Exploring Maghrebi Literature Through the Lens of Active Learning Practices

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Traditionally, Francophone Literature course objectives include reading, comprehending, and analyzing contemporary literary works in French at an Advanced-low level as defined by ACTFL. They also comprise writing coherent analyses of literary and cultural topics informed by substantive research and critical thinking which demonstrate relevant use of textual evidence and documentation. The corpus usually centers around a coherent theme that can be found in each of the selected novels. Typical assignments consist of reading several dozen pages per week, the content of which is discussed in class with the help of prompts. At the end of the semester students might be asked to write a ten-page research paper, which also includes an appropriately annotated bibliography. This model has been used for years and, while it has its appeal, it might not address our students' plurality of learning styles and needs. Numerous scholars in the field of pedagogy have demonstrated that a shift away from the instructor-centered model and towards embracing active learning practices has significant impact on both learning of specific content and the development of collateral competencies. Such is the case of the Process-Oriented Guided Inquiry Learning (POGIL) method, whose promoters describe it as "A student-centered learning philosophy built upon the learning cycle and constructivist theories, which view learning as something that students construct rather than receive from a faculty member" (Murray 12). Those who describe this method emphasize that "In addition to content, POGIL activities and classrooms are intentionally designed to build certain process skills, also called soft skills, that include management, communication, teamwork, problem solving, information processing, critical thinking, and metacognition" (13).

In this article, I am applying evidence-based active learning approaches to the study of contemporary Maghrebi Literature, derived from my experience in two advanced Francophone literature courses, as well as my reflections on previous experiences with teaching literature. The corpus of works I will be using consists of Maïssa Bey's epistolary novel *Nulle autre voix* ('No Other Voice'), published in 2018, and two volumes of Leïla Slimani's trilogy, namely the 2020 *Le Pays des autres: La guerre, la guerre, la guerre* (*In the Country of Others*) and the 2022 *Regardez-nous danser* (*Watch Us Dance*).

From a thematic perspective, students explored socio-political and cultural effects of colonialism and post-colonialism on the literary map of *Francophonie*. Discussions focused on analyzing how women characters articulate or express the problems of identity and resistance, gender roles and family dynamics, sexuality and difference, marriage, and womanhood.

From a pedagogical perspective, this article will incorporate specific examples of respectful classroom engagement, scaffolded reading guides aiming at increasing language proficiency, highly structured activities based on graphic organizers and note-takers, and collaborative learning.

In this article, I will equally articulate the pedagogical value of three evidence-based practices that level the playing field for all learners: active-learning assessment tools designed in partnership with the students, embedding a growth mindset into grading schemes, and continuously soliciting students' anonymous inputs throughout the semester by means of anonymous questionnaires and polls.

The article will furthermore include my reflections pertaining to some challenges that both the students and I encountered during these courses. It will describe in particular my deliberate actions aimed at educating the students to liberate themselves from the abundance of stereotypes associated with Maghrebi cultures, cultures in which feminine identities remain fluid and in alignment with contemporary societal dynamics.

Incorporating Students' Perspectives, a Journey of Curricular Co-Creation

Whether in elementary and intermediate language courses, or more advanced topics courses, getting student input is a best practice for effective teaching and increases student motivation for learning. Language students should be treated as active agents with important perspectives to bring to the learning journey. The student-faculty partnership approach blends perspectives and enhances the diversity of dialogue within educational spaces. Sophia Bello (2018) strongly recommends the collaborative approach. She states that "As language instructors, we should design a course that bears in mind the learner's perspective and provide enough guidance for students to move forward rather than backward. When a student is a participant, rather than a spectator, he/she steps up and takes control of the given situation" (1).

In addition, incorporating students as partners allows the professor to intervene in a timely manner to ensure that their methods are effective in meeting their students' educational needs and preferences. By administering questionnaires, designed in collaboration with the university Center for Teaching and Learning, one can gather students' input and modify assignments based on their feedback. Instructors who take a leap of faith and incorporate their students' inputs to modify assessments can offer their learners a meaningful learning experience aligned with their needs and wants. Students can be trusted as autonomous learners and contributors to course design.

