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## Developing multiple perspectives with EFL learners through facilitated dialogue about images

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### ABSTRACT

This article reports on a case study investigating how Norwegian upper secondary EFL learners develop multiple perspectives in facilitated dialogue about images before and after being familiarized with critical visual literacy (CVL) practices. Focus group interviews were conducted with learners before and after a 16-week intervention in which CVL was introduced as an approach to teaching about culture in the English foreign language (EFL) classroom. An in-depth analysis of the interactions during pre-interviews demonstrates how through the dialogue, facilitated by authentic and critical questions, the learners explored several different perspectives, thus expanding the images' meaning-making potential even without any prior CVL instruction. Furthermore, the analysis of the post-interviews shows how the learners display agency in taking up a critical stance when familiarized with CVL practices. These findings suggest that given the right time and space, EFL learners can engage reflectively and critically with images even as a one-off event, but also that engaging in CVL practices over time supports EFL learners to become socialized into critical inquiry, enabling them to take a critical stance more independently.

### Introduction

In English foreign language (EFL) teaching, literacy has traditionally focused on the decoding, comprehension, and production of verbal texts, with culture being treated as “an expendable fifth skill” (Kramsch, 1993, p. 1). Critical approaches to foreign language (FL) teaching, however, reject this dichotomy between language and culture, arguing that they are inextricably linked. Inherent in this argument is a constructivist view of meaning-making as a social practice, whereby meanings of words, images, or other signs are not pre-defined, but are constructed in social situations (Hall, 2013). It is therefore increasingly recognized that learners need to not only learn to read and write in the FL, but also understand meaning-making “as a process of selecting symbolic forms from a range of options and doing so purposefully to establish, negotiate or advance a perspective” (Kearney, 2016, p. 4). Particularly, in FL contexts this entails an understanding of the cultural situatedness of one's own

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and others' perspectives, and its influence on meaning-making processes. These aims are aligned with the Norwegian subject curriculum for English, which states that “the subject shall develop the pupils’ understanding that their views of the world are culture-dependent” and develop “an intercultural understanding of different ways of living” (Norwegian directorate for Education and Training, 2019). However, such understandings do not develop as a natural consequence of learning another language (Kearney, 2016).

A promising approach to this is critical literacy (CL), an orientation to literacy that emphasizes the social context of text production and reception and how the perspectives offered in texts contribute to challenging or maintaining dominant ideologies. It aims to make the workings of texts conscious (Newfield, 2011), and encourages learners to “work within multiple plausible interpretations of a text” (Stevens & Bean, 2007, p. 7). While investigations of the uses of CL in FL settings have increased over the last decades, few studies have focused on how this relates to cultural learning. This article investigates the specific ways in which CL practices contribute to cultural learning and how they can be included in FL teaching, with a particular focus on perspectives as a central aim of the English subject and using images as a starting point. As argued by Gil-Glazer (2019), “images play a major role in shaping individual and collective attitudes, beliefs and identities” (p. 68) and the visual mediums’ centrality for young people today makes them a powerful basis for critical discussions. To investigate the potentials of critical discussions surrounding images in the EFL classroom with respect to perspectives, an in-depth analysis of dialogues from focus group interviews with Norwegian upper secondary EFL learners (roughly aged 16) is presented. These interviews were conducted before and after a 16-week intervention introducing critical visual literacy (CVL) as an approach to investigating the cultural contexts of images in three EFL classrooms. Drawing on interactional data from the interviews, the study investigates whether and how learners develop multiple perspectives in their readings of images through dialogs facilitated by critical questions, before and after becoming familiarized with CVL practices.

## Conceptual framework

### *Theoretical and pedagogical foundations of CVL*

Critical visual literacy can be defined as an approach that interrogates and challenges the “cultural significance, social practices and power relations” of visual texts (Rose, 2001, p. 3). Building on critical theory, CL, and critical pedagogy, and focusing specifically on the visual mode, CVL works in the “interplay between visual literacy and liberation” (Chung, 2013, p. 18). In line with critical theory, *critical* in CVL signals a focus on uncovering and problematizing power relationships and social interests at work in society (Janks,

2010), and CVL aligns with CL in its focus on texts “as principal means for representing and reshaping possible worlds” (Luke, 2014, p. 28). CVL builds on the assumption that the social constructedness of images is made invisible through the process of naturalization, which establishes socially and culturally constructed makings and readings of texts as normal (Janks, 2010). Furthermore, choices made in the creation of images always combine to create an ideological position for the viewer, which attempts to persuade them to see the world from a certain perspective. The aim of CVL practices is to make these ideological positions visible, enabling readers to “challenge received knowledge, and, instead of taking in knowledge passively, construct it actively and autonomously” (Abednia, 2015, p. 78). It is therefore emancipatory in that it attempts to empower learners with agency, meaning the capacity to engage critically with images and make informed choices based on this engagement.

To uncover and critically engage with the positioning of images, an understanding of how visual texts communicate meaning, i.e., visual literacy, is vital. Serafini (2012) highlights the complexity of reading visual or multimodal texts in his expanded version of Freebody and Luke’s (1990) four resource model. The expanded model consists of four interrelated roles for the reader, each necessary but not independently sufficient: a) reader as navigator, perceiving and attending to content and structure; b) reader as interpreter, constructing meaning from texts by drawing on one’s background and previous experiences; c) reader as designer, choosing aspects to focus on to guide the reading; and d) reader as interrogator, taking a critical and socio-political approach to texts. The interrelatedness of the four roles highlights the importance of attending to both visual and critical literacy in CVL teaching.

