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***Yesterday* as a study for tomorrow: On the use of film texts in addressing gender and HIV and AIDS with secondary school youth in KwaZulu-Natal**

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Abstract

The South African film *Yesterday* (Singh & Roodt, 2004) depicts a woman's lived experiences in relation to being infected and affected by HIV and AIDS. It describes her fears, hopes, dreams, and suffering as a woman, mother and wife. In this paper I chronicle how I used the film as an entry point for secondary school youth to engage with issues of gender and HIV and AIDS, and report on the preliminary findings of a study exploring secondary school learners' responses to a visual text. The study investigated one class of Grade 11 learners' responses to gender representations in *Yesterday* through comprehension activities (questions and discussions before and after the viewing of the film) which focused on relationships between the film text and the experiences of the readers/viewers. I hoped that these activities would equip learners to construct and reconstruct texts – as future writers and social change activists. The findings are based on my observations and on transcripts of classroom discussions. The findings show that film analysis using feminist theories and theories of critical literacy can help learners acquire skills as critical readers/viewers.

Keywords: Critical literacy; Film texts; Gender; HIV and AIDS; Youth.

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Introduction

There is probably no area of public health worldwide that has been more a subject of the arts and literature than HIV and AIDS. As Mitchell and Walsh (2004) have highlighted, there are many projects which have been undertaken by artists to address the social and political aspects of HIV and AIDS. They suggest that projects such as the *Positive Lives* photography exhibition, the *Memory Box* project, and the *Steps to the Future* documentary series have helped not only to break the silence about HIV and AIDS but also to give a face to HIV and AIDS in that these projects often highlight stories about real people living with HIV and AIDS. The study from which this article draws used a film text, *Yesterday* (Singh & Roodt, 2004), to address issues of gender and HIV and AIDS with secondary school learners. In this article I focus on only one aspect of the larger study—work with a cinematic text—and in so doing I explore the ways in which

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reading/viewing a film can be a key component of critical literacy. In the article, I address one pivotal question: How can artistic texts such as films become part of a curriculum to address gender and HIV and AIDS?

Critical literacy for social change

The analysis is embedded in a study of critical literacy. Critical literacy is an important pedagogical approach that language educators employ in their teaching and has been defined as “language use that questions the social construction of the self. When we are critically literate, we examine our ongoing development, to reveal the subjective positions from which we make sense of the world and act in it” (Shor, 1999, p. 2). Coffey (2008, p.1) described critical literacy as an “ability to read texts in an active, reflective manner in order to better understand power, inequality, and injustice in human relationships.” She argued that the development of critical literacy skills in an individual enables him or her to interpret messages through a critical lens and to challenge the power relations embedded in those messages. Learners need to be enabled to make judgments about how a text is argued. A number of studies in the field of literacy have been carried out to interrogate more thoroughly the interrelationship between gender, literacy acquisition, and academic performance. For example, Wing (1997) discussed the relationship between gender roles, boys’ and girls’ language, and classroom behaviour, while Balfour (2001) analysed boys’ and girls’ reading and interpretation of texts. Stokoe (1997) explored the methodological difficulties associated with research on gender and language.

Studies by a number of researchers such as Balfour (2005), Cobine (1995), Arizpe (1994), and Pantaleo (2012) who have looked at critical literacy have shown that classrooms that embrace the reader-response theory have learners that are active and confident. This gives them power and a sense of responsibility to make their own judgements about what they read (The expanding canon: Teaching multicultural literacy, n.d.). These learners are more open to multiple interpretations of a text than to one single interpretation from an authoritative voice such as a teacher. Bender-Slack (2010) also argued that the role of the reader in reader-response is critical to meaning-creation of a text. Pace (2006), citing a number of research studies, argued that diverse perspectives arise from diverse ideas that learners share in post-reading activities. Knoeller (1998) showed that learners who participated in discussions that questioned dominant readings influenced one another’s analyses. These studies were conducted as part of English language as a subject and some of them had had English non-mother tongue speakers as participants

Theoretical Framework

The role of gender in language is regarded as an important part of critical literacy agenda, particularly in the context of deconstructing power. For this reason a feminist framework has been used as lens to contest the notion of classrooms as non neutral sites for the production of knowledge. Feminist frameworks seek to correct the power imbalance in society and as such have turned to new ways of reading texts to reveal the ways that they reinforce or challenge patriarchy. Hearn and Lykke (2009) proclaimed that feminist theories and practices have shown that gender is a major structuring force and principle in and across societies and cultures, both globally and locally. They argued that gender relations are both subject to change and also resistance to change, within what can be seen as a turbulent historical period.

