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Approaches to Teaching Latin American Culture through Film: Children's Plight in Poverty- and Violence-Ridden Countries

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Abstract

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Keywords

Innocent Voices, The Devil's Miner, first-year Spanish, intercultural competence, beginner foreign language

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Students at the beginning levels of foreign language study have many borders to cross and many challenges to negotiate. This paper reports the results of a preliminary study involving the use of full-length films to engender intercultural sensitivity and understanding among two groups of first-year students of Spanish. Both films depict hardships of children in Spanish-speaking countries—as a result of conscription or as a result of child labor. The paper discusses the contextualization of the films for the students, the students' responses to questionnaires, portions of classroom discussion that indicate growth in the areas of focus, and implications of the study for curriculum and instruction. The study confirms the usefulness of authentic video for first-year Spanish students at the college level.

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1. Introduction: Beyond the Tourists' View:

Absolute beginners in a foreign language class may feel as though they have crossed multiple borders at once. Depending on many individual factors (such as motivation and background), they may find the linguistic border overwhelming to such a point that they are unable to consider sociological, political, geographical, or other types of borders. Yet, well-chosen segments of well-chosen films become accessible and powerful tools in providing visual, aural, and textual input in order to engender awareness of elements of culture. Film segments may engage beginning students and help them to absorb better the culture and language of “the

other;” when students build an adequate frame of reference, they may better understand past and present events, transnational interactions, and other aspects of a new culture. Beginning students have the opportunity to cultivate cultural agency as their engagement progresses and their astonishment becomes an incentive for learning.

2. Background:

This study reports the results from applying a combination of pedagogical strategies for the teaching of elements of culture of Latin American countries during the first two semesters of Spanish language instruction at the college level. The materials included excerpts from two films—*Innocent Voices* (2007), a feature film, and a documentary, *The Devil’s Miner* (2005). *Innocent Voices* is set in El Salvador, Central America, and *The Devil’s Miner* depicts conditions in Bolivia, South America.

Although *Innocent Voices* is a feature film and *The Devil’s Miner* is a documentary, the two of them have elements of both genres. Zavala (2012) suggests that the frontiers between genres tend to disappear because of the process during which the subject of the story builds the mechanisms for verisimilitude (p. 19) that an instructor can underscore. The power of both films derives from the fact that they are filmed and narrated from the point of view of the children protagonists. The content of these films offers rich opportunities for multidisciplinary intercultural reflection and discussion. We covered several aspects—historical, social, ethnic, spiritual, and political. The students completed a few short readings; mini-lectures provided further pre-viewing scaffolding, and discussion activities followed. Before presenting the content and characteristics of the target films it is necessary to mention some historical background in order to provide a diachronic base.

2.1 Children as Soldiers:

Innocent Voices (2005), by the Mexican director Luis Mandoki, is a feature film based on historical facts and a true story that depicts a representative situation during the 1980 civil war in rural El Salvador. It presents the victimization of children and adolescents in forced conscription at age 12 by government armed forces to fight in the civil war. Children lose family life and education, but, most of all, they are forced to fight against members of their own communities.

El Salvador, the smallest and most populated country of Central America, had an economy that grew prodigiously in the 19th century

during the coffee boom and produced an elite class of land owners later known as “the 14 families.” These kept their power long after the boom subsided, even into current times. Consequently, most of the population has been excluded from economic benefits and only sporadically has expressed non-conformity or dissent in varying degrees, including guerrilla warfare. The U.S. sided with the elite, based on fear of the threat of communism. The film shows the mid-80s when the US armed forces were backing those of the Salvadoran government against the guerrillas, who were popular in rural areas.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, a symbol of the collapse of communism, the status quo persisted despite the efforts of Oscar Arias, the Nobel Peace Prize winner from Costa Rica. Initiatives of the United Nations resulted in a peace treaty that took two years to be finalized, in 1992.¹ At the time of the peace treaty, Winn (1992) speculated, El Salvador may have been the most polarized country in Latin America. During this 12-year conflict “of incredible ferocity,” approximately 75,000 persons were killed and a million were displaced (p. 527). A powerful illustration of the combination of polarization and repression that produces war is the assassination of one of the most prominent victims of repression, Oscar Romero. Romero, Archbishop of San Salvador, was a strong advocate for the poor and human rights. His assassination while saying mass has been the subject of another feature film. Winn (1992) adds, “The intransigent elite had transformed reformers into revolutionaries and political cadres into guerrillas” (p. 530). Not long after, US citizens were “shocked by the cold-blooded murder of four U.S. women missionaries” (p. 531).