Approaches to CL and CVL have been heavily influenced by critical pedagogy, which promotes literacy education as an instrument for empowerment, liberation, and social transformation (Freire, 1993). In line with this, scholars warn against narrow and prescriptive views of CL practices, arguing for the need to situate such practices in local contexts, and to allow individual backgrounds and reactions to work as a starting point for inquiry (Lau, 2015; Luke, 2014; Stevens & Bean, 2007). This requires teachers to dialogically co-construct knowledge *with* the learners rather than serving as transmitters of knowledge (Freire, 1993). Simultaneously, neither literacy nor specific texts alone ensure a critical approach (Gee, 2015; Lewison et al., 2015), and teachers play a role in modeling what CL might look like, while simultaneously being cognizant of their position of power in the classroom and avoid prescriptive exemplars (Lau, 2015; Stevens & Bean, 2007).

CL is often operationalized by teachers posing certain questions to learners when reading a text, e.g., “What is the author trying to accomplish with this text?” (Stevens & Bean, 2007, p. 11), “What positions are on offer?” (Janks et al., 2014, p. 32), and “Which voices are heard and absent?” (Lewison et al., 2015, p. 6). Abednia (2015) argues that the extent to which a question is critical

depends on its potential to, among other things, encourage active participation, abstract thinking, apply knowledge to new situations, raise self-awareness and the ability to consider alternative interpretations. Exactly how this potential is enacted depends on contextual factors such as learners' age and background, but also on "how effectively a teacher can use [the question] as a tool to work toward these goals" (Abednia, 2015, p. 83).

### ***Perspectives in CVL and cultural learning in FL teaching***

Perspectives are at the core of Lewison et al.'s (2002) model of CL, which has informed the current study. The model outlines four interrelated dimensions of CL practices: a) disrupting the commonplace, e.g., interrogating how images work to position their readers; b) interrogating multiple viewpoints, e.g., interrogating texts through multiple voices and perspectives; c) focusing on the sociopolitical, e.g., interrogating who benefit or are disadvantaged by the perspectives offered in texts; and d) taking action to promote social justice, e.g., considering how texts could be constructed differently to convey alternative perspectives. Lewison et al. (2015) also highlight the importance of a critical stance, in which teachers and learners consciously engage, entertain alternate ways of being, take responsibility to inquire and engage in reflexivity.

CVL practices thus offer ample opportunities for exploring varying perspectives in relation to culture and social contexts, which are central to the aims of FL teaching. Critical approaches to FL instruction suggest that culture "reflects and is constitutive of a multiplicity of voices reflecting a whole array of conflicting and competing discourses" (Crawford & McLaren, 2003, p. 131). Culture, in the current study, is therefore not seen as a unified system of meaning, but as an intersection of diverse voices and identities, which means that one cannot fully understand someone else's perspective; rather, one can only attempt to access the complexity of any situation and acknowledge the partiality of this access (Dervin, 2015). An important distinction in relation to perspective-taking is thus between claims of "knowing" the Other (i.e., someone who is perceived to be different from oneself), which usually involves a degree of essentialism and stereotyping, and a willingness to engage with and consider others' perspectives. Whereas the former would fall within what Broady (2004) calls "cultural knowledge," a less essentialist approach to perspective-taking can be found in Broady's concept "cultural awareness." Cultural awareness "is an approach to culture which emphasizes not information about a culture but skills in exploring, observing and understanding difference and sameness" (Broady, 2004, p. 69). Central to this, Broady argues, is the willingness to suspend judgment and to explore the ways in which normality is experienced differently by different people.

### ***Perspectives in dialogue***

Dialogue is at the core of Freire's, 1993 critical pedagogy, which argues not only that critical thinking is a requirement for dialogue, but also that dialogue is the only way to generate such thinking. In relation to CL practices in FL settings, Abednia (2015) highlights the importance of dialogue in aiding learners to “examine issues from different angles, broaden their views, and deepen their understanding of the text, and, by extension, the world around them” (p. 84). Wegerif and Mercer's (1997) framework of three types of classroom talk is useful for understanding the different ways in which perspectives can be developed through dialogue. Disputational talk is characterized by disagreement, where interaction is treated “as a competitive game between individuals” (p. 55). In cumulative talk, participants build on and expand each other's discourse and construct knowledge through sharing perspectives. Exploratory talk combines elements from both: while challenges can be present, these are justified, and knowledge is critically assessed through exploring alternative perspectives. Thus, exploratory talk is recognized by “a kind of perpetual openness to alternative perspectives” (Wegerif & Mercer, 1997, p. 59), and is therefore most closely linked to how dialogue is conceptualized in CL.

### ***Previous research on dialogue in CL***

CL is not a set method or approach to be applied to the EFL setting but is rather continually negotiated in local contexts. Research on CL, in both first and foreign language settings, has largely focused on the content and product of CL. Thus, there is little focus on the “micro-processes” of critical approaches (Vossoughi & Gutiérrez, 2016, p. 143), which could provide insights into how CL might be successfully implemented, particularly in the context of FL teaching. For example, while previous research investigating the affordances of CL for the development of multiple perspectives in the EFL classroom has pointed to the importance of dialogue (Kuo, 2014; J. Myers & Ebefors, 2010), no information about dialogic micro-processes is provided.

Despite this trend, recent years have seen an increase in research focusing on the interactions surrounding CL. For example, Huh (2016) analyzed CL interactions in a university-level EFL reading class in Korea and found that the learners needed strong modeling and guidance in the form of focused and detailed follow-up questions throughout the class discussions. Toward the end of the class sequence under investigation, however, the learners “showed evidence of initiating critical literacy practices” (Huh, 2016, p. 230). Similarly, Papen (2020) discovered that attempts to build CVL with young first language learners (aged 9–11) through a dialogic approach were compromised by the learners' need for demonstrations of “a specific way of examining

and talking about the pictures” (p. 8), leading to more teacher- and researcher-guided dialogs than intended. Taylor and Hikida (2020) also highlighted the challenges in balancing the tenets of dialogue and critique in their study of interactions between a teacher and her 4<sup>th</sup> grade second language learners. They showed that the tension between dialogue and critique sometimes resulted “in teachers and students foregrounding dialogue rather than critique” (Taylor & Hikida, 2020, p. 280), and demonstrated how critique was jointly accomplished between teacher and students. Kearney (2012) focused on the classroom interactions surrounding a CL approach to cultural narratives in a university-level French FL course and found that the teacher employed several interactional moves to encourage the students to interpret the cultural narratives from multiple points of view. Focusing mostly on the teacher’s role as a model, Kearney (2012) calls for research that “document[s] the ways that students can begin to more fully inhabit other perspectives, to speak through unfamiliar voices, and to view the world through culturally different eyes” (p. 78).