The use of authentic class materials that promote the exploration and expression of diverse identities is more effective when it is complemented by other evidence-based practices. Effective teachers implement student-centered practices,

are transparent about why they use certain learning activities, value diversity in learning, provide structure in their courses, and are adaptable about learning approaches (Addy 71).

Educators in a Francophone literature course should aim to understand the impact that student-teacher partnerships and engaging teaching practices have on meeting students' learning needs. The answers to the following questions might enable them to offer their students a learning experience in which cooperation and co-creation abound. Firstly, the professor should examine the self-reported level of student engagement in a course designed based on engaging teaching practices.. Secondly, they should look at the benefits that students derive from course materials that show different perspectives and whether these benefits change across the semester. Thirdly, they should seek to understand how feedback obtained using questionnaires can be employed to design the course and make timely modification of activities and assessments during the course. Lastly, they should aim at apprehending the perceptions of students regarding their role as partners in the course design.

To answer these questions, students complete two anonymous questionnaires about their preferred learning experiences prior to the start of the semester; one anonymous questionnaire to gather assignment feedback, administered at the beginning of the semester; one focus group conducted in class by a peer to capture feedback regarding activities; and one anonymous end-of-semester questionnaire to incorporate detailed course feedback.

Gathering student input is a pedagogical practice that helps instructors design learner-centered courses that take into consideration student perspectives on what methods and assessments help them learn effectively. To maximize learning and retention, students considering enrolling in a literature course should be invited to provide insights that will help engage them and their fellow students in the course and enhance their learning. This perspective is a shift from the traditional model of the uncompromising instructor, who is the sole decision maker in the classroom. The semester prior to the course being offered, as part of the department's French Program assessment effort, the professor might consider conducting two voluntary and anonymous online questionnaires among prospective students and students pre-enrolled in the course. Assessment prior to the start of the Francophone literature class is an effective practice that enables educators to gather tridimensional information about their learners. This data includes cognitive data (what they know: language proficiency and their previous experiences with literary expressions in the target language); affective data (interests, attitudes, and motivations towards certain topics) and behavioral data (how they learn in French language and literature courses).[1]

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[1] Please see "Appendix A" for two examples of pre-semester questionnaires.

Questionnaires

        At the beginning of the semester when the course is offered, students should be encouraged to complete an online form pertaining to their preferences for the assessments in the literature course. Assessment options include but are not limited to short reflective papers, interviews, presentations, and creative projects. Students should be informed that their responses will be anonymous, that responses were voluntary and there would be no penalty for not responding.[2]

        The value of such a questionnaire, the results of which can be shared with the participants, resides in its potential to generate awareness about commonalities and differences in learning approaches, unearth knowledge gaps, highlight unconscious biases, and challenge assumptions about how learning and evaluation in a Francophone literature course should unfold. For the students, who are now partners in curricular creation, this new role represents a rich source of metacognitive learning, self-evaluation, and self-awareness. Their answers might contain valuable suggestions regarding the nature of assignments and inspire the professor to make timely and meaningful changes. This fruitful partnership enhances trust between students and instructors and not surprisingly leads to the development of new or improved curriculum materials and more effective student-teacher interactions.

        Similarly, to conclude the list of initiatives meant to strengthen the co-creative learning process, at the end of the semester students will be invited to reflect on their experience in the Francophone literature course and reveal their meta-learning and critical thinking abilities.[3]

In-Class Focus Group Administered Mid-Semester

        Mid-way through the semester, a peer educator or any member of the institution's Center for Teaching and Learning should conduct an in-class focus group. One approach of such a focus group would be to collect feedback regarding the effectiveness of specific teaching practices that pertain to a variety of perspectives covered by the course material, engaging classroom environment and teaching methods, and the impact of student-teacher partnership on their learning and engagement. Students are informed that their presence is required as part of normal class participation, but that no penalty will be assessed if they do not respond to the focus group questions. All responses are recorded to ensure that the identity of the respondent will not be able to be determined.[4]

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[2] Please see "Appendix B" for an example of beginning of the semester questionnaire.