These offenses accompanied frequent violations of human rights; one of the most publicized occurring in November, 1989, when six Jesuit priests were murdered. Public memory has worked to silence discussion of these traumas, and film is an effective way to re-expose them. Ignacio Sánchez Prado, a Mexican film scholar, states that political film must be understood in the prevailing ideological narrowness to appreciate its impact; film serves as a tool “for the formulation of the politics and interests of a movie-going audience that looks to the genre to make sense” (2014, p. 108) of events. Furthermore, he notes the utility of film in helping to create associations between enjoyment and politics: “What is designed to make people feel good at the movies has a profound relation to how and what they think and feel about the world around them . . . a close relationship between affective and ideological engagement” (p. 108). Thus,

¹ Winn (1992) provides detailed information on the events of the period in his *Americas*, a book and series of videos used in classes of history and civilization of Latin America at various institutions of higher learning.

the medium and the method of presentation can help to revive silenced voices and memories.

The principal characters of *Innocent Voices* include Chava, the protagonist, Kella, Ancha, Uncle Beto, mama Toya, and the priest. It was written by the director, Luis Mandoki, and Oscar Orlando Torres who, as a child, endured the experience presented in the film. The action is set in 1986. Roger Ebert reviews the film in his web page beginning with a quote from the eleven-year-old narrator, Chava: “When the war started, dad left for the United States . . . Mom said now I was the man of the house.” Chava is apolitical but supports the guerillas because his uncle is a member. He is afraid of the government because he does not want to be taken into the army: “Men with guns [some of them boys] control the daily lives of the people;” they “have machineguns and fire them recklessly.” Ebert (2005) condemns the adults who perpetrate such acts and policies: “Use of children in this way is a sin against the children and against the future.” Chava’s situation depicts that of thousands of children’s steady track through school and life, only to be interrupted by the war. Chava’s mother struggles to support the family as seamstress. Holden (2005) concisely describes the beginning of the film:

Salvadoran army troops storm into a school in the heart of an impoverished rural out a list of village, bark names and forcibly conscript any boy over 12 into the military. As the dazed, terrified children are herded into the back of a truck and carted away, their stricken parents look on in horrified silence.

The film shows the oppressed in the face of their reduction to the status of undesirables, subject to elimination.

2.2 Children of the Mines:

Violence of a different sort pervades *The Devil’s Miner*, set in the city of Potosí, Bolivia. There, “at 13,400 feet above sea level on a frigid and barren plateau,” sat a silver mountain, “where nothing grew and everything consumed had to be brought in” (Winn, p. 65). The Cerro Rico mountain was mined for its ore, first by the Spanish colonial lords, and, after independence, by their inheritors. All these years, the indigenous population, defeated by 16th century conquerors, has done the mining. The average life span of a miner is 33 years due to the long shifts, forced postures, and general hardships of the unhealthy environment. Historically, mining has been done with scant regard for either ecology or the indigenous people. The circumstances result in many young widows

and orphan children who often become the head of household by starting work in the mines at a young age.

After the first mine began operation in 1545, production grew rapidly to the point that Potosí produced half of the world's silver in 1600.

The Spanish conscripted one out of every seven adult males in sixteen highland provinces to labor in the mines and mills every year. The drafted miners were compelled to endure four months of excessive work in the mines, working twelve hours a day, in the bowels of the earth . . . vision of hell . . . it was no wonder they chewed coca leaves to still their hunger, exhaustion, and pain. (Winn, p. 65)

Silver from the Potosí and other mines in Latin America helped place Europe on the road to the industrial revolution and global empire (Winn, p. 68). By the 17th century, the Potosí mine was nearly depleted, and the city and the surrounding area also declined; however, small scale mining for silver has continued to this day.

Miners were strong supporters when Indian peasants began a revolution in 1951. At that time, few Indians were literate or spoke Spanish as a second language, and even fewer possessed any education or technical skills. Currently, a growing number of Indians—Aymara, Quechua, and Guaraní—are working to revitalize their culture and reaffirm their identity (Winn, p. 251). The country's population is mostly indigenous but "the non-Indian elite has largely ignored its rich pre-Hispanic past" (Winn, p. 254). Thanks to Evo Morales, current president of Bolivia twice reelected, the condition of the majority of the population has begun to change. *The Devil's Miner* was made possible when Morales was campaigning for his first term as the first Indigenous president of Bolivia.

