14). As for This Is How We Do It and The Other Side, the entries based on reading picture books, no manifestations of PC or PT were identified.

When reflecting on the Sunglasses Story, the participants were prompted to reflect on a metaphorical story described by Berardo and Deardorff (2012) (see Appendix for a short summary). Siri recognises a personal prism through which she tends to see things: *'And yeah, you get kind of the perspective of the world from both points of view. Yeah. And I think that is really important because I usually tend to only see... see things from my own point of view especially in arguments. And I really want to stand my ground, but I have to remember that the story is not the same for everyone'* (Siri, Group 2). Siri's emotional expression is boosted as she uses a personal pronoun *I*, and intensifiers such as *really*. Even

Table 2  
Frequencies within the dataset

GROUP	PT			THEME			TOTAL
	PT		PC	CDIF	CSIM		
	SPECIFIC PT	GENERAL PT					
1	1	1	3	2	3	10	
2	0	3	6	3	5	17	
3	0	0	3	3	0	6	
4	1	1	2	0	0	4	
5	1	1	3	2	2	9	
TOTAL	3	6	17	10	10	46	

Table 3  
A quantitative overview of the PT and PC themes across all the EPIC entries and focus group interviews

THEME	SUNGLASSES STORY	FRACTURED FAIRY TALE	INTERVIEW ROOM	THIS IS HOW WE DO IT	IF I WERE... I'D BE...	HISTORY CORNER	THE OTHER SIDE	TOTAL
SPT	–	–	–	–	–	3	–	3
GPT	–	2	1	–	–	3	–	6
PC	3	2	1	–	3	8	–	17
TOTAL	3	4	2	0	3	14	0	26

without an active projection of herself into an unfamiliar frame of reference, Siri makes her personal involvement with the prompt explicit and adds self-evaluation to what she has just learned.

When reflecting on the Fractured Fairy Tale entry, the pupils demonstrated a recognition of multiple perspectives and the existence of two sides of the story. This entry, included in the project in the form of a written assignment, asks the pupils to write a fairy tale or any other popular story from somebody else's perspective by changing the traditional plot, characters, etc. Hilde, for instance, reflects in the following way: *'A story always has two sides'* (Hilde, Group 3). The two coded instances based on this entry are related to PC, whereas the other two relate to General PT.

The entry *If I Were... I'd Be...* is one of the tasks which provided the pupils with the opportunities to reflect on PC and ways they perceive their own culture and language through the lens of personal filters and

metaphors (see Appendix). A few of the pupils displayed the increased awareness of stereotypes and bias. For example, Sonja concludes that people tend to think stereotypically, which in turn may lead to oversimplification of another culture. She says: *'We just see things based on stereotypes, and therefore it might not be as accurate. It's only the things we see. Like when we think of America, we think of McDonalds, all the guns and Donald Trump and stuff, but America is much more than that'* (Sonja, Group 2).

Rosa Parks' story (History Corner) resonated with many pupils as there were a few comments when the pupils gained deeper insights regarding multiple perspectives on the same event. In the e-portfolio, they were provided with different accounts of the famous incident that happened to Rosa Parks on a bus in 1955, when she refused to give up her seat to a white man. They were asked to identify each of the voices and describe their personalities as they read the narratives of

the bus driver, a white passenger, an African American passenger, Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King. During the focus group interview, they were asked to reflect on the merits of PT. Arne summarises his opinion about the entry in the following way: *'Because now blacks and whites are equal in rights. But back in there that was different, so I would probably think differently'* (Arne, Group 5). *'I think in a way all that Rosa Parks did is right because she has just as much worth as the white man. Back in the day it was legal the white people should sit in front and the black in the back'* (Arne, Group 5). Arne emphasises the difficult decision-making processes caused by what was legal 'back in that day', hence, acknowledging the importance of context when decentring from a single perspective on the same event. Christina says: *'Because you can't only hear one point of view. And, because that's not all true'* (Christina, Group 5). For learners in Norway, the Montgomery Bus Boycott was quite distant in time and space and introducing various viewpoints (even imaginary ones) proved beneficial for the pupils.

