

MICHEL

So, yes, this course is-- the core of it is discussions. And in order for the course to be

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successful, we have to be able to discuss very delicate, personal issues in a very safe way and to be honest. It cannot be that students are afraid to reveal their positions on various topics including race, language, identity. And one way to do it is to, given that I had at the very beginning of the course, I had the questionnaires about where they came from, what languages they spoke, where they grew up, I was able to use that to trigger discussions.

So if we read a text about authenticity, for example, if you are an African, can you be an authentic writer if you write in English, for example? Then I knew that some of the students had dealt with this issue. For example, we had a student who, although she was Black and Hispanic, but she wasn't very fluent in Spanish. And she wasn't clear whether her not being fluent in Spanish made her any less Hispanic. You see, so I could-- I was able to use that in order to trigger a discussion around this notion that we had read in the famous debate between Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiong'o about African writers. Can an African-- can a writer be authentically African if they write in English or French for that matter?

So that was one way to trigger rich discussion, by taking a text that connected to these issues and making it personal. So the motto there was rich discussions are best arrived at if they stem from a personal basis where students are invested in trying to find an answer that can work for them in their personal lives. Or in the lives of their families, their communities, their countries, etc. So that was the one key technique.

And then, there was another condition for it, to have these discussions. It's to have mutual respect and trust. Because, in these questions, there cannot be a right and wrong answer. So it is based on your own level of comfort, what, you know, choices you've made your personal life, for your identity. And we have to be able to accept different opinions. But sometimes, that was not easy.

Because they were, like in the class, there was another student who spoke Spanish fluently and will view himself as Hispanic. And there was another student who didn't speak Spanish so fluently, who also view herself as Hispanic. So right there, there was a potential for who was more Hispanic, you see. But yet, they are both Hispanic in their own ways, you see.

And this is where the debate gets very interesting. How do you define being Hispanic? And

then we are back to that very core question. Who belongs? Who doesn't belong? And this is where, again, language and identity become tools for either inclusion or exclusion. And since the course is eventually about inclusion, then how can we use these different identities to create a space where one can have a sum that's much larger than the parts, you see.