Richards (2006) observes that "several documentaries have appeared since Evo Morales was elected president of Bolivia, some of which are closely linked to political developments." He adds that the film is a "social document that avoids overt political comment," citing the example of Braulio, a foreman in the mine, and how he mentions that historically 8 million people have died in the mines; yet, more than 5,000 indigenous miners work in cooperatives still searching for any remaining minerals.

Catsoulis (2006) comments on the filmmakers' impressive commitment to realism that helps viewers to understand political implications: "Deep in the silver mines of the mountain Cerro Rico, 14-year-old Basilio Vargas and his 12-year-old brother, Bernardino, work 12-hour shifts for about \$2.50 a day dodging explosions, lung-clogging dust,

lethal gases and runaway wagons.” Richards (2006) pays particular attention to Basilio, the child protagonist and gives credit to the filmmakers’ choice of him as the narrator; Basilio had been working in the mines for four years when the documentary appeared. The filmmakers had chosen him carefully, not only for his intelligence and affability, but also because he was articulate and frank: His “equanimity is refreshing . . . transparent [with] emotion in his gaze and voice . . . Basilio is allowed to tell his own story; his tone and delivery comply with the film’s avoidance of sentimentalism.” This casting decision helps to promote interests in the political issues. The political aspect of the film is subterranean, like the mines, but it is strongly implied.

2.3 Strategies and Scaffolding:

The main characters of both films are transitioning between childhood and adulthood, a stage that is recognized as a difficult one, involving physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, and relational experiences. When watching the films, students can relate to these circumstances and to the difficult way in which the characters face this period of growth; they can compare how they face rites of passage towards adult status. This aspect was included in the readings or lectures.

The instructor offered some statistics and other information for a similar purpose. At present, after Honduras, El Salvador stands in fourth place in the world with 41.2 assassinations per 100,000 inhabitants (Martínez, p. 10), a condition that is an outgrowth or inheritance of previous historical circumstances. The situation has become more dangerous, with violent gangs that fight for the territory of their business and force people to leave, not merely their neighborhood, but their country.

Students completed additional contextualizing readings and mini-lectures on the subject of child labor. Guerrero Flores (2015) cites figures from the International Labor Office, reporting that 18 million children between the ages of 5 and 17 are active workers in Latin America. This situation relates directly to family concerns, poverty, social environment, education, health and the law (my translation of p. 20). Often, working children, interrupt their education; labor interferes with their natural growth, and when prolonged, harms the physical, cognitive, and psychological development of the child (Guerrero Flores, 2015).

Aspects of filmmaking, screenwriting, directing, cinematography, sound, music, and an aesthetic system of images to which the eye is sensitive served students during the screenings, but the instructor was responsible for creating the scaffolding to cross borders with the student

audience. The films were, as Venegas (2012) puts it, outside students' "familiar environments of consumption" (p. 103). This underscored the importance of building bridges and leading students toward accepting that there are different ways of seeing, that countries are structured differently from the one they live in, with differences such as child labor, child conscription, migration, myths, regard for the image of the devil, dictatorial, political systems, a history of colonization, revolutionary movements, ethnic differences, activism of indigenous groups, exclusion, and racism.² All of them are present in the history of Latin American countries, and, although all of them deserve attention in higher education, constraints on time necessitated a more limited focus on the major issues of the film. Venegas (2012) also recognizes the need to develop "discipline-specific methods and terminology," (p. 103) and training for depth of analysis. She underscores the identification of key films that "provide students with a frame of reference for understanding transborder productions" (p. 104).

Zavala's (2012) notion on the cinematographic point of view offers a possibility for the instructor who focuses this element towards the construction of the implicit spectator as a strategy of narrative seduction (my translation, p. 15). Zavala (2012) observes the impact on the viewer of both the camera's point of view, and that of the characters, including the intradiegetic narrator. The instructor used these devices for teaching purposes; the same is true for other technical elements of film.

Current film formats presented more possibilities for engaging viewers. Traditionally, spectators saw movies for distraction, stimulation, or other purposes; they watched a closed, contained piece of art of a single author, and a passive viewer, and the space of the event was a movie theater. Reyes (2012) observes the current diversity of formats, uses, and purposes of film, noting that digital technology has modified reception, access, and consumption. Tools allow film to be interactive, and there has been an ongoing transition from collective consumption in the movie theater, to semi-collective consumption at home and institutions, and to a hyperindividual, non-regulated, non-synchronized product that allows each person to watch when and where it is best suited for them (my translation Reyes p. 44); and viewers can do it individually or semi-collectively. With the transition from analog to digital format, students now can observe segments of film in class and continue to watch through a variety of venues at home, at a library, or otherwise. Teaching methods

² The instructor encouraged History majors in these beginning level classes to explore U.S. history and to find comparable elements.

evolve with technology, and the corresponding adaptations needed to be implemented.