Complementing this work is the idea that reading/viewing itself is a highly interactive process. Rosenblatt’s (1985) transactional theory is crucial because I have used it in this article to frame reading and viewing. Her theory suggested a “reciprocal, mutually defining relationship” between the reader and the text (Rosenblatt, 1985, p. 122). Rosenblatt’s work complemented theories of critical literacy with its emphasis on the importance of democracy and social justice. Critical literacy has also been used to explore issues of power, inequality, and injustice in human relationships. Apple (1990) claimed that reality is socially

constructed hence “texts are not simply delivery of facts. They are the simultaneous results of political, economic, and cultural activities, battles, and compromises” (p. 4). Apple also argued that “what counts as legitimate knowledge is the result of complex power relations and struggles among identifiable class, race, gender, and religious groups” (p. 4), and that “it is not a society that has created such texts, but specific groups of people” (p. 5). Therefore, the processes of reading and of texts being read are power-laden. In order to make meaningful understanding of, and to gain insight into texts readers should adopt a feminist and critical stance in order to engage meaningfully with the text.

Why use film text to study gender and HIV and AIDS?

There is no shortage of media texts that have been produced in South Africa to respond to the AIDS pandemic and to assist in promoting AIDS awareness. The very successful *Steps to the Future* documentary program, for example, encouraged local film makers to produce videos that addressed HIV and AIDS at a local level. One media text which went beyond local circulation and won awards internationally was the feature length film *Yesterday* produced by Anant Singh in 2004 and directed by Darryl Roodt and which featured Yesterday (Leleti Khumalo) as the main character, along with a cast of local actors. This South African film depicts a woman’s lived experience in relation to being infected and affected by HIV and AIDS. The film describes Yesterday’s fears, hopes, dreams and suffering as a woman, mother and wife. Within a short period of time, barely a year, Yesterday’s life undergoes physical, social and existential change. She battles to do her chores in the home, as well as those outside the home, such as subsistence farming. She has difficulty in turning the water pump handle. When her husband returns from the mine in Johannesburg, his thin body and marked skin serve to indicate full blown AIDS. The women in the village start taunting her with all sorts of questions about her husband. As a family they are socially discriminated against by the members of the community and this eventually drives them out of the community. After she fails to get her husband admitted to a hospital she builds a shack outside the village where she nurses him until his death.

In using the film with the Grade 11 learners, I had three main aims. First, I wanted to bring to the classroom a different type of text which learners had never used before. This information was ascertained when I discussed with the educator the types of texts I would like to use with her class. She explained that she had never used film with her class even though the secondary school curriculum makes provision for use of film texts. Second, I wanted to use a text that represents a female protagonist in a positive way. Horne (2005, p. 182) noted that “Roodt’s film representation is informed by feminist ideology as seen in his choice of a female protagonist from whose perspective the audience experiences events.” She argued too, that this is also evident in the protagonist’s “growth as a character when she is tested by adversity and the way her complexity as a human being is portrayed” (p. 182). In this way the character of Yesterday challenges many of the stereotypes about women. I argue that if learners are exposed to texts that depict characters, especially female characters, positively this would have a positive impact on them. My third aim was to use a text that addresses a number of critical social issues such as poverty, stigma, migrant labour, HIV infection, access to health facilities, gender-based violence, and gender relations. These social issues are significant in that they demonstrate how women are not in a position to make decisions pertaining to their lives, since these decisions are linked to how femininity, masculinity and sexuality are socially constructed, and to the power relations within cultures (Hoosen & Collins, 2004).

Amaya-Anderson (2008) highlighted the point that film, apart from its formal or aesthetic properties, is also a social practice in which audiences of all ages participate. Adolescents and young adults most often patronise theatre movies. She ascertained that according to the Motion Picture Association (MPA)(2007) about 37% of frequent and occasional moviegoers were aged from 12 to 24 years old. She also argued that this percentage is large and supports the argument that film is the audiovisual literature of a younger generation (Open the Window on literature, 2004, p. 9). Even though the reports mentioned above refer to the American context they are relevant to the South African environment because the latter is influenced by American popular culture which most South African youngsters emulate. At the same time film is, for

the younger generation, a more familiar text than print because watching movies seems much easier to “read”. Nonetheless, the act of watching is not to be taken as a passive activity (Berger, 1972) but rather as a highly interpretative act.