The current study attempts to answer this call by providing an in-depth analysis of the ways in which EFL learners develop multiple perspectives in their readings of images, thus expanding our knowledge about how CL can be enacted in the EFL classroom. Furthermore, through its focus on images, the study contributes to an under-researched area in FL teaching, where images are often seen as a way of providing linguistic support rather than cultural texts worth critiquing in their own right (e.g., Abednia, 2015). Images have the potential to “spark the students to move beyond literal interpretations and open up a dialogic space” (Heggernes, 2019, p. 56), in which they can expand their thinking and co-construct cultural knowledge. The current study seeks to explore how this potential can be supported through CVL.

## **Methodology**

This study draws on data collected for a larger research project investigating how Norwegian upper secondary EFL learners approach the reading of images depicting other cultures before and after being introduced to CVL. The project was a qualitative case study, exploring a CVL intervention through the analysis of learner texts produced during the intervention, and pre- and post-interview data. The Norwegian Center for Research Data provided ethical permission for the project and informed written consent was granted from the participants.

## **Participants and context**

A convenience sample consisting of 83 EFL learners (38 girls and 45 boys, mean age 16) participated in the intervention. These include all learners from three 11<sup>th</sup>-year general studies classes at an upper secondary school, situated in



a medium-sized city in Norway. Their expected English proficiency level was B1/B2 (Hasselgreen, 2005). The classes' three EFL teachers participated in the planning and implementation of the intervention. Conversations with the three participating teachers revealed that they had no prior experience with CL practices. CL is not mentioned in the English subject curriculum in Norway, nor in the other subject curricula. The participants were therefore not likely to be familiar with CL practices before the intervention.

### ***Pedagogical approach and procedures***

The intervention consisted of twelve CVL tasks that were implemented as an integrated part of the EFL classes over a period of 16 weeks, totaling roughly 9 hours (around 20% of the total teaching time for the English subject during the period). These were anchored in the four dimensions of CL practices (Lewison et al., 2002), as well as the national English subject curriculum in Norway (Norwegian directorate for Education and Training, 2013). The tasks were designed to integrate with the topics from the teachers' yearly course curriculum, namely "stereotypes, indigenous people and multiculturalism," "politics and multiculturalism," and "race and class." The tasks were evaluated by the teachers and introduced either by me in an auditorium with all three classes present, or in the classrooms by the teachers.

In relation to perspectives, the tasks aimed to develop the learners' awareness of their own perspectives through, for example, exploring their own associations with a photograph depicting items typically infused with cultural meanings in Norway, and reflecting on whether people with different backgrounds would share the same associations. Other tasks encouraged exploration of others' perspectives by asking explicitly how different groups of people would react to the image(s). The tasks also aimed to facilitate a recognition of the perspectives on offer in the images and how these were communicated, introducing analytical tools from Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) grammar of visual design to aid in the understanding of how visual texts are constructed (Serafini, 2012). Finally, through redesign tasks, the learners were asked to challenge the perspectives offered in the images and design alternatives. For a complete overview of the tasks, see, C. W. Brown (2019, pp. 138–140).

### ***Data collection***

Altogether five focus group interviews with six learners per group were conducted before and after the intervention. The number of focus groups and the number of participants were informed by research demonstrating that 3–6 focus group interviews provides a high degree of saturation with homogenous groups (e.g., Guest et al., 2016), and methodological advice of including 6–8 participants in each group (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Thirty participants (13



girls and 17 boys) were assigned randomly to five groups, which remained the same in both the pre- and post-interviews. The interviews were semi-structured, using five tasks specifically designed for the interviews with images as prompts and accompanying questions. This paper only focuses on two of these tasks (Task 4 and 5) as they relate directly to the exploration of different perspectives.

The images for the tasks were selected based on representing current events and/or being related to the topics covered during the intervention. The prompts in Task 4 included four images related to U.S. sports teams with a Native American theme in the pre-interviews: two images depicting the logos for Washington Redskin's and Cleveland Indians, and two depicting sports supporters (J. Brown, 2014; Shirey, 2014), and images representing the first Thanksgiving in the post-interviews: three from children's books (Dagliesh, 1954; Davis, 2010; Skarmeas, 2012) and a painting (Ferris, 1912). In this task, the participants were asked to consider how different groups of people might feel about the images. Task 5 included a photograph showing a group of Mexicans attempting to cross the river border to the US (McNew, 2006). In the interviews, the participants were asked to describe their impression of the people in the photograph, the elements in the photograph contributing to their impressions, and how it could have been taken differently. The same photograph and similar questions were used as prompts in both the pre- and post-interviews (Appendix A).

Before the interviews, the participants were informed that the purpose of the interviews was to gain insight into their reflections about different images, that there were no right or wrong answers, and that everyone's opinion was equally valuable. During the interviews, I guided the discussions by asking critical questions, probing for explanations, and backchanneling (Marková et al., 2007). The questions in the interview guide were authentic, as they were asked without a predefined answer in mind and allowed a range of responses, although the impromptu probing questions were not always so.