Bueno (2009) points out the importance of “challenging students’ imaginations while helping them consider alternative ways of seeing, feeling and understanding things” (p. 319) as they acquire transcultural competence and “gain insights into the products, practice, and perspectives of the target culture” (p. 321). Some of her approaches to facilitated students’ engagement, including contextualization practices in-and-out-of-class, discussion, and presentations. Other devices (which lack of time prohibited) include role playing, tasks, skit-writing, presentations, and individualized control over difficult elements of videos, as well as an overall design of the course to “promote translanguingual and transcultural competence” (p. 323-326).

3. Methodology:

3.1 Population:

Students’ enrollment in the first and second semesters of beginning Spanish is as diverse as it might possibly be. Ours is an urban public institution, with a student body that ranges from age 15 to 85, all along the socioeconomic spectrum. Students take Spanish classes during 15-week semesters, and class size ranges from 7-27 students per section. Most of students in Spanish classes are at novice low³ level in the subject, and most are absolute beginners. Their view of the world is limited to the United States, and, many times, does not extend beyond their neighborhood, let alone their city. Some students have a few notions of the countries of their ancestors. For these two classes, the enrollment was 10 (6 females, 4 males) for Spanish 101 and, for Spanish 102, 8 (6 females, 2 males) students. Students do not provide information to instructors about demographics, including their age, except voluntarily, in informal conversation.

3.2 Curriculum:

Two major course goals were providing authentic linguistic input and helping to build foundations for well-developed global citizens.⁴ It also

³ Levels as described by *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines*. For further information on proficiency levels and guidelines, the ACTFL website at www.actfl.org provides documents.

⁴ Course goals are derived from common syllabi for these levels. The syllabi are aligned with the State of Ohio Transfer Assurance Guide (TAG) requirements for public universities and focus on outcomes linked to proficiency levels developed American Council of Teaching Foreign Language (ACTFL). For further information on TAGs, please consult www.ohiohighered.org

seemed helpful to incorporate films relevant to the content of cultural components of the textbook (in this case, *Nexos* by Spaine Long et al., 2015), which contains text, audio, and video segments for the teaching of culture of all Spanish speaking countries, including areas of the United States. This study describes the incorporation of films, partially shown in class, spoken in Spanish with English subtitles. They supplement the cultural material in corresponding chapters in the textbook. These are on El Salvador for course SPN 101, and Bolivia for course SPN 102. The textbook contained the overall supporting cultural reading that students completed in preparation for the screenings, and students could complete suggested readings for extra points. Readings and instructor mini-lectures included historical, ethnic, political, economic, religious, and general cultural information on topics that the film amplified with the human aspects. This delivery sensitized students and helped many of them connect better with the content.

3.3 Data:

The students filled in a pre-viewing questionnaire in which they stated their expectations of the film; this was intended to help open their minds to receive the information. (Please note that both this questionnaire and the post-viewing questionnaire are included in an earlier section of this issue.) Post-viewing, a second, more detailed, questionnaire offered insight into the degree to which the minds and hearts of students had been affected, and on the effectiveness of the film as a pedagogical device. The second questionnaire not only revealed the degree of cultural understanding gained of the particular text chapter and country studied, but it also offered implicit suggestions for improvement and tune-up for future applications.

In some classes, a few students, mainly those whose parents are immigrants, or those who had studied or traveled abroad, displayed some intercultural competence (not necessarily Intercultural Communicative Competence) to various degrees. These students were an invaluable source as models in the classroom; they contributed input to obtain more positive results at the end of a term. At the beginning of a course, an identification of the characteristics of each individual student was helpful because several students easily became culturally literate and helped to raise the low or non-existent initial expectations of the group. This approach, in combination with choice screenings, was effective in improving intercultural competence. Although immersion in another culture may promote optimum results, it is not always possible for many students. The instructor circumvented the limitations of the classroom by encouraging

students to attend meetings of the Spanish program's cultural club and community events, as well as extra credit for writing a review of a film or a television or radio program, and by assigning reports on current events of Spanish speaking countries.