Amaya-Anderson asserted that film study in the writing classroom provides an excellent opportunity to introduce learners to alternate points of view, to different perspectives raised by the film text itself, and to the multiple voices that make up the classroom. Thus, film presents a lived experience that learners engage in to understand their lives and world. Furthermore, Amaya-Anderson explained that it fosters thought and the pleasures of forming and making meaning. Since learning is socially constructed, she commented, it is essential that educators bring social practice into the classroom as a way to bridge the gap between what learners know and what they need to learn and practice. In this way, film serves as a pedagogical space where learners’ knowledge meets school knowledge. Amaya-Anderson stated too, that using a film text which learners are familiar with helps them to acquire analytical discourses and intellectual skills. Further, she argued that it helps move learners from private knowledge and experience to alternate viewpoints and public discourse. It is a favourable medium for the writing classroom as learners can dialogue about charged social issues depicted in the film. She considered that these issues present learners to public concerns on the representation of gender, race, class, sexual orientation, and more. Writing about these issues prepares learners who might otherwise be indifferent to delving into a discussion on cultural politics.

Dovey (2009) pointed out that “cinematic texts in South Africa have a great deal to offer when read as primary texts in the same way as literary texts as evidence or even as interview and narrative ‘entry-point’ texts for eliciting perspectives of review participants” (p. 70). Dovey’s research showed that media texts are essential and legitimate in enhancing literacy. Media literacy theorists have argued that that which a good reader brings to a written text is similar to that which a critical viewer brings to visual texts (Masterpiece Theatre Learning Resources, 2012). Both the literary and visual texts require a critical thinker to predict, make connections, infer, ask questions, and interpret. In both texts the details of character, theme, plot, mood, conflict, and symbolism allow for meaning making. In both instances, learners must be guided to be active interpreters. Culkin (1995), a media education pioneer, argued that:

we live in a total-information culture, which is being increasingly dominated by the image. Intelligent living within such an environment calls for developing habits of perception, analysis and selectivity that are capable of processing the relentless input of visual data . . . [because] schools are where the tribe passes on its values to the young, schools are where film study should take place. (p. 124)

Thus, it is significant to work with media texts alongside literary texts as part of literacy in the twenty-first century.

Methodology

The site of the study was a Grade 11 isiZulu literature class in a township secondary school in a peri-urban area in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The home language of the learners in the study is also isiZulu, and the school draws learners from the township and neighbouring informal settlements. The rate of unemployment in this area is very high. Most learners come from a working class background and some head their families. The school runs a self-funded feeding scheme to cater for AIDS orphans and vulnerable children. Some of the learners are from remote areas and have found residence in rented cottages around the school and are exposed to risky lifestyles because they live on their own.

I selected the sample purposefully because I assumed that Grade 11s would be mature enough to discuss gender related issues, and at the same time they would not be dealing with the pressures of the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) Grade 12 examinations. The educator suggested a Grade 11 (E) class to be used, in which she is a class teacher and so knows the learners very well. In total, 43 Grade 11 learners, 6 males and 37 females participated in the study.

Design

A classroom intervention programme based on the film, *Yesterday*, was designed and implemented by the educator with the researcher observing the proceedings over a period of five weeks. Since the film deals with HIV and AIDS and the spread of HIV is socioculturally related, context-specific interventions are valued (Ford, Odallo & Chorlton, 2003). The focus of the activities was on viewing and re-viewing, speaking and writing within the context of the selected text. Mitchell and Weber (1999) suggested that film as a primary text could be studied through close reading strategies. Using those strategies, the educator and the learners viewed and re-viewed the film and focused on certain scenes for class discussions. The focus of the observation was to see how learners interact with the film through the educator's direction. Classroom observation plays a crucial role in assessing the effectiveness of an intervention (Worthen, Sanders, & Fitzpatrick, 1997). They argued that it is the observation of learners and educators at work that documents the learning experience itself.

