

Promoting Social Justice through 21st Century Skills: Thematic Units in the Language Classroom

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Abstract

This article demonstrates the ways in which the Spanish curriculum at one private university integrated social justice learning targets guided by the ACTFL 21st Century Skills Map and the Partnership for 21st Century Skills in a Living Learning Community (LLC) course called “Social Consciousness and Developing 21st Century Skills.” The LLC interdisciplinary approach combined an intermediate Spanish course with a compulsory one credit course for all first year students. Examples from four thematic units in the Spanish intermediate class illustrate activities intended to foster learners’ social consciousness, empathy, collaboration, diversity appreciation, civic engagement, personal responsibility, and leadership. This article draws on the existing literature, the curriculum design process and product, qualitative data collection, as well as instructor reflections to make suggestions on how language educators can inspire students not only to understand the complexity of the world we live in, but also to take action by targeting 21st Century Skills through thematic units and authentic resources.

Key words: social justice, 21st Century Skills, critical pedagogy, 21st Century Skills Map for World Languages, World-Readiness Cultures Standards, living learning communities, authentic resources, National Coalition Building Institute

Background

Living Learning Communities (LLCs) allow students to register for multiple courses that are tied together by a common topic, allowing them to make connections through an interdisciplinary approach. In an LLC, a group of students in their first semester of university share two or more courses and live in the same dorm to afford them the opportunity to develop a sense of community within a smaller group. The World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages (ACTFL, 2015) defines one of the 5 Cs, connection, as the ability to “connect with other disciplines and acquire information and diverse perspectives in order to use the language to function in academic and career related situations.” In this way, LLCs are a perfect platform not only to follow one of the ACTFL Cs, but to delve into concepts potentially related to social justice across disciplines.

The “Social Consciousness and Developing 21st Century Skills” LLC aimed to make students more socially aware of their own cultural frames of reference, especially about stereotypes, prejudices, and social disparities within their own culture. In order to obtain those objectives, a critical pedagogy approach based on Freire’s (1970) theory and the ACTFL 21st Century Skills Map (ACTFL, 2011) had an im-

portant role in this course. Furthermore, several approaches from community based learning (National Task Force, 2012, p.15) such as civic ethos, civic literacy, civic inquiry, and civic action were also included in this LLC. With those frameworks in mind, learners analyzed and compared products, practices and perspectives through a social justice lens. The new World-Readiness Standards for Cultures (ACTFL, 2015) stated that “Learners use the language to investigate, explain, and reflect on the relationship between the products and practices with the perspectives of the cultures studied.” Furthermore, by promoting 21st Century Skills, the four units that will be explained below focus on how social justice is interconnected with the new World-Readiness Cultures Standards. This paper will outline the merger of two course curricula in an LLC and the creation of a space for learners to engage critically through thematic units in a world language class.

Literature Review

When the goal of language education is to change societal structures, educational practices must be selected with equality and liberation in mind. According to Freire (1970), that kind of education is only possible through developing each oppressed person’s *conscientização* (35), or critical consciousness, to bring about a new “awareness of self.” This term means “learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality” (Freire’s translator’s note 38). Similar to current practices in critical pedagogy, social justice is the ultimate goal of Freire’s pedagogy. Creating awareness in our classrooms is necessary to make our world better. Freire, like many other educators, believed that change only happens if we are aware of injustices, and we decide to do something about it. One of these educators is Osborn (2006), who commented on the role of the educator in changing the curriculum to include social justice topics:

World language educators will need to reform and expand language curricula and instruction along the lines of a critical approach to language education, pedagogically oriented toward an exploration of issues related to the role of language in discourses, in discrimination, and in ideology. (p. 4)

