



Including Social Justice in an Intermediate Spanish Course Using Two Articles from Mario Vargas Llosa

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Abstract

Social Justice is a crucial topic to be discussed in World Language classrooms, not just in order to use the target language via relevant and fascinating contexts, but also as a tool to give students the opportunity of applying critical thinking. The learning outcome, therefore, and -from a cultural-responsive teaching perspective- would be not only preparing students to improve their four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing using realia, but giving students the possibility to enhance their sense of social responsibility, and social justice. The ideal learning outcome would be to guide students to be global citizens, ones that will feel compelled to be involved in trying to make better our contemporary, and often turbulent world. I argue, that the Spanish 201 course: Intermediate Spanish I, is the perfect linguistic milieu to share through the cultural themes of the course, many important elements of social justice, and discussed them with students. I consider that two journalist articles written by Mario Vargas Llosa (2010 Nobel Prize Winner of Literature): "The Immigrants" and "Fataumata's Feet" are quite effective and linguistic appropriated for the students to engage them in fruitful debates and passionate discussions.

Keywords: *Social Justice- Mario Vargas Llosa- Immigration*

1. Introduction

We will start by defining the concept of "Social Justice", then a brief description of the Spanish 201 course, follow by a general information of Mario Vargas Llosa, and his relevance in the Hispanic Literature. We will give a brief summary of the two journalistic articles wrote by Mario Vargas Llosa: "The Immigrants" (1996), and "Fataumata's Feet" (1999), next we will comment in the ways these two articles will be integrated in the Spanish 201 course, and finally we will share a conclusion.

2. Social Justice

According to the definition of United Nations, "Social justice may be broadly understood as the fair and compassionate distribution of the fruits of economic growth."

The National Association of Social Workers defines social justice this way: "Social justice is the view that everyone deserves equal economic, political and social rights and opportunities. Social workers aim to open the doors of access and opportunity for everyone, particularly those in greatest need."

Finally, the Center for Economic and Social Justice has the following definition: "Social Justice encompasses economic justice. Social justice is the virtue which guides us in creating those organized human interactions we call institutions. In turn, social institutions, when justly organized, provide us with access to what is good for the person, both individually and in our associations with others. Social justice also imposes on each of us a personal responsibility to work with others to design and continually perfect our institutions as tools for personal and social development."

3. Spanish 201 Course



Spanish 201, is an intermediate I course, the third one after Elementary Spanish I, and Elementary Spanish II. This course consists in an intensive review of basic Spanish grammar directed at building fluency and proficiency in oral and written Spanish while learning more about relevant Hispanic culture topics. The prerequisite for Spanish 201 is Spanish 102, or two years of high school Spanish, or the equivalent. Spanish 201 carries 3 credits.

Upon completion of Spanish 201, students will be able to communicate in the target language at an intermediate level in the skill areas of reading, writing, speaking, and listening. They will be able to apply advanced grammatical structures, such as complex verb forms, that support communication at the intermediate level of proficiency.

4. Mario Vargas Llosa

MVLI is a prolific Peruvian writer, essayist, journalist, politician, and university professor. He wrote nineteen novels, three books of short-stories, twenty-four books of non-fiction (including *The Language of Passion*, 2001, where the two journalist articles that we are referring to are included). Mario Vargas Llosa is a brilliant author whose texts have been translated into several languages. For his books he received multiple and well-deserved recognitions including, among the most prestigious ones: in 1967 the Rómulo Gallegos Prize, in 1986 the Prince of Asturias Award, in 1994 the Miguel de Cervantes Prize, in 1995 the Jerusalem Prize, in 2012 the Carlos Fuentes International Prize, in 2018, the Pablo Neruda Order of Artistic and Cultural Merit. In 2010, Mario Vargas Llosa got as well the most important of all the literary awards: the Nobel Prize of Literature, “for his cartography of structures of power and his trenchant images of the individual’s resistance, revolt, and defeat.” As listed in the page of the Nobel Prize Organization.

5. “The Immigrants”

This journalistic article was written in 1996, for the column: “Piedra de toque”, in the Spanish newspaper, El País. Vargas Llosa, shares in this emblematic article his views about the polemical topic of immigration, and he does it from a perspective of solidarity and ethical responsibility. Vargas Llosa narrates the life of several immigrants from different countries and their struggles to first get to their new country, then to establish themselves, and then bring their families there. Vargas Llosa is in favor of immigration and supports it as a crucial human right to look for a better life. Vargas Llosa believes that immigrants are an “injection of life, energy, and culture”, and therefore immigrants should be welcome in all countries.

6. “Fataumata’s Feet”

This article was written in 1999 for the same column: “Piedra de toque”, in the Spanish newspaper, El País. In this article Vargas Llosa uses the clever metaphor of the feet of an African immigrant, from Gambia, whose house in Barcelona, Spain, was vandalized by teenagers. Vargas Llosa uses the metaphor of Fataumata’s to illustrates how many and incommensurable hardships and challenges, immigrants encounter when they are making their path to a better future. Definitely, Vargas Llosa wrote this article from the point of view of solidarity and human compassion.

7. Integrating Social Justice Activities in Spanish 201

Students will have the opportunity to watch in class a video of an interview of Vargas Llosa about his views in immigration. This way they will have the chance to practice their listening skills, and will start thinking in the topic. Students will do a close reading of the articles in class, practicing then their reading skills, and later on, their speaking skills, as soon as they are placed in groups to discuss the articles while using their critical thinking skills, and enhancing their intermediate Spanish vocabulary.



Students will be divided in groups of four to discuss the topic of immigration using these two articles. In each group, students will be either in favor of immigration, against it, or totally neutral. Students will make a poster graphically representing the perspective of the group about the topic of immigration.

After they present in class their posters, students will work in their same groups to prepare a debate which will have the same three possibilities of the posters: in favor, against, or neutral. In the debate students will have the opportunity to practice besides their critical thinking skills, their oral skills. As a final assignment, students will work individually to write a composition where they will express their real view on immigration, rather than the one given to their group. By writing their compositions, students will be able to enhance their vocabulary and practice their writing skills.

8. Conclusions

We are convinced that students will benefit a great deal by being able to interact, in several ways, with authentic materials (realia) of a high caliber. In fact, by reading and analyzing these two journalistic articles: "The Immigrants" (1996), and "Fataumata's Feet" (1999) where Vargas Llosa expressed in a clear manner, and in a beautiful fashion his perspective on immigration, students will learn a lot. Vargas Llosa's articles are well-informed, and extremely well-written. Since the level of Spanish proficiency of the intermediate I students is good enough to understand the two articles, students will lower their affective filter by feeling really confident as they were able to read, understand, debate, and even write about a high polemic topic based in two journalistic articles written by a Nobel Prize of Literature.

In a perfect world, the hope would be that students will feel inclined to use more often their critical skills, and will try, not only to read more texts by Mario Vargas Llosa, but also to become global citizens.

References

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