The analysis identifies three instances of the Specific PT theme, all related to the History Corner entry. The task enabled the pupils not only to expand their aware-

ness of the multiplicity of perspectives, but also project their own perspectives towards the possible stances of others. For example, Christina argues: *'I think I would do as the bus driver did in this story when he called the police. Because I would follow the law so it wouldn't be much trouble'* (Christina, Group 5). Christina gives the reasons for why they acted in a particular way. Seline, on the contrary, when identifying with the other's actions, says: *'I'm not sure... I guess I don't think I would have called the police but maybe he felt like he had to'* (Seline, Group 4). Seline adopts the bus driver's perspective and considers what she would do if placed in his situation and expresses her disagreement with his actions. The ways in which these instances revealed the signs of Specific PT thus vary from the capacity to relate to the context bus driver lived in (Christina's comment) to trying to be sensitive to his feelings and actions even though disagreeing with them (Seline's comment).

The third coded instance was drawn from a conversation about the learning outcomes of the History Corner in Group 1. The researcher draws attention of the participants to the variety of viewpoints of those partaking in the Montgomery Bus Boycott. The rest of the dialogue is provided in Excerpt 1 below (Figure 2).

- 1 **Christian:** *The rules say that she was supposed to stand in the back, but I think it's wrong*  
 2 *because...even though she's black it doesn't mean she's different and the bus*  
 3 *driver calling the cops it was his job, and he was supposed to do it but (1.1)*  
 4 *like... I think the rules were wrong not the people.*  
 5 **Frida:** *If he was born then... I don't think that he would think the same. So... it was*  
 6 *maybe normal at that time.*  
 7 **Christian:** *Yeah, at that time it was normal.*  
 8 **Frida:** *There were stories from that time. Maybe we don't know but in our time from*  
 9 *our perspective, it is different.*  
 10 **Christian:** *If this has happened now?*  
 11 **R.:** *Yeah.*  
 12 **Christian:** *Then I think the black woman was right that she could sit where she wanted.*

Figure 2. Excerpt 1, Group 1

Christian points out that 'the rules' of that time were wrong, 'not the people' (line 4). Then Frida questions Christian's point of view and doubts that he would think the same if he was born 'then' (lines 5-6). Thus, Frida's comment shows how decentring one perspective can serve as a tool for meaning making when she de-familiarises what she knows, hence, gaining deeper insights (Boland & Tenkasi, 1995). Frida adds an argument which reflects her perspective (lines 8-9). In his last contribution, Christian re-frames what had been said and attempts to construct a perspective from 'our time' (i.e., from his perspective) (lines 10, 12).

Summing up, the data above suggests that the PT skills of pupils were activated when reflecting on the EPIC entries (in particular, History Corner, Fractured Fairy Tale, Sunglasses Story, and If I Were... I'd Be...). Excerpt 1 illustrates the pupils' projection into an unfamiliar frame of reference from either contrasting *now* and *then* (Christian) or becoming aware that other perspectives do exist, and they may be different in many ways depending on the context (Frida). More importantly, the pupils managed to recognise that their view of the world may be not universally shared, even within the focus group (Tseng, 2002, p.12).



Table 4

A quantitative overview of the CDif and CSim themes across all the prompts and focus group interviews

THEME	SUNGLASSES STORY	FRACTURED FAIRY TALE	INTERVIEW ROOM	THIS IS HOW WE DO IT	IF I WERE... I'D BE...	HISTORY CORNER	THE OTHER SIDE	TOTAL
CDIF	1	–	4	5	–	–	–	10
CSIM	1	–	3	1	–	1	4	10
TOTAL	2	0	7	6	0	1	4	20

#### 4.2. Commitment to similarity/difference

When it comes to the themes of Commitment to Similarity (CSim) and Commitment to Difference (CDif), they were identified in five EPIC entries out of seven (Table 4). Even though the themes are not evenly distributed across the groups, they reveal some common tendencies.

In *This Is How We Do It*, inspired by a picture book by Lamothe (2019), the pupils are asked to discuss images representing days in the lives of seven children coming from seven different backgrounds (see Appendix for more details). In the focus group interview, the researcher asked open-ended questions about whether the participants found any differences and similarities between their daily routines and those of the kids from the book and what they had learned from the entry. The following example shows CDif as related to this entry: *'I choose her [showing one of the kids from the image depicting the main characters from the book This Is How We Do It, see Appendix], we didn't have a lot in common. So... Maybe it's because I live in Norway and she lives in Uganda'* (Christina, Group 5).