The film was first shown in full to the learners and this session lasted for almost two hours. Subsequent viewings focused on six film clips which depicted themes that emerged from the film, such as poverty, service delivery (lack of health facilities, sanitation, transport), gender relations, gender-based violence, migrant labour, HIV infection, living with HIV and AIDS, and HIV and AIDS stigma and discrimination. Here, I discuss only two of the film clips.

Film clip 1: Yesterday visits the doctor

This clip was longer than the others because it covered Yesterday's two visits to the doctor before going to her husband in Johannesburg. The film clip depicts Yesterday and the doctor when the doctor had asked if she and her husband engaged in protected sex after she (the doctor) learnt that Yesterday's husband was working in the mines in Johannesburg. Yesterday responded by saying there was no need to use a condom because she was a married woman. Yesterday's blood was drawn for HIV testing and after a few days she returned for her results and to learn that she was HIV positive. The doctor suggested that she ask her husband to come for testing as well.

Film clip 2: Yesterday visits her husband in Johannesburg

This clip shows Yesterday arriving in Johannesburg, overwhelmed by the big city and its big buildings and busy traffic. She arrives at the mine where her husband works and tells him about her HIV results and that the doctor has suggested that he gets tested as well. The husband responds by assaulting her. The mine male official who is in the office does not come to her rescue.

Trustworthiness

Patton (2002) posited that the credibility of a qualitative study hinges on trustworthiness. To ensure trustworthiness, first, the intervention programme and the observation schedule were piloted to ensure suitability before data collection. Second, verbatim accounts of participants were captured. Last, the entire data collection process was conducted in the participants' home language.

Analysis

Working with the data

In this article I focus primarily on the response of the learners to the two film clips. Overall, learners dialogued confidently on social issues on representations of class, gender, HIV and AIDS, poverty, stigma and discrimination, and gender-based violence depicted in the film despite the fact that they were not familiar with the use of visual texts in their isiZulu literature classes. Although the learners were intensively exposed to the conventions of film study, time constraints made it difficult for them to fully grasp the necessary skills required to engage with a visual text. The reading and analysis of the film posed a challenge to both the educator and the learners. Learners were enthusiastic and appreciative of the use of film as a teaching text particularly as they regarded films as sources of entertainment. For them this was a new experience of exploring a text that was different from the literary texts that they had been exposed to. As a result, learners were grateful and acknowledged the efficacy of the new approach through which they would be viewing films in future.

A close reading of the themes

In this section I consider some of the themes and issues that came up from learners' discussions. I call this "close reading" of the themes as a way to signal an analysis that is embedded in the literature of feminist studies and media studies. In part, this type of analysis also draws on my own readings/viewings as a Zulu woman growing up in South Africa and having been educated under the Bantu Education system where critical thinking, especially for African learners was discouraged. I declare my positionality here because as an academic interested in feminist research, I regard it important to expose learners to different kinds of readings/viewings of texts so that they understand that messages in texts are power-laden and need to be deconstructed for meaning creation.

The excerpts of text presented in the next section are taken from transcriptions of class discussions during classroom observations. The selected portion shows the part where the debate/discussion was at its peak with these learners being the key participants.

Migrant labour and HIV infection

Most men in the community in *Yesterday* were migrant labourers. These men left their wives or partners in the rural areas when they moved to the cities. Learners speculated that these miners, when they are in the cities, have relationships with other women and in most cases they do not practise safe sex which puts them and their wives at risk of contracting HIV. This assumption about miners' extramarital affairs is supported by the doctor's comment when she heard that Yesterday's husband was a miner in Johannesburg.

Doctor: Niyalisebenza ijazi lomkhwenyana uma niya ocansini?

Doctor: Do you use a condom with your husband when you make love?

Yesterday: Ini? Ngobani? Ngishadile nje.

Yesterday: What? What for? I am a married woman.

