

Excerpts from student Discussion Participation Portfolio entries

a. *Appreciating Ambiguity and Complexity.* Becoming comfortable with ambiguity is usually one of my pedagogical goals that students frequently fail to appreciate or even understand. Having a prompt that targeted this particular aspect of learning helped me help them come to value ambiguity and see it as part of learning experience. Many times students wrote entries using this prompt, expressing their initial fears about reading the first lengthy text in Spanish, or understanding an already complex text that they had to read in a foreign language. They wrote that they came to “gain appreciation for the ambiguity and complexity of the story line,” or that “ambiguity may be part of the overall fantasy and mystery of the novel,” or realize that “the conversation (in class) ended more ambiguously because there is no real conclusion that we can say from the text.”

b. Students also wrote about developing collaborative learning practices, becoming more aware of others and also becoming more open to sharing their thoughts in class.
“Some of my classmates shared stories that were very personal and it allowed me to get to know them even more. For example, my friend *** spoke about the conflict she experiences between her public and personal life, and *** shared the experience of being the first generation of attending college. I now understand my colleagues better and this makes the whole classroom environment more comfortable.”

“Although there were parts of the movie that I was unable to understand because the characters spoke very fast, it was helpful to be able to debrief with classmates and go over the main points. I didn’t catch on to some of the religious references and after hearing different perspectives from my classmates I was able to fully understand the overall point of the movie.”

“This week we did our presentations of our “autorretratos,” which was extremely interesting to see how people perceive themselves and how they chose to express themselves to the class. I enjoyed learning about my classmates while also being able to express myself. I think that this connects to my life because I need to work on becoming more aware of others and how they choose to express themselves because often times it goes unnoticed or unappreciated. I realized this through being required to listen to others present themselves to the class. I also noticed that often times people are a mixture of different experiences and aspects.”

c. *Hunting assumptions and Broadening Understanding and Empathy.*

“I think that our discussion of “La noche boca arriba” was very interesting and definitely fostered the critical thinking skills that we’re trying to accomplish with the class goals. At the beginning of class I think we were ‘hunting assumptions’ because the class was split on what we all believed was true reality and what was the dream. Our analysis of the story was based on these preconceptions and I think as people began to explain the basis for their own interpretation of the story others challenged their own. Personally I thought that the Moteca storyline was the truth because of detail that was given and never thought that “the city” was reality but when people explained their reasoning I totally saw where they were coming from! I think when we talked about the background/historic info of Cortázar story we were ‘broadening understanding and empathy’ because I definitely feel like learning about the political history of Argentina made the story more relatable and relevant and not only did it help me understand the story but vice versa i.e. the story and the way Cortázar was describing the city vs. the jungle gave me a new perspective on the history.”

"I appreciate how the movie is realistic and doesn't show an ideal happy ending. But it left me with a very grim perspective of the world. Is there any reason why some people are born to wealth in free countries and others are not? Is there any way to break out of the cycle of poverty? I don't know the answers to these questions, but I wish I did so I could do more to fix them."

"Our discussion about boundaries and barriers of land also made me want to act differently outside the classroom. I agreed with the points made in class, that all of my classmates and I thought that it does not matter if there are boundaries because there will always be cultural mixes of people if some boundaries are eliminated. However, my teacher in relation to John Lennon's song "Imagine" tried to explain that people should be able to freely live in different countries internationally. This idea made me want to act more positively outside the classroom towards this ideology. It was saddening to come to the realization in class that some people are naturally given privileges and others are born into ideas of inequality. I think that if we, as a society, think we can come to form a better world because all humans share it, then we need to make it easier for citizens to be given opportunities to immigrate legally. I was surprised that everyone in the class had an opposing view to my teacher and it made me wonder what in my life has helped form my philosophy about immigration."

"For example, before watching this movie I hadn't thought much about how much of an ongoing, and lifelong process and experience being an immigrant is."

"I never really heard about all they went through to get our family to where we are now, but the film made me curious. Mere minutes after I finished watching the film, I called my parents and asked them what it was like to completely uproot their lives and move to a different country."

"*Adralén* by Miguelanxo Prado is the first graphic novel I've read and it is a very different experience. I had never thought to read a graphic novel in English because, for some reason, I have always associated graphic novels with people who do not like to read. When I first think of graphic novels, I typically think that only people who are too lazy to read "real" novels read them. But after starting *Ardalén*, I have had a change of heart."

d. *Students' comments about discussion-based pedagogy.*

"For the first time ever I truly felt like I was not necessarily learning Spanish, but rather applying my Spanish to everyday activities."

"Our discussion of *También la lluvia* was interesting and I especially liked how I am noticing that I find both myself and other class members improving in our ability to communicate our thoughts."

"I was able to talk about my conversation with Anateresa and answer any of the questions my classmates had. It is exciting to think that my ability to speak in Spanish is increasing, and I can communicate with other people in a different language."

"I am more confident in class, which I believe is showing as I am speaking up more with questions and ideas that I have about certain topics. One issue that I have is that when I speak Spanish I have a French accent because French is my first language, which makes it hard sometimes for my classmates to understand what I am saying, but I believe that they understand more and more what I am saying in Spanish class."