The interviews were held in an adjoining classroom during the class's EFL lessons. They were therefore conducted in English to ensure a learning outcome for the participants, and because the expected English proficiency level was considered sufficient to participate in such discussions. However, the participants were encouraged to use Norwegian when needed. Audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed verbatim and non-verbal cues, such as pointing, were added to the transcripts from video recordings (see, Appendix B for transcription conventions). In total, 511 minutes were transcribed, of which 224 minutes, covering the two tasks described above, comprise the data for the current study.

### ***Data analysis and researcher role***

Data analysis was conducted in two iterations. First the entire data set was analyzed using thematic analysis to gain an overview of the data set as a whole and select cases for the next iteration. The second iteration was restricted to one group to allow for an in-depth analysis of the discourse developed by the participants throughout the interviews (Marková et al., 2007). The case group was selected based on coding density (i.e., all the codes in the thematic map devised in the first iteration were present and their frequency was high). As such, the case does not represent the data set as a whole but provides a richer opportunity to investigate the research aim.

The pre- and post-interview transcripts from the case group were then analyzed using elements of interaction analysis (Marková et al., 2007) to investigate how the different perspectives were developed throughout the dialogue, and how the context shaped the participants' contributions. Particular attention was given to the voices through which the participants spoke, i.e., whether they spoke from a I-position ("I think . . ."), used an impersonal voice ("One might think . . ."), or gave voice to others by quoting them directly or indirectly (Aveling et al., 2015). This way I could investigate the types of perspective brought into the dialogue and the learners positioning in relation to these. Attention was also given to the activity types, such as a debate, a classroom-like situation, or a conversation between friends (Marková et al., 2007), which provides information about how the learners oriented to the situation and how this might have influenced the perspectives they brought forth. Finally, the types of talk the learners engaged in, i.e., disputational, cumulative and exploratory (Wegerif & Mercer, 1997), were explored (see subsection "Perspectives in dialogue in CL"). The sensitizing questions and accompanying clues for when to ask these questions developed by Gillespie and Cornish (2014) helped guide the analysis by focusing it on context, purpose, addressivity, voices, positioning, and responses.

As a consequence of my engagement in the classroom, I had a dual role: as both a teacher and a researcher, enabling rapport-building throughout the intervention. In the analysis, I have attempted to account for this dual role, as well as the power imbalance between the teacher/adult and learner/minor (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

### ***Description of participants in the case group***

The group consisted of six learners, aged around 16: Edvard, Adrian, Irina, Nethan, Mona and Silje (pseudonyms). Apart from Irina, who was born in Eastern Europe to Eastern European parents, and Nethan, whose parents were born in South Asia, the participants were all born in Norway to Norwegian parents. During the interviews, the group dynamics were respectful, though

somewhat imbalanced, with Irina and Adrian being the most vocal. Nethan was mostly quiet but responded when asked directly and sometimes made contributions unprompted, although he is not active in the excerpts below.

## **Results and analysis**

This section is divided into two sub-sections, covering the pre- and post-interviews respectively. Whereas the first section focuses on how the participants developed multiple perspectives through dialogue facilitated by critical questions, the second section examines how familiarity with CVL practices influenced the discussions.

### ***Pre-intervention interviews: Developing multiple perspectives through facilitated dialogue***

The analysis of the pre-intervention interviews showed that the participants developed multiple perspectives through two distinct processes, illustrated by excerpts from Task 4, in which the participants were asked to discuss four images related to Native American themed sports teams.

#### ***Developing multiple perspectives through expansion***

One of the most prominent ways in which the participants developed multiple perspectives was through expanding on each other's contributions (Wegerif & Mercer, 1997). An example of this is from Task 4, where Irina notices how the sports club supporters in one of the images had painted their skin red. Attempting to explain why they might have done this, she states that "most people" attribute this skin color to Native Americans, thus ascribing this view to a broad prototypical group rather than herself (Thein et al., 2007). Irina is here engaging with the image as an interpreter, using her background knowledge to construct meaning, and as a designer, in deciding to focus on this particular aspect of the image (Serafini, 2012). The topic of red skin color is not pursued by the other participants at this point, but is brought up again by Adrian later in the interview after being invited to invoke a Native American perspective (Figure 1).

While the formulation of my question in Excerpt 1 encourages a cultural knowledge approach (Broady, 2004), whereby Native Americans are treated as a homogenous group, it also reflects the general discourse about cultural groups with which the participants are likely familiar through schooling. This way, the question leaves it open for the participants to make their own interpretations and develop the discourse themselves. After a pause, Adrian suggests Native Americans may be offended because of the red skin color. The pause, modalizations and recontextualization of Irina's previous idea

- 1 Int.: So what do you think Native Americans think about these kind of pictures? (4.2)  
 2 Adrian: They may be offended because of the skin... red... offensive...  
 3 Int.: You think they might be [offended by] that?  
 4 Adrian: [It could be. ]  
 5 Int.: Yeah?  
 6 Irina: Like I watched like an interview with Native American people and they didn't  
 7 like that people called them red-skinned people because they are not red.  
 8 Int.: Mhm. (2.3)  
 9 Adrian: It was probably used like... like an insult in the... like back in the day. (2.6)  
 10 Edvard: I think it really depends on how much like... you are into... the Native  
 11 American... the culture and if you are like really into the culture... maybe  
 12 you're easily offended by that picture. Or if like your father or... just your  
 13 family is Native American you don't really care, you don't get too much  
 14 offended. (2.8)

**Figure 1.** Excerpt 1. Task 4, pre-intervention interview

(Marková et al., 2007, p. 138) could suggest that Adrian did not have a pre-defined conceptualization of this issue but developed these ideas through the dialogue.

Irina then introduces the voice of Native American people more directly in the form of an indirect quote (Aveling et al., 2015). She does not express her own orientation to this perspective, but rather presents it as a non-committal quote of an outside authority (Marková et al., 2007, p. 205). By explicitly referring to the source of her information, she brings more credibility to this voice; seen in relation to Adrian's statement, it could be interpreted as an attempt to support his view. In line 9, Adrian introduces a historical perspective, displaying an awareness of the possible influence of the historical context surrounding the representations on their contemporary interpretations.