Learners' comments about Yesterday's response to the doctor suggested that she displays naivety and blind submission to marital expectations and conjugal rights. Dominant discourses of sexuality position women as the objects of men's sexual desire: meeting the needs of men and ensuring men's pleasure is

seen to be an expression of affection (Holland, Ramazanoglu, Scott, Sharpe & Thomson, 1990; Holland, Ramazanoglu, Sharpe & Thomson, 1994; Lindegger, 1996). Learners argued that she got infected by her husband because he engaged in unprotected sex with other partners. This demonstrated that learners were aware of how HIV is contracted. However, when they were asked what Yesterday could have done to protect herself from being infected they were very uncomfortable and reluctant to respond. There was some silence for a while with no learner volunteering to lead the discussion. The reluctance to engage in such matters publicly is influenced by cultural appropriateness: in Zulu culture it is taboo to discuss, openly, matters relating to sexual activities; even married couples are constrained by this taboo (Hoosen & Collins, 2004). It is generally accepted that men initiate, dominate and control sexual decisions and interactions, while women have to take responsibility for the contraceptives (Gupta, Weiss & Mane, 1996). In spite of women's lack of power, the responsibility for safe sexual behaviour is placed squarely on them (Strebel, 1995; Strebel & Lindegger, 1998). The educator probed until the learners started to respond. Learners' comments are reflected in the exchange below:

Nosipho: Ubengamcela kodwa kona kunzima.

Nosipho: She could have asked him but it is difficult.

Thandi: kona kunzima mam . . . kodwa wayezoqalaphi?

Thandi: Yes it is difficult madam . . . but how was she going to approach this?

Sihle : Impela . . . umqansa nje lo. Isizathu uzothi yini?

Sihle: Indeed . . . it is difficult. What reason was she going to give for this request?

Zethu: Mina ngicabanga ukuthi wayengathi uyagula manje ucela balisebenzise.

Zethu: I think she could have said she is sick therefore they must use a condom.

Lucky: hee hee(Uyahleka) Ubiza ukufa kodwa phela lapho.

Lucky: Hee. Hee. (He laughs) She would be playing with death.

Thisha: Hawu ! Ukufa ngobani manje?

Teacher: Gosh! Death, why?

Lucky (agcizelele nangezandla): Mam phela manje . . . ubaba wekhaya uzofuna ukwazi ukuthi uze ugule nje bekwenzenjani.

Lucky (emphasising with his hands): Madam you see . . . her husband would have demanded to know how did she get sick.

This exchange seems to indicate that the learners are aware of the challenges women face in negotiating practicing safe/protected sex. Even though they did not make reference to personal experiences one can deduce from their comments that they are aware of such challenges either personally or from very close friends or relatives who might have shared such information with them. Nosipho, for example, suggested that Yesterday should have asked her husband to use a condom but expressed reservation about the

request. Thandi, Sihle and Lucky all highlighted that it was not easy to negotiate use of condoms with her husband. The suggestion raised by Zethu, that she must ask her husband to use the condom under the pretence of being sick, was vehemently disputed by Lucky who pointed out that that would have been her death sentence. The teacher's interjection helps to elicit clearer explanation from Lucky. Lucky's explanation, even though not explicitly put, suggests that the husband would have suspected that his wife cheated with another man in his absence and contracted a sexually transmitted disease. This suggests that the husband would have demanded to know the reason why she wants to use a condom. The learners' discussion indicated that women, especially married ones, have a challenge in protecting themselves from being infected by their husbands who have extramarital affairs with multiple partners. It is evident that the lack of open communication about sexual issues between men and women due to cultural barriers and the expectation that women should not be assertive contribute to the low usage of condoms (Heise & Elias, 1995; Strebel & Lindegger, 1998; Wingood & DiClemente, 1998). This then results in a high HIV prevalence in females.

Stuart (2009) argued that despite the ARV roll out and other strategies to reduce HIV prevalence, statistics reveal an alarming reality for South African women. Citing Shisana et al. (2009) she stated that "the 33% prevalence rate for females aged 25–29 years remained constant from 2002–2008 and that in 2008 females aged 20–29 years were twice as likely as males to become HIV positive" (2009, p. 74). Stuart further stated that even though it appears that there was a national decline in HIV prevalence in teenagers aged 15–19 from 2002–2008 this was not so in Mpumalanga and some parts of KwaZulu-Natal (two of the most rural of the nine provinces in the country) including Bergville, the setting for the film, *Yesterday*. She argued that the high HIV prevalence rate amongst females aged 25 to 29 years and those aged 15 to 19 years is attributed "to increased intergenerational sex or sexual relations with males at least five years older them" (Shisana et al. 2009, as cited in Stuart, 2009, p.74).