[3] Please see "Appendix D" for an example of end-of-semester questionnaire.

[4] Please see "Appendix C" for examples of in-class focus group administered mid-semester questions.

By actively supporting and engaging in a focus group, educators demonstrate to their students that they are intentional about building a supportive learning community, that they genuinely value their students' viewpoints and are intentionally collecting their feedback to adjust lesson plans or strategies, and that they are continually striving to improve the overall learning experience.

Approaches for active learning and collaboration in the Francophone Literature Course

While there are numerous ways for an instructor to demonstrate how they value all voices in the classroom, collaborative and cooperative learning activities are particularly effective in activating the potential of varied perspectives. Collaborative activities that involve oral, written, and visual communication appeal to diverse language and literature learners while promoting creativity. In addition to encouraging "increased critical thinking and metacognition," a learning environment based on augmented use of active learning strategies, represents, according to Andrew du Rocher, a possible means of reducing student plagiarism (212).

Studies in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) emphasize the impact that integration of cooperative learning techniques has on the learners' experience (Alamdari and Ghani 242). These techniques help to maximize meaningful discussions and cultivate positive interdependence. They are an engaging practice involving every member of the team at every stage of literary discovery while creating a sense of accountability as each contribution is crucial to textual comprehension and in-depth analysis. Collaborative activities promote the integration of the study of culture and language, facilitate connections between language and content, promote comparisons between the students' first and second language and appeal to diverse learning styles. Case studies emphasize the impact of collaboration. According to one study, "the participatory approach" is deliberately employed "to incorporate linguistic tasks into topics of interest that are relevant to students' daily lives" (Sokolova et al. 101). In the context of teaching literature in a second language, Debora Blaz stresses the importance of multimodal collaboration that takes the shape of a pedagogical duty for all educators: "In order to reach all your students, you will have to adapt this subject matter for visual/spatial, logical/mathematical, kinesthetic, auditory, and other learning styles" (229).

In the following section, which takes into consideration the above-mentioned evidence-based practices, the focus will be on proposing several learning strategies that enhance growth mindset and involve diverse materials as well as necessitate cooperation between learners as they explore three contemporary Francophone novels written by Maïssa Bey and Leïla Slimani.

Novelist, short story writer, playwright, essayist and poet, Maïssa Bey ranks as one of the most highly acclaimed North African writers. Her works are often included in Francophone literature curriculum in higher education. In the unstable political climate that has reigned in Algeria since 1990, under the weak shelter of anonymity given to her by her pseudonym, her choice to write the unsaid, to lay bare the taboos of Algerian society, and to break silence has become for Bey a vital necessity. Hers is a courage to tell uncomfortable truths with verve and vigor. Without falling into the temptation of idealism, Bey's stories reveal women characters who sometimes embody degradation, and at other times achieve fulfillment. Young or mature, educated or illiterate, traditional or pioneers of a disturbing modernity, the protagonists of her novels seek to understand and shape themselves on their own terms, often while defying what is forbidden and doing so in the face of violence and isolation. The study of her works in the French-speaking literature class represents an immeasurable source of material for breaking stereotypes about North African women and expressing the complexity of the feminine and its relationships with the masculine.