In this same vein, Cho (2012), explained that “the fundamental aim of critical pedagogy is to construct school and education as ‘agents of change.’ Further supporting the inclusion of social justice in language learning, Glynn, Wesely, and Wassell (2014) provided rubrics and a method for educators to include social justice topics in the language educator’s curriculum. They connected the need to include social justice in the classroom with the Communities standard from the ACTFL *World-Readiness Standards* (National Collaborative Board, 2015), which argues that learners should use the language beyond the classroom to interact and collaborate in their communities and in a globalized world. For that to happen, learners need to develop global competency and intercultural communicative competence (ICC) so they can interact with others in a respectful and responsive way (Glynn, Wesely, and Wassell, 2014). Byram (1997) defines ICC as “an individual’s ability to communicate and interact across cultural boundaries” (p. 7). Moreover, learning to define and identify cases of equity, equality, discrimination, privilege, marginalization or oppres-

sion through social justice units, may help students to have successful interactions with people in the target language (TL). Furthermore, the second component of the Communities' standards is the importance of lifelong learning. Glynn, Wesely, and Wassell (2014) claimed that social justice in the language classroom promotes critical thinking, which then can lead to helping students to analyze and think critically about their own power structures. Critical thinking and lifelong learning are part of 21st Century Skills and should be considered in any curriculum aiming social justice issues. This article goes a step further because it explains how units can also focus in other 21st Century Skills that have been ignored such as empathy, leadership, self-awareness and social consciousness.

Three elements contribute to social justice learning outcomes in the language classroom according to Randolph and Johnson (2017, p. 12): 1) the Communities and Cultures standards; 2) student transformative learning and ICC; and 3) teachers' critical pedagogy and community-based instructional design. Once students become socially aware and are able to analyze their own assumptions that create the way they see their world, they experience perspective transformation, which is the base of transformative learning. Furthermore, Randolph and Johnson issued a call for action for all educators to consider social justice in their classroom since in their opinion language study is dominated by topics related to the political issues in our nations such as immigration, diversity, inclusion, multiculturalism, and globalism.

Using the 21st Century Skills Map as Part of Critical Engagement and Pedagogy

As explained above, critical pedagogy is essential for social justice education to happen. World languages education and the 21st Century Skills Maps for Teaching World Languages (ACTFL, 2011) connect with critical engagement and pedagogy and make it possible for teachers and learners to explore different routes that can potentially lead to social justice topics. The Partnership for 21st Century Learning (2017) is an organization whose mission is "to serve as a catalyst for 21st century learning to build collaborative partnerships among education, business, community, and government leaders" (p. 1). They collaborated with recognized national organizations of different core academic subjects to put together documents with examples demonstrating how to integrate 21st Century Skills within these content areas. For world languages, they collaborated with ACTFL, and a map was created considering the three modes of communication (interpersonal, interpretive and presentational) and the 5 Cs (Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities), which are central to the current ACTFL World-Readiness Standards for Language Learning (2015). The result, after one year of work and input from hundreds of teachers, was "The 21st Century Skills Map" for the teaching of world languages (ACTFL, 2011). This document explained how the 5 Cs interconnect with important skills and how the 21st century classroom differs from the industrial age classroom. They provided useful examples showing how to connect languages with 21st Century Skills in three main levels of language competency on the oral proficiency scale: Novice, Intermediate, and Advanced. An example of an intermediate level under the category of "Critical Thinking and Problem Solving" is:

Students examine a variety of resumes from Internet sites. They then identify possible jobs/careers that the resume writer(s) might seek.

Using a resume site, students complete a template for a job/career they might have at some time in the future, and write a cover letter in which they 'apply for' a prospective job. Students organize a class job/career fair, alternately playing the roles of interviewer and interviewee. (ACTFL 2011, p. 9)

This example could be connected to social justice if students reflect on and pose questions about the differences they notice in resumes from different countries, such as the tradition of including a picture in Hispanic countries and the resulting social connotations of this practice.

Another example in the same category, but in the advanced level, is: "Students investigate an immigration issue in the US and a target-language country, analyze and synthesize the information, and propose a solution in the form of a letter to the editor" (ACTFL 2011, p. 9). This assignment is a clear example of civic engagement and social justice in the world languages curriculum. The 21st Century Skills Map (ACTFL, 2011) document can be a tool that helps educators meet the goal of including social justice topics in the curriculum.

The 21st Century Skills Map and Freire's Pedagogy

There are several notions within the 21st Century Skills Map (ACTFL, 2011) that echo the original ideas of Freire's (1970) pedagogy. One of them is the relationship between the teacher and his or her students and the type of instructor in charge. A second one is the importance of critical thinking in the classroom. Additionally, creativity and innovation are life skills that feature prominently in both texts. Using authentic resources and learning to discern the effect of media in the world are ideas one can tie to both documents. Finally, the notion of placing learner's agency in his or her learning is shared in the manuscripts.