Gender relations and gender-based violence

The film clip that shows *Yesterday* going to her husband in Johannesburg to tell him about her HIV status and to tell him that the doctor suggested that he also be tested for HIV, highlights issues of gender relations. The educator asked learners to discuss gender relations depicted in the film; learner discussion was directed by the teacher's question below:

Yini oyifundile kulesi siqeshana sefilimu emayelana nezobudlel wano bobulili?

What did you learn from this film clip about gender relations?

Nosipho: Ngisasho namanje . . . mina . . . ngibubona bungebuhle.

Nosipho: I still maintain my position . . . this relationship . . . is not good at all.

Thandi: Ngiyavuma . . . kodwa mhlawumbe . . . lo baba uthuswe izindaba ezimbi azizwile.

Thandi: I agree with you . . . but maybe . . . the man was shocked about the news he had just heard.

Nosipho: Ukuthuka? Mnh . . . cha . . . lokho akumniki ilungelo lokuthi amshaye.

Nosipho: Shocked? Mmh . . . no . . . that does not give him a right to beat her.

Sne: Empeleni . . . kumele engabe uyazisola ngokwenzekile kodwa yena uveza udlame (kukhona abafundi besilisa abavungamayo).

Sne: Actually . . . he should be sorry about what has happened instead of being violent (murmuring amongst male learners).

Lucky: Phela uyindoda, lento imehlisa isithunzi (uhleko).

Lucky: He is a man, this thing is tainting his dignity (laughter).

Nosipho (uyahwaqa): Kanti uma uyindoda kumele ungamhloniphi yini umuntu wesifazane?

Nosipho (she frowns): Does being a man mean one should not respect a woman?

Lucky (uhleko): Kahle bo ngodlame . . . bengidlala.

Lucky (laughter): Hold it don't be aggressive . . . I was only joking.

Nosipho: Vele nje abantu besilisa ababahloniphi abantu besifazane. Buka nje . . . nalona osehovisi akamsizi uYesterday.

Nosipho: It is obvious that men do not respect females. Look . . . even the man in the office does not help Yesterday.

The discussion was lively. One learner, for example, commented that the news about Yesterday's HIV positive status and the suggestion that the husband should be tested, angered the husband and so he assaulted her. Learners condemned the husband's behaviour as being unacceptable. This kind of gender-based violence is related to power inequalities based on gender roles, which are marked by the domination of men and the subordination of women (Njuho & Davids, 2012). Nosipho played a central role in the discussion, commenting on gender relations, power and gender-based violence as the key issues to have been raised. She saw Yesterday, the main character, as powerless and unable to defend herself from her husband who is beating her for nothing.

While Thandi concurred with Nosipho, she also suggested shock as a reason for the man to have behaved that way. Nosipho argued that being in a state of shock does not justify any actions of violence. Sne felt that the husband should have been very apologetic about the whole issue and have asked for forgiveness instead of being violent. Lucky's defence of the husband's violent action as being the demonstration of his manly power angered Nosipho who retorted by saying males do not respect females. Her generalisation about men's attitudes towards women was somehow prompted by the noncommittal attitude of the man in the office who read his newspaper as if nothing was happening just outside his window. The mine official had just distanced himself from the incident and not intervened.

At the same time, a reading of Lucky's comment demonstrates patriarchal attitudes entrenched in his reasoning. Although he said he was joking, this did not erase the statement he had uttered and which reflected how he thinks about women and how he would act towards them. Research has shown that this reflects the thinking that most men still hold—that to demonstrate their masculinity they must be aggressive towards women and homosexual men. According to Koenig et al.'s study (2003), 70% of the male participants and 90% of the female participants considered the act of beating up a woman as justifiable. Bhana, De Lange and Mitchell (2009) referred to Wood, Lambert and Jewkes (2007) who argued

that many South African researchers when linking gender-based violence and masculinities have shown how violence is understood within the context of entrenched sociocultural notions about “male superiority and privilege as well as the social impact of apartheid, political emasculation and unemployment on generations of African men” (2009, p. 49). Judging from this one could only assume that Lucky uttered this statement because he sees the matter at hand as being private and not an issue to be discussed in a public arena such as the workplace. Bhana et al. (2009) further noted that in rural areas in South African as well as elsewhere in the country, “teachers and youth emerge from social contexts where ideas and social values affirm gender inequalities, and popular ideas about gender permit the use of violence to maintain male authority” (Sideris, 2004, as cited in Bhana et al., 2009, p. 50). Bhana et al. also commented that “rigid notions of masculinities are defended by invoking the patriarchal content of Zulu culture” (p. 50). They argued that it is crucial to understand the ways in which male teachers in specific contexts give meaning to gender-based violence for developing appropriate strategies for HIV and AIDS education. What is interesting in the learners’ discussion is that none of them mentioned the catcalls from miners as they filed past Yesterday. Learners just concentrated on Yesterday, her husband and the mine official, whereas the miners’ actions could be classified as sexual harassment, disrespectful, and intimidating and needed to be commented upon.