Up until this point, the dialogue resembled cumulative talk (Wegerif & Mercer, 1997). However, Edvard's contribution in lines 10–14 brings further nuance to the preceding perspectives and treats Native Americans as a more diverse group. Speaking from an I-position (Aveling et al., 2015), thus more clearly positioning himself as speaking from his own perspective, he suggests the most influential factor for the interpretations of these representations is not whether the subject is Native American, but how much they are “into the ... culture.” It is unclear from this statement what being “into the ... culture” means, but the use of “depends on how much” in line 10 suggests that he views this as a continuum. This could therefore be a display of cultural awareness (Broady, 2004), where diversity within the group is recognized. Through critically assessing the previous ideas, Edvard moves the dialogue toward exploratory talk, although this opportunity is not followed up by anyone.

In this excerpt, multiple perspectives are developed among three participants. Starting with a tentative statement of how Native Americans might be offended by the red skin color in the representations, they co-construct their arguments by

bringing in other voices and relevant considerations. They also develop the talk from cumulative to exploratory, and from cultural knowledge to cultural awareness, and, guided by the critical question, they employ their roles as interrogators in considering the socio-political contexts of the images (Serafini, 2012). The excerpt is characterized by few overlaps and several longer pauses between turns, and there is little tension and disagreement. Instead, the participants build on and expand the previous arguments, in this way co-constructing “something one ‘might think’ about issue-in-focus” (Marková et al., 2007, p. 151).

### ***Developing multiple perspectives through arguments and counterarguments***

A less frequent way in which the participants developed multiple perspectives was through arguments and counterarguments, characteristic of disputational talk (Wegerif & Mercer, 1997). Toward the end of the following excerpt (Figure 2), I introduce an impromptu probing question that, unlike the questions from the interview guide, is not authentic in the sense that it does not allow a range of responses, which influences the ensuing interactions. Excerpt 2 is taken from the end of Task 4, after I ask whether the participants know of any similar incidents in Norway, a question which encourages “meaningful connections between the text and real life of learners” (Abednia, 2015, p. 83). At the lack of response to this question, I bring up a recent public debate about a politician from a right-wing party, Siv Jensen, known for her strong opinions about immigration, who attended a “wild west” themed party dressed as a Native American. This incident was much debated in the Norwegian news, but only Edvard and Irina express their awareness of this. As a further prompt, the debate is summarized, followed by the exchange displayed in Figure 2.

Irina cuts the summary short by stating that it was not weird that people were upset by the incident, again introducing “most people” as a generic group to defend this position. Her argument is marked by several false starts and modalizations, which could indicate that she predicts the other participants might provide resistance to the statement (Gillespie & Cornish, 2014, p. 441). The immediate challenge posed by Adrian shows that this is a contentious issue, and the lack of mitigation in Adrian’s challenge might indicate a change of activity type, more akin to a political debate. As a defense of her position, Irina uses the party’s discourse about immigrants. She then goes on to elaborate on how this relates to the incident, but gets interrupted in line 9 by Adrian, who indicates a shift of perspective by opening with “but” (Aveling et al., 2015, p. 677). Adrian introduces Siv Jensen’s intention as an important factor, indicating an emerging understanding of the concept of positioning (Janks et al., 2014). His statement

- 1 Irina: It is not weird that people were upset about it, because like most people think  
 2 that their like party is like more like ... I don't know, racist maybe. [I guess...]  
 3 Adrian: [How is it ]  
 4 racist?  
 5 Irina: Against like...ehh, how they talk about like... innvandrere (immigrants).  
 6 Int.: Immigrants.  
 7 Irina: Immigrants. How they talk about them. So like, when she like dressed up like...  
 8 [a Native American]  
 9 Adrian: [But is... Did she] like dress up like in a negative way [or is it...]  
 10 Silje: [But [why] are people ]  
 11 making costumes of the way that certain people dress?  
 12 Irina: [I don't know, but]  
 13 Adrian: [To... to...] [like... eh]  
 14 Irina: [No but... ]  
 15 Silje: [It's like ] they are making costumes of how we [dress in Norway  
 16 and its... ]  
 17 Adrian: [Uh. It's like...  
 18 It's like to] to... they... they don't... Native American's don't dress like that to  
 19 this day, so they like.  
 20 Irina: It doesn't [have to be negative.]  
 21 Adrian: [It's like to... to predict] history. No, not predict, to show history like  
 22 to show how they dressed, it's [like showing history...]  
 23 Irina: [It doesn't have to be ] negative, but I understand  
 24 why most people like didn't like it because... if it was like another political  
 25 person maybe they wouldn't be that offended, but like, yeah...  
 26 Int.: Because it was [her it was worse?]  
 27 Mona: [Yeah. It was her ]  
 [...]  
 36 Edvard: But, like... ehm... it wouldn't... like it's in Norway, it's not in the US, so...  
 37 even though I understand why people get offended, it doesn't really matter...  
 38 matter much in Norway, I would assume.  
 39 Adrian: I think it fully depends on the intention of Siv Jensen, like did she *intend* to...  
 40 you know, make fun of them or was it just to like [show history or...]  
 41 Mona: [I think the same. ] Yeah.  
 42 Int.: So you think... **But does it matter** what the Native Americans think or does it  
 43 matter what the [individual thinks?]  
 44 Adrian: [Of course. Maybe] ehh... how they interpret her costume. So,  
 45 if they interpret it as... as making fun of it or to honour it... I think that's also  
 46 very important.

**Figure 2.** Excerpt 2. Task 4, pre-intervention interview

trails off, possibly as he is overlapped by Silje, who asks why people would make these costumes at all. The framing of her question as a challenge suggests a negative view of this practice.