Freire (1970) did not believe in a hierarchical authoritative classroom where the teacher had all the information and his or her only job was to transmit knowledge to the students, or what he called "banking education" (72). He claimed that "education must begin with the solution of the teacher/student contradiction by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers and students" (p. 72). He also believed that by teaching each other, everybody involved grows (p. 80). In the same way, the 21st Century Skills Map for World Languages rejects the authoritative instructor, adding that one of the characteristics of the 21st century classroom is that it is "learner-centered with teacher as facilitator/collaborator" (ACTFL, 2011, p. 4). This idea connects with the importance of bringing students' strength and talents to the classroom. Glynn, Wesely, and Wassell (2014) suggested specific questions that learners can answer about themselves and that potentially can help educators to know their students better and invite them to share that knowledge. The facilitator or collaborator is somebody who works with somebody else in a project or an activity, so this type of teacher will benefit from and grow through the relationship with students. The Spanish thematic units within the LLC assured that the lessons were student-centered because there was no book and learners needed to bring content to the classroom to share with the professor and other learners. *Reciprocal teaching and learning*, exchanging information and understanding among classmates, happened every week. Although the term reciprocal teaching

and learning is not used in either of these texts, it is possible to suggest that there is a connection between this term and the ideas reflected in both documents.

Striving for critical thinking is described in the 21st Century Skills Map in the section that states: “critical thinking and problem solving: students as inquirers frame, analyze, and synthesize information as well as negotiate meaning across language and culture in order to explore problems and issues from their own and different perspectives” (ACTFL, 2011, p. 9). Freire (1970) believed that his pedagogy helped his students to become critical thinkers. He stated that “problem-posing education makes them [students] critical thinkers” (p. 83). As shown above, critical thinking is the key aspect of critical pedagogy, and transformative learning happens when critical inquiry and perspective transformation take place.

A third idea found in the 21st Century Skills Map that recalls Freire’s (1970) philosophy is the relevance of creativity and innovation to contribute to society, which is related to base learning communities. The skills map outlines that “Students as creators and innovators respond to new and diverse perspectives. They use language in imaginative and original ways to make useful contributions” (ACTFL, 2011, p. 10). This resonates with Freire’s (1970) teaching method as a way to develop creativity, because “problem-posing education bases itself on creativity and stimulates true reflection and action upon reality” (p. 84). Both texts mention the importance of social action and how learners can contribute to improve their communities. This connects with ACTFL communities and cultures standards as described above.

Freire (1970) emphasized the importance of a learner’s agency in his or her learning and described the world as “a problem to be worked and resolved” (p. 32) and wanting the students to “be a Subject who acts upon and transforms his world” (p. 32), similar to the same way in which the 21st Century Skills Map puts an emphasis on the learner as a ‘doer’ or ‘creator’.

Technology makes information readily accessible from all over the world. Some language instructors are used to taking advantage of these resources in the classroom. The 21st Century Skills Map (2011) defined information literacy: “Students as informed global citizens access, manage, and effectively use culturally authentic sources in ethical and legal ways” (p. 12). Freire (1970) also saw the importance of authentic resources; he promoted the reading and discussions of magazine articles, newspapers, and book reading chapters. Freire also claimed that it was necessary “to analyze the contents of newspaper editorials following any given event.” Freire, in fact, questioned why different newspapers had such different interpretations of the same fact (p. 122). For him, the sense of criticism explained under critical thinking was essential. This is related to the 21st Century Skills Map because they promoted media literacy defined as “students as active global citizens evaluate authentic sources to understand how media reflect and influence language and culture” (p. 13). It is clear that the same idea of understanding and evaluating media is stated in both texts.

Even though the 21st Century Skills Map does not claim to be a source for social justice issues, some of their examples are connected to this topic and many others can be easily modified to that end. As mentioned above, many of the similarities are at the core of the thematic units created in the Spanish course in the Living Learning Community for social justice.