Christina concludes that her daily routines do not have a lot in common with those of a girl from Uganda, hence, reinforcing the differences based on the fact that they live in different countries. This entry tended to navigate her towards knowing the Other, rather than a willingness to engage with and consider the perspectives of the Other. The former usually implies stereotyping and falls within cultural knowledge, which is likely to be reduced (Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2004, p. 7). In total, five out of ten instances of CDif are drawn from this entry, all of which are characterised by the danger of reinforcing stereotypes through activity design when emphasising one cultural dimension (a national one).

As for the Commitment to Similarity theme, ten instances signified the participants' focus on and appreciation of similarities between people. For example, The

Other Side, History Corner, and Sunglasses Story entries seem to enable the pupils to reflect on the issue of similarity related to how they viewed the issue of race, in particular skin colour. The Other Side is a picture book by Jacqueline Woodson (2011) which invites the pupils to read a story about the friendship between a black girl and a white girl. The entry is used as a resource to introduce learners in the acceptance of the Others and the existence of the diversity emphasising values of respect and tolerance. Tina, for instance, highlights that skin colour does not have any particular importance for kids, who, unlike adults, value people regardless their skin colour: *'It [picture of a fence] shows that kids are just kids, and they not really get involved or like know about adult issues. So they just see like humans, they don't see race'* (Tina, Group 2).

Two of ten coded instances relate to the ways the pupils display a more complex understanding of the interplay between difference and similarity existing in the world. A few pupils demonstrated that things are not only black and white and often the others cannot be characterised by either difference, or similarity. The following excerpt (see Figure 3) illustrating the above statement is taken from Group 2's discussion about the EPIC entry Interview Room. In this entry, the pupils were asked to interview a person from a different background and compare his or her daily routines and interests with their own. In the interaction below, the researcher prompts the pupils to reflect on their experiences. This episode begins when Nicole comments on the importance to learn from and about others and not to have prejudiced representations about another national group (lines 1-6).

By representing two cultures (Norwegian and Brazilian) as reduced to national groups, Nicole first fails to deconstruct stereotypes and value cultural diversity within these groups (lines 13-14). The researcher's impromptu questions on the perceptions of similarities

- 1 Nicole: *I think it's useful to know that not everybody like, not every culture is the same...*  
2 *because some people are like closed-minded, they only like their own culture,*  
3 *like they think stereotypically about other people, like if you are from there you*  
4 *only do this and only do this, right? But when you get to ask people from that...*  
5 *came from another culture, about their culture, you learn more about people*  
6 *around you and then just, yeah.*  
7 R.: *Hm...yes*  
8 Sonja: *I agree. Because when you talk to someone who is actually from that country and*  
9 *are part of that culture, you get a less stereotypical point of view and, yeah, you*  
10 *get more accurate description of what a normal (.) for example, Brazil.*  
11 R.: *Yeah, and have you found any similarities or differences if you think about it? {}*  
12 *What have you noticed?*  
13 Nicole: *Uhm... I think like the Brazilian culture and Norwegian culture are quite*  
14 *different. There are some bad things about the Brazilian culture, but also in*  
15 *Norwegian, of course, but... ehm I've noticed that there were actually... like not*  
16 *a lot of differences, but enough differences to...for it to be significant.*  
17 Eva: *Yeah, I did that task and I found that even though we eat different food and go to*  
18 *different schools, and live in different countries, we share a lot of the same*  
19 *interests and like... we both like to hang out with our friends, we both are*  
20 *interested in our futures, yeah.*  
21 Tina: *I think I would definitely think about the similarities because that's where you*  
22 *find common ground and... like can develop relationship, like friend relationship.*  
23 Sonja: *I believe that both are pretty important because you should not get too caught up*  
24 *in the differences and distance yourself too much from the culture, but you also*  
25 *have to remember that there are differences, and you have to respect those*  
26 *differences. And... yeah, I think that it's a little bit of both together.*  
27 Nicole: *Yes, I agree with Sonja with that... that you have to respect cultures. For*  
28 *example, when you travel, it's kind of important to know like (1.2) uhm... that in*  
29 *some other countries there are things that are bad there that aren't bad in*  
30 *Norway... so you have to like before you travel sometimes you have to learn a bit*  
31 *about, about the culture so you don't disrespect people without knowing.*