The protagonist of her latest novel, *Nulle autre voix,* writes to chase away her pain. She draws on her pain in order to decipher what led her to the murder of her violent, demeaning husband. Recently released from prison, withdrawn from the world, she embraces the ecstasy of solitude, locked in a sort of silent, beneficent bubble. With this character, or rather this anti-heroine, Bey seems to want to overthrow the myth of feminine gentleness, of the woman who is the source of love, the one who gives life. The novel features characters and stories from a variety of backgrounds and identities. It helps to develop empathy as students learn to navigate social complexities, which in this case involve incarceration and its associated stigma. Discussions about sensitive topics in a fictional context naturally arising through this novel in a Francophone literature course may help overcome shame surrounding the discussion of the topic as the reader-student explores the experiences of former inmate characters without judgement or condescendence.

Along with confinement, in *Nulle autre voix* learners are invited to explore the challenging themes of trauma, memory, and silence within the context of post-colonial Algeria. The novel, written in the form of a diary or inner monologue, allows for an intimate portrayal of the protagonist's psychological state. Central to the story is the exploration of the individual's experience with trauma. The author of the novel suggests that trauma, when unspoken and unaddressed, leads to emotional fragmentation and isolation, while also drawing attention to the ways in which collective histories of violence shape individual and national identities. Students exploring Bey's novel collaboratively examine the plurality of trauma manifestations by the means of a shareable and structured online note-taker in which they address the following important topics: the nature of trauma, its rapport

with silence, gender, memory, repression and denial, and the role of writing in the expression of trauma.

Another exploratory lens of Bey's novel is the way in which female characters either empower or constrain the protagonist's sense of self. An active learning tool, such as Think-Pair-Share, may be employed to find the answer to a complex question such as "What does the protagonist's relationship with other women reveal about solidarity and conflict within Algerian society?" This highly effective strategy promotes individual reflection, peer interaction and group discussions. To consolidate the result of their collective inputs, students use a graphic organizer of their choice, such as a circle map or a spider map.

While the first thirty pages of Bey's novel are dedicated to the protagonist, specifically to the contents of her notebooks, which are filled with introspection and reflections on herself as well as allusions to her cold-blooded act, the chapters that follow bring into focus the writer, Farida. This elegant, patient, diplomatic woman, who came from nowhere, claims to want to carry out research on female crime. It is thanks to this stranger that the protagonist comes out of her hibernation, that the ropes with which she had bound herself come loose and that her days start with her eagerly waiting for opportunities to unveil her experiences. This benevolent intruder, this other voice, coming out of nowhere, finds abundant material to explore as she patiently digs into the life of the protagonist and her crime.

Silence sometimes settles in, synonymous with embarrassment, which reflects a groping in unknown territory and a coldness and resistance because it is not easy to articulate how in full prison confinement, she has, for the first time, experienced a sort of jubilation and deliverance. Her awkward conversations with the writer work themselves out effectively and gently. The readers see the cracks in her shell which let in the light and the potential of hard-won relief. These exchanges represent a rich educational source for learners in a literature course. Educators could readily explore the above interactions by asking their students to engage in role play, an active learning method. In groups of two students, they can reenact the conversations between these two characters while incorporating relevant body language and inflections of one's voice. A low-stakes assessment, this activity is an authentic reenactment and as such is a vicarious real-world application of students' learning.

In addition, the course professor might take an interdisciplinary approach by employing Fadhila Mouzaoui-Koudjil's 2017 work, *Les femmes détenues en Algérie : trajectoires et stratégies identitaires* ('Women Prisoners in Algeria: Trajectories and Identity Strategies'). This work focuses on women incarcerated in Algeria and their reintegration into society. The author questions the meaning that the prisoners and prison staff give to the notions of punishment and reintegration as well as the methods implemented to achieve these objectives. The author

developed her field of investigation through thirty-five in-depth interviews and eighty questionnaires during a survey carried out in penitentiary establishments among women and staff to highlight the trajectory of reintegration, identify viable strategies, and sketch the profiles of inmates. The professor can select relevant interviews and assign one reading per student. The students can later share their reflections with their peers in a breakout group. In doing so, not only do the learners gain agency over their learning, but they also develop a sense of responsibility as they become invaluable participants empowered to contribute to the strengthening of their academic community.