Instructional Context

The institutional review board (IRB) approved research on the LLC project that connected two courses: Intermediate Spanish Intermediate, a course that met the language requirement and carried three credits hours, and a FYI (First Year Interaction), a one credit hour course. Both courses met for 50 minutes three times a week. No course book was used in the Spanish classroom, rather only authentic resources such as short news clips, bilingual children's books, and videos were used, among other resources. Free grammar websites online such as "Spanish Grammar and Culture with Barbara Kuczun Nelson" (Nelson, 2007) from Colby College and "Spanish Proficiency Exercises" (Kelm, 2017) by the University of Texas at Austin were useful for students to review outside class. The FYI course shared similar objectives to the 21st Century Skills (ACTFL, 2011), creating an opportunity for both instructors to work with each other to create activities that needed to be done in English during the FYI time.

Curriculum Design

As stated above, building a community among learners where teacher and students get to know each other as soon as possible, and everyone becomes aware of individual strengths, is key to critical pedagogy and social justice education. That is why a goal for both instructors from the first day of classes was to build a sense of community where all opinions were encouraged and respected. The FYI instructor was also the college's Director of Diversity and Inclusion, and she was certified to lead a National Coalition Building Institute (NCBI) workshop. NCBI is a leadership organization that organizes workshops on diversity, inclusion an equity in campuses and other organizations. The LLC students attended a "Welcoming diversity/Prejudice reduction" training, intended to fight against racism and other forms of oppression. The main goal of the workshop was to share opinions and assumptions from different groups, while questioning stereotypes. Because the questions were personal and sensitive, students were asked to keep everything they heard during this meeting confidential. With an abbreviated NCBI session that lasted an hour and a half, students not only started to question their own ideas about stereotypes and prejudices, but also got to know each other very well, and a sense of community and trust seemed to be created between students and professors very early in the semester.

This workshop was done in English during the FYI class time, but it would be possible to conduct the discussions in the TL at advanced levels of instruction. Additional activities that were completed throughout the semester to foster a sense of community and to learn about learners' strengths included:

1. Filling out profiles in the TL and uploading a picture to the Learning Management System.
2. Making a student introductory video, power point, or digital story about themselves or something/somebody important to them. Students presented those to their classmates.
3. Playing cooperative games in the TL throughout the semester.

As Randolph and Johnson (2017) mentioned, the traditional practice for language teachers is to include at the beginning of the semester team building activities

and ice breakers in the lesson plan. They suggested a “recommended practice” for “all units throughout the semester to incorporate low-stakes trust-building activities in order to establish and continually reinforce community” (p. 25).

Students and Instructors

There were 13 students in this LLC and one Spanish preceptor. The preceptor was a senior Spanish major with an Advanced Low ranking in the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI). He attended one class a week and assisted the Spanish instructor with the needs of the class, and taught for five minutes during each class about a topic related to culture from his experiences studying abroad in Spain. Additionally, he met with students twice a week, once in the college dining room to play board games during the “Games in Spanish” meetings, and also, in a classroom to review grammar related to the course’s learning tasks. The preceptor also accompanied students to course related events he organized, and served as a successful language learner role model for students.

Materials

A questionnaire at the beginning of the course was distributed. Furthermore, reflection papers in English after some of the events and a final reflection paper on the course were included.

Analysis

Teaching 21st Century Skills in Thematic Units through a Social Justice Lens

As Bain (2017) suggested, it is a good idea to start any unit with a question that learners need to answer. All the units in the Intermediate Spanish Course targeted the following 21st Century Skills: collaboration, communication, critical thinking, creativity, innovation, empathy, technology and media literacy, and intercultural communicative competence. The units also focused on other skills such as diversity and leadership, and were connected to civic learning outcomes. These are four examples of the units that were designed.

Unit 1

The first unit dealt with diversity, collaboration, leadership, and empathy via the topic of poverty. The main questions for this unit were: *What do you know about poverty in the USA?; How do you compare it with other countries in the world?; and How have some people’s leadership and empathy helped to alleviate poverty in different places around the globe?.*

First, students had to look up information about poverty in the U.S. to create their own infographic with their research findings. This task fostered learners’ technological literacy since most had no prior skills making or using infographics. Students used free versions of Picktochart (2017), Canva (2017), and Easel.ly (2017) software, which are some of the many options for making infographics online. Learners shared their information with classmates in pairs. With this activity, the interpretive and interpersonal modes of communication were practiced.