Figure 3. Excerpt 2, Group 2

and differences between one's own and the target person's background might have influenced this (lines 11-12) as the discussion moves towards the compare and contrast ability. Recognising similarities and differences might be challenging, but it may also stimulate learners' perspectives and cultural awareness (Broady, 2004; Tomlinson, 2019). Eva builds on Nicole's comments that the cultures (Norwegian and Brazilian) were quite different, but she also displays an enhanced awareness of complexities when she argues that on the surface people may look different but when it comes to interests or the 'futures' [sic] (lines 17-20), they seem to share a lot. Tina agrees with Eva by recognising the importance of building mutual understanding through recognising similarities (lines 21-22). In her next turn, Sonja emphasises that differences might cause distances between self and other (line 24). At the end of this extract, Nicole rounds off the conversation by saying that respect and willingness to learn from each other are

two interrelated things. In this conversation, one can see that the pupils' fixed beliefs about others based on national differences appear to be significant as there is still a lot of implicit essentialising. However, discussing them with peers offers opportunities for the pupils to learn from each other and decentre from their perspectives and opinions. Through this excerpt it is possible to see how the group of pupils modify their perspectives through group discussions with the researcher and peers.

Summing up, most of the coded instances related to CDif and CSim are attributed to the two entries, namely, Interview Room and This Is How We Do It both of which deal with comparing and contrasting daily routines of one's own and those of another person from a different cultural group. However, the data shows that even though there is an emphasis on national cultures in the pupils' comments, the pupils' discussions are characterised by a dialogical perspective on

difference (as opposed to seeing difference as a problem) (Xu, 2013) (Excerpt 2). Undoubtedly, the way the researcher guided conversations may have influenced the ways the pupils responded. Consequently, the teacher's role in a classroom does have an influence on how the learners discuss and consider the perspectives of others.

In conclusion, several patterns emerge from the data which seem to provide insights into how the pupils considered perspectives of others when reflecting on the EPIC entries. When reflecting on the entries dealing with interviewing other people, comparing the routines and ways of living of people from different cultures (namely, Interview Room, This Is How We Do It), the pupils' focus on differences or similarities is mostly grounded in an emphasis on national cultures. However, even in such cases, other pupils challenged such opinions through dialogue. For example, in Excerpt 2, Nicole reflects upon her own monolithic views on culture, which in turn forms the foundation for more open dialogue with others. On the other hand, reflections on such entries as Fractured Fairy Tale, History Corner, Sunglasses Story trigger perspective consciousness and perspective taking among the pupils. Even though the opportunities for PT were less frequent as compared to PC, the pupils in their focus group interviews decentred from one's own perspective and relativise the notion of difference.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The thematic analysis of the data reveals several major ways in which the pupils considered perspectives of others. First, perspective consciousness is the most recurrent theme within the dataset. History Corner, Sunglasses Story, If I Were... I'd Be..., and Fractured Fairy Tales are among the EPIC entries which have given the pupils opportunities to discuss the issues related to the diversity of perspectives. Three of the EPIC entries (History Corner, Sunglasses Story, and Fractured Fairy Tales) highlight the complexity of narrative realities and provide the foundations for recognising a multiplicity of perspectives. Many studies have proposed the importance of storytelling, or narrative experiences, as an important tool for encouraging the process of perspective taking and intercultural awareness in general (Andenoro et al., 2012; Sell, 2017). The entries implemented in the EPIC provided the pupils with the opportunities to get 'a deepened sense of perspective' (Andenoro et al., 2012, p. 106) through telling and retelling the same story.