Adrian and Irina then both attempt to start a turn, but trail off and are overlapped by Silje, who presents an analogy in line 15, stating it is “like [...] making costumes of how we dress in Norway.” Implicit here could be an argument that since this would be unacceptable, making costumes of Native American traditional dresses is also unacceptable given that these practices are comparable (Marková et al., 2007, p. 145). Adrian overlaps with a distinction, explaining how making costumes of how we dress in Norway would not be the same, as the Native American costumes do not represent

how they dress today. Instead, he argues, it is a way of showing history. Such analogy-distinction cycles contribute to a dialogic tension, through which previous statements can be complemented, extended, or contradicted (Marková et al., 2007, p. 150). In line 23, Irina appears to orient toward consensus, acknowledging Adrian's position by stating "it doesn't have to be negative," followed by a "but." She now speaks from an I-position, stating that she "understands why most people didn't like it," and suggests that their reaction stemmed from Siv Jensen's position in the political landscape, not just the costume.

After some discussion surrounding different politicians in Norway, in line 36 Edvard brings in the Norwegian context as influential to the interpretation of this incident, arguing that this diminishes its importance. In response to this, Adrian alludes back to intentionality, stating that he believes this is the most important perspective, with which Mona agrees. He speaks from an I-position and also boosts his comment in line 39, demonstrating his strong alignment with this view. At this point, it appears that some consensus has been reached on the topic. However, a question from me makes Adrian rephrase his comment. I begin by formulating a clarifying question ("so you think") but trail off and rephrase it into a challenge to his comment. Given the conviction with which Adrian's previous statement was delivered, it is interesting that he immediately acknowledges the challenge and rephrases his previous statement, overlapping his "of course" with the last part of the question. The directness of this question in combination with the external framing of the interview, a classroom-like situation, and the power imbalance between the interviewer and the participants, could have changed his orientation toward the situation. The question was therefore likely not interpreted as an authentic one, but one which attempted to guide him toward a particular viewpoint.

The frequent interruptions, rapid turn-taking and overlapping speech in this excerpt implies that this is a topic that the participants have strong opinions about, also suggested by the number of participants actively contributing to the discussion. Although still on the wider topic of Native Americans, this is an incident "closer to home." As argued by Kearney (2012), it is more challenging to achieve deep explorations of issues that are physically, psychologically, and spatially distant. The participants' familiarity with the incident might have allowed them to more easily engage in exploring different perspectives, as they have opinions about these politicians and are better acquainted with the discourses surrounding them. In this excerpt, multiple perspectives are developed in a flow of arguments and counterarguments, but the talk nevertheless most strongly resembles exploratory talk. This is reflected in the participants justifying their perspectives and challenges, and offering ways of bridging their differing views, reflecting a "competition between ideas rather than between people"



(Wegerif & Mercer, 1997, p. 57). Through confronting each other's ideas, the participants share a multitude of perspectives, co-construct new knowledge and in the process make their thinking explicit (Marková et al., 2007, p. 65).

### ***Post-intervention interviews: The influence of familiarity with CVL practices***

The analysis of the post-interviews reveals that the participants still predominantly developed new perspectives through expansion in exploratory talk. However, some qualitative differences were found in the ways they displayed agency in adopting a critical stance and utilizing the CVL dimensions to develop their perspectives further.

### ***Developing multiple perspectives through taking a critical stance***

One example of the participants taking up a critical stance can be seen in Task 4, prompted by four representations of the first Thanksgiving. For referencing purposes in the transcripts, these have been coded N1-N4, where N1 refers to Davis (2010), N2 to Skarmeas (2012), N3 to Dagliesh (1954), and N4 to Ferris (1912). Early in the task, Adrian provides some descriptive differences between the painting (N4) and the illustrations from the children's books (N1-N3), stating that in the former, "the Native Americans are like almost like bowing, and [...] on the floor" whereas in the children's book illustrations "they are like equal to the ... the Europeans," thus displaying a focus on the images' content and structure (Serafini, 2012). This marks the start of several contributions related to differences. Five minutes later during the same task, Edvard develops these ideas further through engaging with the CVL dimensions (Figure 3).

Edvard is here disrupting the commonplace (Lewison et al., 2002) by reflecting on the constructedness of images, and displaying awareness of how image-makers have to make choices (Kearney, 2016). In line 5, he initiates a shift to the socio-political (Lewison et al., 2002), by focusing on "how people can use this," showing an awareness of the ideological nature of images (Janks et al., 2014). The lack of first-person pronouns in the contribution indicates an impersonal voice and is perhaps an attempt to analyze the images more objectively.

- 1 Edvard: It's really weird how a small change in a picture can mean so much.
- 2 Int.: Mhm.
- 3 Edvard: Like, this is all based on the... the same thing and it's so different.
- 4 Int.: Mhm.
- 5 Edvard: So, if... if you try to look at this another way ehh... how people can use this in a
- 6 bad way that's... like that's propaganda isn't it? If you... like you take... for
- 7 example this ((points at N4)) looks like more negative and... versus this one
- 8 ((points at N1)).
- 9 Int.: Mhm.
- 10 Edvard: So you can use this to look down towards like... white people could use this
- 11 ((points to N4)) to look (towards)... ehh, look down to black people. (5.3)

**Figure 3.** Excerpt 3. Task 4, post-intervention interview

Interestingly, in line 10 Edvard first uses the general pronoun “you” (as in “one”), but then rephrases it to “white people.” This suggests that he is invoking a different voice than previously, “you” now representing “white people” rather than the general “you” in line 5. The rephrasing might also suggest his line of thinking developed as he was talking, indicative of “a dialogue with oneself” (Bakhtin, 1984), in which Edvard contradicts and rephrases his own statements. Simultaneously, he reintroduces Adrian’s idea: the focus on differences and N4 being more negative than the other illustrations. Thus, Edvard is in dialogue with the preceding contributions in the interview, discourses about propaganda, with himself, and with his imaginary of the audience, displaying the heterogeneity of the speaker (Marková et al., 2007, p. 62). This suggests that his ideas were not pre-defined; rather, they were developed through the dialogue. Moreover, the development was supported by navigating the content and structure of the images and interrogating these through taking a critical stance (Serafini, 2012), and applying CVL dimensions; firstly disrupting the commonplace and decentering from the representations, and secondly questioning the socio-political consequences of this, which in turn lead to a deeper exploration of the cultural issue-in-focus.