Students were asked to watch two assigned news clips of about two minutes in the TL and infer the main ideas from the images and headlines of the news. The

educator prepared questions to help the students understand the meaning of the news clips. They portrayed people overcoming difficult situations through leadership, empathy, and collaboration. The first short news clip, available at wapa.tv, called “Tejedoras de la naturaleza¹” was about a women’s cooperative in Nicaragua. The women pick up plastic bags from the beach, wash them, dry them, and color the bags to then knit colorful purses that they sell to tourists. This initiative not only provides for their families and cleans the beach in Pella, but it also saves turtles which often die when they confuse the plastic bags with food. The second video, which can be found on Telemadrid (2017) explains how an NGO, Mary Meals, was created. This organization works in more than 14 different countries, and in their model, they buy food locally and request that the communities cook and serve the food to those in need. In these videos, through effort, collaboration, creativity, and leadership, people who live in poverty improved their situation. The leadership of some people is used to the common benefit of the community. After studying and reviewing these materials, students were encouraged to look for a video in Spanish about poverty to share with their classroom to promote reciprocal teaching and learning. Once students had explored issues about poverty, guided with a lens of social justice, they were further challenged to speak on poverty issues.

Students attended a workshop by a grassroots manager for RESULTS: The Power to End Poverty, who came to the college and talked to learners about inequality in the USA. He used an active method with a quiz to ask the audience about what they knew about poverty. After the quiz, he taught students and faculty how to do a laser talk or elevator speech, using a sample to defend an antipoverty program while promoting *civic literacy*. This term is defined by the National Taskforce on Education (2012) as:

The cultivation of foundational knowledge about fundamental principles and debates about democracy expressed over time, both within the United States and in other countries; familiarity with several key historical struggles, campaigns and social movements undertaken to achieve the full promise of democracy; and the ability to think critically about complex issues and to seek and evaluate information about issues that have public consequences. (p. 15)

With this unit learning task mentioned above, students used language to investigate, explain, and reflect on products, practices, and perspectives related to poverty. Therefore, the new World-Readiness Cultures Standards were used through a social justice lens. Additionally, because students were able to learn about RESULTS and how its team efforts had positive results in poverty awareness advocacy, some of the students in the class decided to join the college RESULTS chapter.

Four Civic Learning Outcomes in the form of civic literacy, civic engagement, civic responsibility, and civic leadership skills such as advocacy, public speaking, and team working happened with those students with the help of this NGO. They wrote letters to their senators and congressmen requesting that safety nets for the poor be protected. Students were also encouraged to meet with a local congressperson’s assistant to voice their support for antipoverty programs such as the earned income tax credit (EITC) and food stamps. At that meeting, students used the knowledge

they had obtained during this unit to express empathy for and solidarity with those in poverty. In a reflection on this unit, one student stated:

I learned that poverty is actually a big deal, even in the United States. It is something very serious and is a problem that needs to be addressed. What is very important about this talk, as well as what I took out from it is that anyone, literally anyone, can help out. Even if it is in your community, you can make a difference. This talk inspired me to have more of a role in my community, to just give back to a community that has been so great to me.

This student became a member of the RESULTS campus chapter and attended the meeting with the congressman's assistant. He, along with other students, showed a sense of responsibility to work for greater equity. Although all students were required to attend the RESULTS lecture, only the learners who were moved by this unit decided to be engaged in their communities, volunteer, and become social change advocates.

Unit 2

The second unit was centered on self-awareness, personal responsibility, initiative, effort, self-direction, and empathy for the disabled. For this unit, the main questions for learners were: *What are your core values and goals for the future?* and *Is empathy an important skill for you?* Students and the professor shared a long list of values in the TL such as love, family, justice, creativity, and personal development. Learners then determined which three values were the most important to them, and they had to explain why they chose them in the TL. This exercise was intended to help students to get to know themselves better and understand why they act the way they do. This is related to a Civic Learning Outcome called Vocational Discernment or developing a deeper understanding of one's calling or vocation.

Students also watched a video in Spanish from writer Elsa Punset² (Punset, 2014). This Spanish video teaches viewers strategies to achieve their goals. In the TL, students needed to establish an important goal for themselves and strategize how to obtain it following Punset's advice. They also needed to draw their goal or dream and be able to explain it in the TL to their classmates. The three modes of communication were practiced with these two learning tasks.