Secondly, the three instances of Specific PT (when the pupils constructed the perspectives of others) show that discussing a historical event can and should be presented from a number of different – and often conflicting – voices (Dypedahl, 2020). On the one hand, tasks involving accounts of well-known past events can enable learners to realise how people's perspectives may change depending on the context. The current data echoes the findings from Kearney (2015) and Thein et al. (2007), who indicated that narratives and fiction texts which represent unfamiliar and 'distant' voices (Kearney, 2012, p. 59) can make it possible for students to revise their perspectives and explore how our perspectives arise from the worlds we live in. On the other hand, by showing different reports of historical events and news items, classroom work can contribute to decentring discourse by problematising fundamental concepts like democracy and human rights. While nationality, ethnicity and skin colour may have an impact on how people react to a particular event, there are other markers of identity which influence it (Hoff, 2020). As Hoff (2020) argues, the rationale behind people's responses is varied and may be highly personal. Thus, including a range of diverse responses to and reflections on historical events and discussing them from the current standpoint can potentially provide a platform for intercultural learning.

Finally, as illustrated in Excerpt 2 and shown across the database, inconsistencies and controversies in the pupils' manifestations of PT suggest that the process of considering perspectives of others in the EFL classroom setting is complex and nuanced. Some of the pupils displayed both perspective consciousness coupled with instances of intercultural awareness and formulated stereotyping based on static beliefs (as in Excerpt 2). For instance, Nicole's comments indicate her monolithic view on culture combined with the suspension of previous beliefs and willingness to deconstruct stereotypes. These findings accord with the study conducted by Étienne and Vanbaelen (2017), which showed a mix of ethnocentrism and emerging ethnorelativism among their participants, as they saw differences that they still tended to essentialise instead of exploring and taking into account the foreign context in itself. However, occasionally, the participants from the study revealed more nuanced interpretations, moving towards more fluid interpretations and positionings. In the current study, Sonja and Eva pinpoint that approaching otherness could happen through appreciating and respecting both difference and sameness. Such pupils' comments

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serve as an illustration of an argument expressed by Sell (2017) that intercultural understanding is a balancing act between searching for similarities and realising differences. Overall, considering the perspectives of others in the EFL classroom can be organised around activities purposefully designed around PT, moreover, they can be facilitated by classroom dialogues mediated by the teacher.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The data presented above highlights the insights of lower secondary school pupils regarding the perspectives of others through the lens of an intercultural orientation to language learning (Borghetti, 2011; Scarino, 2010). It has been shown that realisations of PT in the classroom are complex and varied, and the ways the pupils considered the perspectives of others are often contingent on the type of the entry they discuss. Thus, decisions FL teachers make about planning and designing classroom activities are crucial to success.

As for the limitations, the tendency of this age group to respect authority (Alter, 2015) could have influenced the results of the study. It should be acknowledged that children and young adults might mainly orientate their answers toward what they think is expected from them (Alter, 2015). Hence their focus group interview comments can show some signs of social desirability (see Dervin, 2010). Due to space limitations, this paper only focuses on the focus group interviews; however, it would be beneficial to look at the pupils' texts in the EPIC and analyse them in terms of changes in perspectives over time. In addition, not all pupils participated equally in the focus group interviews, and it is not feasible to generalise the findings. In addition, the

participants' comments might also be dependent on other factors, such as experience, knowledge gained, individual's motivation, etc. Therefore, the process of considering the perspectives of others should be examined more thoroughly, and closer attention should be given to any factors that constitute learners' context and background.

The findings suggest some practical implications for teaching. The results indicate that storytelling (as in Fractured Fairy Tales), fictional or imaginative texts based on historical events (as in History Corner) and metaphorical representations of the notion of perspective (as in the Sunglasses Story and If I Were... I'd Be...) promote the awareness of diversity of perspectives among the pupils. Correspondingly, the teachers can suggest similar activities, in which the emphasis is put on a decentred perspective (Ware & Kramsch, 2005) and recognition of the multiplicity of perspective (PC) during their classroom interactions or engagements with texts.

It has been shown that the entries based on interviewing people from other cultural backgrounds, engaging with comparing and contrasting can be also beneficial for creating opportunities for PT. However, finding the right balance between similarities and differences is a way to avoid oversimplifications and stereotypes. Thus, the learners' attention should be drawn to the perception of cultural differences as practised by individuals, and, more importantly, to the awareness that *'the self and the other do not necessarily stand in a confronting or dichotomic relation, but in a relation of complementarity'* (Xu, 2013, p. 394).