4. Results and Discussion:

The results of the questionnaires collected from students have been collapsed, that is, combined, because of the small size. The information obtained from students in the survey, prior to the movie screening, revealed that they rarely or never see foreign films. Fewer students saw the target film for personal growth as opposed to the rest that watched for class requirement. Most of them rate their cultural acquaintance with "the other" in contrast with that of the U.S. as fair, leaning more toward poor. Some examples of the responses to an open-ended question of expectations included the following: Learning about oppression of my ancestors; see events of the period in context; see more about what I had heard as a child; watching the film will help me develop listening skills; as a history and education major I expect to see the prevailing conditions of children's labor; and I need to build a foundation to study Bolivia in class.

These responses divided themselves into three general categories: Heritage, linguistic, and utilitarian/educational goals. It was edifying to see that students were applying course and cultural content to their chosen areas of study, beyond the Spanish course. Further, all students who responded (6 in 101 and 5 in 102) listed some purpose for viewing.

Some of the responses on the post-viewing of both movies revealed that an average of 75% considered the films as very interesting. Students tended to disagree that there are similarities in the social, political and economic conditions of the target countries and the U.S. With *Innocent Voices* most students agreed that the religious beliefs presented were not shocking, which differed from the responses of viewers of *The Devil's Miner* where students found these beliefs to be shocking. For *Innocent Voices* all students agreed that the presentation of violence is shocking; students were divided in their responses on the perception of the political systems of both countries. They see the countries as very different from the U.S. Students tended to agree that the topics are comparable with at least one film of the U.S.; all but one of them agreed that they would recommend the film to others.

The additional comments at the end of the survey for *Innocent Voices* included: I will watch it again; eye opener; sad and intense; hard to believe; good films like this should be part of the curriculum. For The

Devil's Miner: Amazing film, very informative, we need to see films like this, people need education to reach their potential.

An additional pre-viewing activity was discussion in groups of three students based on the statistical and general information on the target countries given in the textbook. Then, after viewing, students practiced connections with the previous information, offering their own impressions, including discussion of similarities and differences among the two target countries and the United States. Critical thinking and problem-solving questions included asking for proposals on how to promote child labor laws, how to rehabilitate child soldiers, how to approach legislators in this country regarding policies that affect children in this country and in Spanish-speaking countries, what one can do as an individual, and next steps.

Informal assessment of intercultural knowledge revealed that the motivation of students was initially low for learning more in-depth information about other cultures, mainly because the course is a required one. However, with the motivational force of the films, the students observably raised their interest, some temporarily, at least until the next screening, and probably permanently for a few of them. Continued film viewing could encourage long-term or ongoing student interest.

The cultural aspects to which students were most demonstrably able to relate were the way in which children become adults at an early age in some cultures, especially when facing extreme circumstances. When students saw how the characters had to face such hardships, they reported that they became aware of the importance that these countries give to education. They said that they saw the value individuals put on family ties; they discussed their realization of the kind of social, economic, and political struggles that characters endured, including emigration. Junior and senior students were able to comment on comparable conditions in the U.S., and freshman and sophomore students listened attentively. During small-group discussion the upperclassmen were able to state criticism of their own culture and of the one viewed in the film. The experience of the screening did not produce rejection, objection, or indifference; it was generally accepted without signs of ethnocentrism. Students became aware of differences, accepted them, and wanted to learn more. Time constraints did not allow further discussion on conflicts such as recent immigration of Salvadoran children to the U.S. Students did not focus upon the issue because, after watching the film, they indicated that they understood the kind of forces that push immigrants to take so many well-known risks during the immigration process, such as climbing on top of cargo trains for transportation through Mexico, and finding their way into the United States with a *coyote* that may not be reliable.

In general, the results of responses to questionnaires and the content of discussion indicated that the cultural content of the textbook had become dimensional for the students, rather than a series of tables and paragraphs in the textbook, or a short tourist video. Responses of most students indicated that they had made an initial crossing into intercultural understanding.

This study is imbued with common limitations. The number of participants is small, and data are based on the fact that they took part in course activities (for which they were not penalized if they chose not to be included). The study has not yet been repeated, although it is replicable. However, it contributes to our understanding of the potential of film to impact beginning college-level students' attitudes, insights, and newly awakened intercultural sensitivity. Wisely chosen portions of films that students can manage at the Novice levels and that are scaffolded before, during, and after viewing did affect learners' intercultural competencies.

The implications of the study are significant for beginning level programs in many aspects at the curricular and the instructional levels. Student responses implied that, if and when possible, more clips should be incorporated throughout the chapters. Other instructors of the beginning sections reviewed these results and agreed to seek appropriate clips for additional cultural topics, but this is a temporary measure, while the program reviews next steps.