Additionally, students also read different bilingual books assigned to them. These stories represented brave Latino immigrant children who were able to reach important goals in their lives, such as being able to immigrate to the USA, adapting to a new school without speaking the native language, and eventually bringing a father to the USA from El Salvador. Effort, friendship, and the help of their communities were key for each character's success. After reading the books, learners had to reflect on and write about how the characters developed the 21st Century Skills targeted in this unit. An interpretive mode of communication was developed by reading and understanding the books, and the interpersonal mode of communication occurred when students explained to each other in their own words the book they read and how the characters developed specific abilities. An effective activity to promote interpersonal communication was to share such books they read with a *speed dating* exercise. Learners had two minutes to explain their book in the TL to

their partner. They took notes on each other's books before moving on to their next classmate. This activity enhanced reciprocal teaching and learning and sustained the idea of building community during the semester among the class. Empathy and understanding of other people's situations were skills targeted with these books, along with diversity appreciation since all the characters were from different countries in Latin America. One student commented the following after this unit:

I feel like I've developed a lot of skills in this class and empathy is definitely one of them. I think it makes you a more compassionate and loving person in general and I think that is the key to getting along with people better. It's always a good idea to get to know someone before making assumptions about them and their actions.

To continue the topic of empathy in this unit, learners watched a short news clip (Actuality Media, 2014) about a café called "Sonrisas" in Nicaragua. This coffee shop only has servers who can neither hear nor talk. Sign language is used, and this initiative gives employment to the disabled. Learners were asked to learn to communicate with some basics of sign language and think about how we needed to be an inclusive society. For this news clip, learners needed to make their own vocabulary list after watching the video. Another learning task related to social justice is that students were asked to imagine themselves as an employer who cares about the disabled and to develop a project or company similar to the one in the news. With this activity, students reflected on how their own culture treats the disabled, and which types of companies and leaders are needed to improve relationships with this social group. This is also an example of connecting the new World-Readiness Cultures Standards with social justice since learners analyzed and reflected on the types of disabilities in their culture, the social norms related to this group and the ideology behind it.

Service and civic engagement also happened in this unit with an activity programmed on campus. Each fall semester, students organize a "Halloween Day" to give candy to and play games with children from the community that visited the campus for the event. Usually, games are competitive. However, the students, professors and preceptor in this LLC decided to organize different activities related to this unit that promoted social justice. First, they lead cooperative games³³ in Spanish. Also, students read the bilingual books learned in class, that portrayed as main characters children immigrants, and that promoted empathy, collaboration, effort and team work. Finally, students taught some sign language to children, and they talked about respecting and understanding people with disabilities because diversity and inclusion needed to be supported.

Unit 3

This unit targeted social consciousness and civic literacy through criminal justice and domestic violence topics. Some of the questions learners were faced with at the beginning of this unit were: *Why are there so many people who want to change the American criminal justice system?; How could criminal justice be improved?; and Are our justice department and government in general doing enough to reintegrate female prisoners once they have finished their prison sentences?.*

As in the other units, students first investigated the topic by themselves and prepared information to share with classmates. Learners often are not aware about

the fact that South Carolina has one of the highest rates of domestic violence and women killed by men. Additionally, learners had to work with the song “Malo eres” (2007) by the Spanish singer Bebe. This song is about a woman with children who suffers from domestic abuse. Next, students watched a short clip about a Spanish dancer who teaches flamenco in a Bolivian female prison (BBC, 2013). Activities around the song and video were similar to the aforementioned activities described for talking about news clips. Following the World-Readiness Cultures Standards (ACTFL, 2015), learners used the TL to investigate, explain, and reflect on a social justice topic, domestic violence. Additionally, a guest playwright gave a lunch and learn in English about her play, “The Volunteer” (Landis, forthcoming), related to domestic abuse and the US criminal justice system. She explained how the play was created and how she drew from her six years as a volunteer in a female prison to create the play. The playwright shared with learners and guests some realities of which many were not aware. For example, she explained that women inmates have very few visitors compared with male inmates, the ease with which arrest and imprisonment can happen, and that some women are in prison because of years of domestic abuse and/or because they killed their partners in self-defense.