As the History Corner entry has also shown, the importance of context when drawing the meaning from a text seems to be crucial. As shown in the findings, the recognition of a variety of perspectives might be a steppingstone towards perspective taking, therefore, it might be useful for teachers to elaborate on how one's perspective can change (e.g., over time) or how different perspectives vary (e.g., across contexts, generations, gender, or social roles). Therefore, the teacher who by the careful selection or adaptation of activities may influence whether a more ethnocentric or ethnorelative way of thinking will be reinforced in a class plays a role here. Summing up, this study shows that the role of the teacher is crucial in order to challenge learners' views on the issues of considering the perspectives of others in language classrooms. Creating a scaffold for learners to gain new perspectives is a way to improve foreign language teaching.

**Appendix A**

Table 5

*The overview of the EPIC entries*

NAME (SOURCE)	DESCRIPTION
Sunglasses Story (Berardo & Deardorff, 2012, p. 153)	Pupils read and reflect on a metaphorical story which helps them to realise that we all see the world through our own unique lens. The story tells about two groups of people who are born with a differently coloured pair of glasses (yellow and blue). When the groups meet, they put on each other's sunglasses, and realise that both see green lenses.
Fractured Fairy Tale (Dolan, 2014, p. 72)	Pupils are asked to retell a popular story, changing the point of view, the plot or ideas.
Interview Room (Huber-Kriegler et al., 2003)	Pupils interview a person with a background different from their own about things they do in their everyday lives and compare the information obtained with their own daily routines.
This Is How We Do It (Lamothe, 2019)	Pupils complete a series of tasks as they read the book. They explore lives and daily rituals of seven kids and link them with their own lives. An end page with a night sky scattered with stars is accompanied by the words, 'This is my night sky,' hinting that though these kids may lead very different lives, they all see the same sky above them.
If I Were... I'd Be... (Rigamonti & Scott-Monkhouse, 2016)	Pupils complete 12 stem sentences by choosing 12 metaphors thinking about themselves, their culture, and the target culture (all sentences starting with 'If I were... I'd be...'). In the second and third stages the pupils go through the same steps but replace the same metaphors with 'If Norwegians were..., they'd be...,' and 'If the British/Americans/... were..., they'd be...,' to reflect on themselves, their language/culture and the target cultures and languages, as well as stereotypes shaping them.
History Corner (Bromseth & Wigdahl, 2007, p. 159-162)	Pupils complete a series of tasks as they explore the story of Rosa Parks and the Civil Rights movement. They engage in tasks aimed at perspective-taking as a resource for expanding the meaning-making potential of a historical event.
The Other Side (Woodson, 2001)	Pupils answer a series of questions on their perceptions of the children's book <i>The Other Side</i> by Woodson (2001).

**Appendix B****Interview guide for focus group interviews****SELF AND OTHERS**

Do you remember the activity where you were asked to interview your friend from another country? 'Interview Room' and the activity 'This Is How We Do It'. Was there anything particular from these activities that you remember? Anything that made you think about yourself and the other person's culture? What did you learn from these activities?

**PERSPECTIVE TAKING**

The pupils are asked to recall the following EPIC entries/activities, namely Sunglasses Story; Fractured Fairy Tale; If I were..., I'd Be...; History Corner, and The Other Side: (1) How did these entries in the EPIC

make you feel? Did you like them? What did you learn? (2) We have discussed how we can use a change of perspective to see ourselves in a new light (e.g., Sunglasses Story; Fractured Fairy Tales; History Corner). What have you learned? (3) In what situations in your real life would you use the knowledge from these activities? Can you suggest any examples? (4) Pupils are shown two images made by E. B. Lewis depicting the main characters from *The Other Side* book and are asked the following key questions. (1) Who are the people in these pictures? (2) What can you tell me about that picture? (3) What does the fence represent? (4) From what perspective/viewpoint do we see this event? (5) Why is it important to consider different perspectives? (6) Can you make up a short dialogue between the people in the photo? (7) Could you make up titles for the images?



**Appendix C: Transcription conventions**

[ ]: overlaps in speech

(.): incomprehensible speech

...: pauses less than 1 second, trailed off speech

(1.2): pauses more than one second

{ }: material has been deleted from the excerpt

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