To enrich the textbook material, instructors in this program have customarily incorporated authentic⁵, meaningful materials that also reflect aspects of the target culture. In addition, we practice ongoing assessment that is integrated into instruction. These are aspects of the Integrated Performance Assessment model developed by American Council of Teaching Foreign Language (ACTFL).⁶ Of course, film clips and links to short videos are available with our textbook and other textbook programs. These sometimes serve as a resource for instructors who have time

⁵Authentic materials are considered to be those that the actual speakers of the target language and target culture use in their everyday lives. Actual speakers of the target language and target culture prepare them (in contrast to materials that teachers of the target language or textbook publishers prepare). C. Polio (2014) writes more in her article "Using Authentic Materials in the Beginning Language Classroom," *CLEAR News*, 18(1), p. 1-4; or, see J. Weyers's (1999) article, "The Effect of Authentic Video on Communicative Competence," *Modern Language Journal*, 83(3), 350-366.

⁶ Integrated Performance Assessment (IPA) is a model of assessment for classroom use and combines ongoing assessment of students' language in the communicative modes described in the 1996/1999 *National Standards for Foreign Language Learning* by ACTFL. These communicative modes are the Interpersonal, Interpretive, and the Presentational. For further details, please see B. Adair-Hauck, E. W. Glisan, and F. J. Troyan. (2013). *Implementing Integrated Performance Assessment*. Alexandria, VA: ACTFL, or www.actfl.org

constraints or who feel less confident in choosing appropriate segments for class use (or entire films for outside assignments). Because the results of this preliminary study indicate that the use of film can aid in heightening motivation, engagement, and even, possibly, retention, we are discussing further ways to integrate the use of these powerful cultural artifacts into already overfull syllabi. To succeed in doing so increases the potential for recruitment and retention in beginning level classes but implies a reconfiguration of course objectives, not only to affirm the conscious and systematic integration of the cultural component, but also to sustain focus on the necessity of organic and dynamic instruction for students at this beginning level.

One strategy seems to be to be the a more effective pedagogical exploitation of the films. In addition to encouraging exploration, reflection, and discussion of cultural aspects during and outside of class, we can consider the combination of linguistic practice with some element of the film. That is, practice with vocabulary, semantic, and grammatical elements can be drawn from current or past chapters. In addition, interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational tasks associated with the chapter can be reframed to focus on the films, and aspect of the culture upon which they focus, and/or issues and themes. For example, at the very beginning of study, in a unit on the family, students could introduce the a character in the film, orally, in an email to the instructor, or in a written paragraph.

The implications thus offer many possibilities for revitalizing curriculum and instruction. Further research on these revitalizations would be a contribution to the field. In addition, replication of this preliminary study, using the questionnaires, will provide guidance in curricular and instructional modifications. Also, even though the results of the study suggest that the use of these two films helped many to students embark upon the preliminary stages of development of Intercultural Communicative Competence, we can focus on systematic assessment, particularly at this baseline level.

5. Conclusion:

Incorporating feature film segments viewed in class and completed outside of class greatly expanded pedagogical possibilities. Careful selection and handling of films produced a classroom atmosphere that promoted the students' engagement in the cultures of others. The cultural base that students acquired prepared them to integrate information and insights in other courses. Students showed that they can expand their intercultural understanding and competence in the academic setting and

in their professional life, helping to make them potentially good decision-makers in multicultural issues, and building on 21st Century skills. More research continues to develop fresh approaches to teaching culture in language courses to build and maintain intercultural literacy; undoubtedly, one is film.

Instructors who have high levels of intercultural competence can make an impact in helping students connect real-world topics with what they study. These connections, according to Spaine Long et al. (2015), help to strengthen communications skills and encourage continued exploration of culture through films that expose them to authentic language use. These linguistic and cultural advantages help students to connect to one another and the world, to compare their own culture with that of the other, and to begin to communicate better, in their own language and in the target language.

In describing the advantages of integrating film into instruction, Sealey (2008) notes that film, along with the combination of the individual teaching style of each instructor and the teaching objectives of a lesson plan “can add visual and intellectual rigor unparalleled by other modes of expression” (p. 7). This type of rigor is particularly important in Novice-level courses, in which learners struggle to interpret and use modes of expression as they gain insight into the cultures that integrate these modes. The use of film as a sophisticated language of engagement can help to reframe understanding of past and contemporary issues, making them seem relevant to students who may feel that they are pushed across borders that seem unpassable.

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