Students had the opportunity to go to the theater and watch their Spanish professor act, since she was one of the main characters of the play. The play was winner of the New Play Centre Stage Awards in 2015, in Greenville, SC. All the students wrote a reflection in their online portfolio, using Pathbrite (2017), about the impact of the play on their understanding of the topics studied in this unit. Transformational learning happened during this unit and one of the students commented:

My perspective on inmates and the corruption that occurs to females and prison really had an effect on me. These facts should definitely be discussed more so that a change can eventually happen.

This reflection was written in English as part of their FYI (First Year Interaction) coursework linked to the LLC.

Unit 4

The fourth and final unit focused on diversity and global awareness, with topics including rejecting stereotypes and being aware of religious differences. The questions for this unit were: *Are some stereotypes connected to a specific culture or religion?* and *How can we combat them?*

The first activity for students to do in the TL was to post a picture on the platform they share and explain why that picture was culturally relevant for them. As homework, students watched two videos in English that help fight stereotypes, Momondo’s Tedtalk (Momondo, 2016) and “The Danger of a Single Story” by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (Adichie, 2009). Learners shared their reflections about those videos in the TL. The first video is about a group of people who are interviewed before and after getting a DNA test, and how their view point of other cultures is totally changed after they realize they are connected to other parts of the world. Because this course had a budget, students had the opportunity to get their DNA tests done, with a cost of \$100 per test, and the students created videos similar to the one they watched before and after knowing which countries they were connected to.

Also, for this unit, learners watched a Youtube video called “Latinos musulmanes luchan contra los estereotipos y buscan su identidad” (eluniversocom, 2012) which details the increased number of Latinos that become Muslims in the U.S. They had to create their own vocabulary list with words they learned from this video. Then, they had to use those words to write this video’s summary in the TL. One more learning task was to reflect on an article online on myths about Muslims called “Mitos y realidades sobre los musulmanes” (Webislam, 2012). A successful activity for this unit once students had enough vocabulary and knowledge about this topic was to do a role play in pairs. One of the students said a stereotype or myth aloud about Muslims, and the other student responded in the TL with arguments learned in class.

Next, a campus pastor who is in charge of Interfaith groups was invited to talk to students about the importance of respecting everybody’s religion. He also arranged for the class a visit to a mosque in Rock Hill, SC. The class was able to attend the Friday service, and afterwards, the learners were engaged in a conversation with the mosque’s Iman and a second Iman who was the guest speaker that day. Because this visit happened the Friday after the U.S. national elections on November 8, 2016, the service’s message was focused on the importance of opening their mosque to different people to make the point of Islam being a peaceful religion.

This unit, like the ones described above, focused on connecting social justice with the new World-Readiness Cultures Standards and 21st century skills (ACTFL, 2015) because the Muslim religion, their practices, and ideology were studied and analyzed. Additionally, one of the Civic Learning Outcomes obtained from these activities was Civic Literacy. This is connected with being socially aware and becoming knowledgeable and conversant about pressing issues facing society today, such as respecting different cultures and religions and more specifically, fighting Muslim stereotypes. One student commented about the trip to the mosque:

My classmates and I also had the fantastic opportunity to visit a mosque in Rock Hill, South Carolina... I was tremendously skeptical going into this situation as I did not know what to expect. This is because the media personifies many terrorists as being of Islamic faith... This opportunity enabled me to be a more socially conscious person as I learned to look past stereotypes that are portrayed throughout society and the media.

Pedagogical Implications

Some of the different assessments conducted during this course, formative reflections about individual events or texts, and the final self-reflection summative assignment reflect one or more of the four components that Glynn, Wesely and Wassell (2014) said that Sonia Nieto saw as being part of a social justice education. The first component is that the unit “challenges, confronts and disrupts misconceptions, untruths and stereotypes that lead to structural inequality and discrimination based on social and human differences” (Glynn, Wesely & Wassell, 2014, p. 1). Most students agreed that learning about these different topics changed their perception. A student in her summative self-reflection mentioned:

The program involved interactive activities such as visiting the mosque in Rock Hill, as well as watching news clips about relevant conflicts such

as illegal immigration and poverty. Through these exercises and experiences, I have seen a change in my perspective of the world, acquired higher level of Spanish-speaking skills, and gained an increased ability to show empathy.