Excerpt 4 (Figure 4) is from Task 5, prompted by a photograph of Mexicans attempting to cross the river border to the US. Prior to the excerpt, the participants are asked to discuss the photograph and their impression of it. The group agrees that the photograph gives a negative impression, and Adrian shows agency in bringing the focus toward the photograph itself by gesturing and offering a description of selected elements, employing both the roles as a navigator and a designer (Serafini, 2012). He describes the lighting, the positioning of the people, and the absence of eye contact, all elements explicitly addressed during the CVL intervention (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006), followed by an interpretation: “it’s very negative.” The juxtaposing of the description and the interpretation

- 1 Adrian: Yeah, it looks like they’re... you know, it’s more ehm (2.3) you’re more... it’s
- 2 easier to sympathize with someone if they are looking at you and it’s like more
- 3 relatable, I don’t know. And if they... it’s more distant-ish.
- 4 Int.: More distant-ish?
- 5 Adrian: Yeah.
- 6 Int.: Yeah? (2.7) Anything else about the photograph? (2.9)
- 7 Edvard: If you place the camera here for example ((points at a spot in the middle of the
- 8 photograph)), it would be a whole other story.
- 9 Int.: Mhm.
- 10 Edvard: Like, we see down ((gestures with his hand to illustrate)) and see what they are
- 11 doing, what’s wrong... but if you’re seeing from their perspective it would be a
- 12 whole other story. (1.8) Why they have to run, how they run like... or how they
- 13 swim.

**Figure 4.** Excerpt 4. Task 5, post-intervention interview

suggests that the analysis was offered as a way of “ground[ing] their interpretations and judgements” (Hoyt, 2016, p. 79). I ask Adrian to elaborate on the lack of eye contact and its effect.

Adrian seems to struggle to articulate what he wants to say, marked by multiple false starts and pauses. Perhaps as a way of mitigating this difficulty, he begins to talk about what the effect would be if they had eye-contact with the viewer, stating that “if they are looking at you,” “it is easier to sympathize.” Thus, Adrian is displaying a recognition of the constructedness of images, an ability to imagine alternative images, as well as an awareness of the effects of these positionings. Following an open question, Edvard appears to build on Adrian’s ideas that the photograph could have been taken differently and develops this further by suggesting the possibility of using a different angle. This, he argues, would allow the reader to see “from their perspective,” which would offer “a whole other story.” Edvard here shows a willingness to interrogate texts through multiple voices (Lewison et al., 2002) and an awareness of how images can be constructed to provide alternative perspectives. This is indicative of cultural awareness, as Edvard is exploring how reality could be viewed through other eyes (Broady, 2004). The unprompted engagement with CVL dimensions by Adrian and Edvard indicates adopting a critical stance (Lewison et al., 2015).

Excerpts 3 and 4 are marked by no overlaps, several pauses and longer turn-taking. They are also examples of exploratory talk, as evidenced by the qualifications and justifications (Wegerif & Mercer, 1997). Through this talk, the participants display agency in disrupting commonplace ways of viewing the world, focusing on socio-political issues, and interrogating multiple viewpoints (Lewison et al., 2002), dimensions they had been working with throughout the intervention. Interestingly, both Adrian and Edvard show agency in grounding their interpretations in the photograph, both through gestures and descriptions, displaying confident use of the navigator role (Serafini, 2012). Through this exploration, they challenge and expand the image’s meaning-potential, recognizing both the complexity of visual representations and the multiplicity of perspectives.

## **Discussion and conclusions**

The aim of the current study was to investigate (1) how learners engaged in dialogues facilitated by critical questions develop multiple perspectives in their readings of images, and (2) whether familiarity with CVL practices had an influence on these dialogues. The findings demonstrate the learners’ ability to develop multiple perspectives even without previous CVL instruction, as well as the instrumental role of the facilitated dialogue in this process. By engaging in exploratory talk, the participants developed knowledge about the cultural issues-in-focus by bringing in different perspectives, analogies, and

distinctions, and through building upon and/or critiquing each other's contributions. Thus, the dialogues constituted not only a space to share ideas, but to actively co-construct them. Furthermore, the participants co-constructed more nuanced perspectives, moving toward cultural awareness (Broady, 2004). Therefore, a dialogic approach to CVL appears to be a productive way of developing understandings of how perspectives can differ and how they are related both to the individual and social context, emphasized by the Norwegian EFL curriculum and critical approaches to FL teaching alike.

Unlike previous research which has pointed to the necessity of close facilitation and modeling (Huh, 2016; Papen, 2020), the learners in the current study received little guidance beyond the critical questions. Moreover, Excerpt 2 showed the participants' inclination to be politically correct when asked more leading questions, which, rather than encouraging critical reflection, can be seen as an attempt to guide the participants toward a particular ideological position (McConachy, 2018). As indicated by previous research (Papen, 2020; Taylor & Hikida, 2020), the tension between dialogue and critique can be difficult to balance. In Excerpt 2, critique is foregrounded over dialogue to the extent that learning is not happening through engagement *with* the learners (Freire, 1993). The contrast between the ensuing responses from the leading question and the one posed at the beginning of Excerpt 1 is striking, although they are both attempts at getting the learners to consider the Native Americans' perspectives. In Excerpt 2, the impromptu question neither encouraged dialogue nor did it have the effects of a critical question (Abednia, 2015).