Learners’ responses overall

The learners’ responses affirmed that there is pleasure in watching, understanding, and analyzing films because they seemed to engage confidently and enthusiastically with the text. For these young people it was evident that the use of film has a pedagogical role both inside and outside of the classroom. Learners described the experience as an eye opener to the way they watch films. Learners’ comments on the fact that they would now watch movies with a critical eye in order to decode hidden messages shows how much they benefited from the learning experiences. This is also illustrated below by a learner’s comment from her journal entry:

Ngikuthokezela kakhulu ukufundiswa ukuhlulza amafilimu ngoba lokhu sekuzongenza ngiwabuke ngendlela ehlukile kunasekuqaleni. Ngizowabuka ngehlo elicwaningayo.

I greatly appreciated to be taught how to analyse a film as this would make me watch movies differently than before. I would watch them with a critical eye.

This is an important observation—especially coming directly from one of the learners.

Conclusions and implications for further research

This article examined some key issues on gender and HIV and AIDS with secondary school learners using the film, *Yesterday*. Working with film, I argue, offers a crucial way to engage learners in exploring, understanding, and reflecting on their everyday lives. This, in turn, exposes the everyday challenges they face in the context of poverty, gender-based violence, HIV and AIDS, and stigma and discrimination, and helps them think of possible solutions.

Using film in a classroom environment is essential because film demands a certain level of engagement for its particular narratives, subject positions, and ideologies to develop. Giroux (2002) ascertains that in ninety-minute to two-hour formats, film offers “a deeper pedagogical register” than “a three-minute pop song or a twenty-two minute sitcom” (pp. 7–8). Amaya-Anderson claimed that a film’s textuality requires viewers to enter the world of character, setting, and sociopolitical themes. The viewing process in watching a movie is informed by a wider spectrum of cinematic discourse. As a result, film has a larger vocabulary which cues and constrains viewer response (Fehlman, 1994).

Since film is a social practice that adolescents and young adults enjoy, it is highly recommended that educators include film study in their language and writing programmes, especially in African languages including isiZulu. In the South African school context, film study has been a prevalent feature in schools which were previously for Whites, Indians, and Coloureds but not in Black African schools. The assessment standards in the NCS for Grade 10 to Grade 12 stipulate that learners should be able to analyse and explain the sociopolitical and cultural backgrounds of texts (DoE, 2002, p. 25).

hooks (1996) suggests that even though it might not be the filmmaker's intent to teach audiences specific things, young viewers extract lessons from narrative films and in some cases they learn from these films more than they do from books. Like Heyda (1999), I argue that even though film may offer entertainment, escape, and pleasure, educators and learners must explore the nature of these affective responses—looking specifically at what they have to say about culture and their subject positions as viewers. Film in this case is not the end but the beginning of inquiry, dialogue and writing

This type of material, when brought into the classroom, could have a positive effect on learners' attitudes towards men, women, and people living with HIV and AIDS, and also promote their active engagement in challenging and changing the dominant images of gender inequality, poverty, gender-based violence, HIV and AIDS, and HIV related stigmas. The process of viewing and discussing allowed these learners to construct and reconstruct their experiences and the challenges they face in relation to the issues mentioned above.

It would be naïve to expect drastic changes from the learners when they have been exposed to just one text over a short period. Moreover there are other questions that might be raised: To what extent might *Yesterday*, the film, become dated in its representation of gender and HIV and AIDS? What are some of the challenges of showing a film in a rural school? How do teachers empower learners from disadvantaged ethnic and gender groups who do not have critical analysis skills? While the answers to these questions remain to be explored, it is apparent that film study seems to offer a space for dialogue and discussion—and perhaps that is the best that can happen to truly make the life of *Yesterday* a yesterday.

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