The second component for social justice education to happen is that the course “provides all students with the resources necessary to learn to their full potential, including both material and emotional resources” (Glynn, Wesely & Wassell, 2014, p. 1). The fact that this course was part of a LLC and that students share the same dorm and two classes together was ideal for them to feel close very soon at the beginning of the semester. Furthermore, with the NCBI workshop and other activities mentioned above that promote understanding and community, students most probably felt that they were in a safe place and they could express themselves.

The third component is “to draw talents and strengths that students bring to their education.” (Glynn, Wesely & Wassell, 2014, p. 2). To this point one student commented about her experience on the “Halloween Day” described above and she stated:

I also really liked participating in the Halloween Festival and working with the children. I spent most of last year teaching Spanish to pre-schoolers, so this activity came really easy to me. I'm also glad that I got to teach the kids my “Movement” song because I knew they would like it, and they did.

This specific student was happy to be able to share her knowledge teaching Spanish to children.

The four components mentioned by the authors is that the classroom “creates a learning environment that promotes critical thinking and agency for social change” (Glynn, Wesely & Wassell, 2014, p. 2). Some students in this course wrote letters to their politicians, met with their aids and expressed their willingness for social change. Besides, one student commented about the author of the play, “The Volunteer”, “*she was a great speaker and I would love to go to the prisons and volunteer like she has done. She has inspired me.*”

Conclusion

The four units explained in this paper, along with the NCBI workshop, were taught to reinforce 21st Century Skills such as global awareness, civic literacy, communication, collaboration, creativity, information, media and technology literacy, initiative and self-direction, leadership and responsibility, and tie them to social justice issues. Although social consciousness is not listed as a 21st Century Skill, it is an important part of understanding society, as people are not always aware of injustices, prejudices, or stereotypes that are so ingrained in society that they are seen as “normal.” For social justice to happen in the classroom or anywhere, an awareness of the issue needs to happen first. Thus, empathy is a component added to each unit, as empathy is an essential element to target social justice. One needs to be able to feel and understand others’ emotions and situations to be moved to act against injustice. Regarding empathy, Gardner and Goleman (2008) stated that to be a good leader, the

most important thing a person needs is to be empathetic. There are psychologists, such as Krznaric, author of *Empathy: Why It Matters, and How to Get It* (2014), who are of the opinion that empathy can be taught.

In these pages, it has been suggested how all four units connected the new World-Readiness Cultures Standards and social justice. In addition, they also shared the commonalities explained above between Freire and the 21st Century Skills Map. Learners had to research information about each topic at the beginning of each unit and share it with the professor and classmates. This learning task contributed to reciprocal teaching and learning where the professor was a collaborator that guided the learning of the students, with everybody involved learning from each other. This very activity also promoted critical thinking, which is one of the skills promoted by Freire and the 21st Century Skills Map. Students in the LLC were required to reflect on stereotypes and analyze topics they did not know much about such as female inmates in the U.S., living with disabilities, or the Muslim religion, among others. Similarly, taking initiative, information, and media literacy and technology literacy with the use of infographics were skills targeted with this learning task and some others. By having the learners in charge of much of the information taught in these units, creativity and innovation, two other commonalities between Freire and the 21st Century Skills Map (ACTFL, 2011), were promoted. One specific example of this is the learning task for which they had to ‘create’ a company that employed people with disabilities. The use of authentic resources promoted by both Freire and the 21st Century Skills Map happened with all the activities learners were involved.

Engaging language learners in various events in the school and community fosters real world learning and grounds theory into practice. It is important for educators to check their school’s calendars before the semester starts to plan ahead for tasks and activities that connect learners with the community. For this course, some of the tasks the class did were based on events that were already happening in the community, such as the play “The Volunteer,” (Landis, forthcoming) or the “Halloween Day” celebration.

We, as language and culture educators, are in a key position to make a difference in the world, one course and one student at a time. We should not underestimate or underuse this opportunity or responsibility to make our world better.

End Notes

¹ This news clip and others described in this manuscript were found by some of the author’s colleagues, such as the current Spanish coordinator and the previous one. They are sometimes used in the Spanish curriculum of the institution.

² Elsa Punset is a writer and a philosopher. She has many videos online that are very useful as authentic resources on the topic of personal development.

³ An example of a cooperative game is the “musical chairs,” in which instead of eliminating children, chairs are eliminated and children need to share the chairs once the music stops.

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