The most significant difference between the pre- and post-interviews was the learners' displays of agency in interrogating images. Thus, like Huh's (2016) findings, the learners appeared to develop their ability and/or willingness to initiate CL practices over time. While this could reflect the participants' orientation to the situation, which may have been influenced by experiences from the pre-interviews and their increased familiarity with the researcher, it could also suggest that the participants had "become gradually socialized into the practices of interpretation and reflection" (McConachy, 2018, p. 86). Namely, they are adopting a critical stance (Lewison et al., 2015) and, through engaging in the CVL dimensions, developing the perspectives more deeply and more critically. They also grounded their interrogation in the images' semiotic structures more firmly, using the role as navigator to support the role of interrogator (Serafini, 2012) and displaying an awareness of how meaning-making involves semiotic choices which are influenced by and influence perspectives (Kearney, 2016). Seen from the broader perspective of education as a continuous developmental process, the findings indeed look promising if the aim of FL teaching is for learners to engage consciously with the process of meaning-making (Newfield, 2011) and to engage in a meaningful and deep exploration of cultural texts (Kearney, 2016).

The current study has therefore provided empirical findings evidencing the possibilities and affordances of dialogic spaces in EFL classrooms, in which multiple perspectives of images can be explored and critiqued through critical questions. Like Heggernes (2019), this study also found images to be a powerful starting point for exploring and co-constructing cultural knowledge in the EFL classroom. The findings also lend support to previous research (Huh, 2016), revealing that becoming socialized into the process of critical inquiry may enable learners to gradually assume more responsibility for this process. As argued by Thein et al. (2007, p. 55), “[t]rying on alternative perspectives is a habit of mind,” and familiarity with CVL practices, seemed to provide the learners with a wider variety of tools to do this.

Through its close analysis of the micro-processes in focus group dialogues, the study has contributed with empirical explorations of *how* dialogue aids the development of multiple perspectives, thus adding to previous research (Kuo, 2014; J. Myers & Ebevors, 2010). However, given the local situatedness of CL practices in general, and the restricted sample size in particular, additional studies with learners of differing ages and backgrounds are necessary to further advance our understanding of *how* CL can be enacted in different contexts. Furthermore, in the present study the dialogues were facilitated. A future avenue for research could thus be to explore how dialogs might unfold in a less controlled classroom environment.

Despite these limitations, pedagogical implications can still be drawn from these results. Firstly, teachers might consider foregrounding dialogue over critique, and letting learners use their role as designers to choose aspects of focus, since learners’ engagement increases their participation (Huh, 2016). By allowing learners to design the reading path to a larger extent, and/or by asking questions which prompt them to connect their real-life experiences to the texts (Abednia, 2015), teachers can facilitate learners’ active participation in co-constructing cultural knowledge. Foregrounding dialogue also entails a sincere interest in the learners’ contributions. Teachers should be aware of their position of authority and be careful not to impose their own preferred readings of images (Stevens & Bean, 2007), while also providing enough time for learners to respond before attempting to move the conversation forward. This can be achieved through asking authentic questions and allowing learners to actively participate in co-constructing critical dialogs (Taylor & Hikida, 2020), while also providing analytical tools that aid them in their role as a navigator. Given the complex web of texts learners face in an increasingly globalized and digitalized society, it is crucial that they are given opportunities to investigate the diversity of perspectives behind cultural texts (Hoyt, 2016), and develop their understandings of meaning-making processes (Kearney, 2016) in FL classrooms, aspects which can be achieved through CVL. Simultaneously, the complexity of this task, and the likelihood that such skills

are transferable to other contexts, suggests that fostering CVL should be a concern for all classrooms.

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## Appendix A. Interview guide

*Task 4, pre-interviews: Native American themed sports teams.*

- (1) What do these images depict? (Information about the images provided)
- (2) How do these images portray Native Americans?
- (3) What do you think Native Americans/sport team supporters think about such images?
- (4) What is your personal opinion?
- (5) Can you think of similar occurrences in Norway?

*Task 4, post-interviews: Representations of Thanksgiving.*  
(Information about the story of Thanksgiving provided)

- (1) How do these books portray the first Thanksgiving?
- (2) What do you think the author/illustrators might have been thinking when creating the texts?
- (3) What do you think the target groups might think about these texts?
- (4) What do you think Native Americans might think about these texts?
- (5) What is your personal opinion about them?

*Task 5, pre-interviews: Positioning of Mexican migrants.*

- (1) What can you see in this photograph?
- (2) Based on this photograph, what is your initial impression of these people? Why? Is there anything about the way the photograph has been taken that influences your impression?
- (3) Do you think the people in the image would like this photograph? Why/why not?

This is a photograph of Mexican migrants attempting to cross the border to the US illegally.

- (1) Where do you think you would find such photographs and why do you think people would choose to use them?
- (2) Do you think such photographs influence your or other people's impression of Mexican migrants in general? Why/why not?
- (3) Do you think anyone could gain something from giving this type of impression of Mexican migrants? If so, who?
- (4) Could the photograph have been taken differently in order to create a different impression of the people in it? If so, how?

*Task 5, post-interviews: Positioning of Mexican migrants.*

- (1) Do you remember this photograph? What does it depict?
- (2) What impression does this photograph give of Mexican migrants?
- (3) What are the elements of the photograph that contribute to this impression?
- (4) Do you think anyone could gain something from giving such an impression of Mexican migrants? If so, who?
- (5) Could the photograph have been taken differently in order to give a different impression of the people in it? If so, how?

## Appendix B. Transcription conventions

- [ ]:overlaps in speech
- ( ):incomprehensible speech
- ((laughter)):other oral or non-verbal expressions
- . . .:pauses less than 1 second, trailed off speech
- (x.x):pauses more than 1 second