Another novel that works well in the classroom is *Le pays des autres* by Leïla Slimani. This work describes the lives of a Franco-Moroccan family in the aftermath of World War II. The novel explores the themes of colonialism, race, identity, gender, and the shifting socio-political landscape of Morocco during the 1950s.[5]

This structured approach echoes Jennifer MacLaughlin et al.'s (2021) perspective:

> Content should be prioritized by highlighting and illustrating foundational concepts that will serve as the building blocks for digging deeper, thinking critically, and engaging in active learning. To arrive at the right amount of content, it is critical to reverse engineer from the desired learning outcomes of Job to be Done and then focus on aligning pre-class content with active learning. (14)

Both in *Le pays des autres: La Guerre, La Guerre, La Guerre* and *Regardez-nous danser,* the meeting between Mathilde, an Alsatian and Amine, a Moroccan, represents, on the one hand, an extraordinary adventure and, on the other hand, a confrontation of cultures and value systems. In addition to the themes proposed in the reading guide, I encourage Francophone literature professors and their students to explore the potential of bodily representations and hostile spaces in the creation of an identitarian hybridity, characterized by balance and tolerance, although born in solitude and nourished by frustrations. Through the lens of inclusive teaching practices, comprehension questions can constitute the basis for short assessments, which can readily be peer-reviewed. Firstly, these questions clarify whether harmonious relationships are possible in the country of others, in this rural Morocco of the 1950s where animosity and benevolent curiosity coexist in a space of negotiation, sometimes of renunciation of traditions. Secondly, they inquire how one can integrate without losing oneself. Above all, students reflect on how one can

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[5] Please see "Appendix E" for a sample reading guide.

tame the desire for others, when violent impulses arise randomly in the hostile niches of this space where one sometimes feels dominant, sometimes dominated.

Just as in her previous novels, Slimani excels, in the first volume of her trilogy, in revealing the emotions of the main characters. Unlike Bey's novel, built around a small number of characters, Slimani's narrative web is complex and poses educational challenges. An engaging educator would most likely use graphic organizers, such as a tree chart, to ease comprehension and to help learners retain relevant information about characters, their relationships, and their roles in the narrative development. Easy to design thanks to available online resources, such a visual tool is an effective method to represent ideas and concepts, highlighting their meanings and relationships as it illustrates not only the connections between characters but demonstrates the potential to structure the relevant interplay of facts, concepts, terms, thoughts, and ideas.

Similarly to language courses, in literature courses hybrid examinations, composed of low-stakes assessments, tend to be highly effective and help to close the achievement gap. Such assessments, ranging from true-false statements, checking basic understanding of concepts, to free-response assessments, particularly useful in verifying the completeness of one's understanding of more nuanced concepts, are invaluable in promoting student understanding and comprehension.

At the heart of the story in Slimani's second volume, *Regardez-nous danser,* dance becomes a symbol of freedom. The characters seek to escape from the social and family constraints that suffocate them. Slimani uses dance as a metaphor for emancipation, illustrating how art can serve as a means of expression and resistance. Slimani's elaborate work offers a profound reflection on the fluidity of the human condition. Through dance, the narrator invites us to contemplate the universal quest for freedom and escape, both personal and collective. Dance embodies a form of resistance against norms that do not align with the young protagonist's eagerness for emancipation. In a social milieu, where young women experience tensions and inner conflicts, dancing represents an act of rebellion against the colonial past of their parents and grandparents. Dance as physical and emotional liberation contrasts with the rigidity of their daily lives and underlines the desire for freedom. This polyvalent theme is to be explored collaboratively by means of another active learning strategy, the fishbowl. A small group of students sits in a circle (the fishbowl) and discusses representations and the symbolism of dance in the novel while the rest of the class observes. After a set time, observers can ask questions, add comments and offer peer feedback. As articulated by Myhiun Han and Erica Hamilton, "the goal of the strategy remains centered on facilitating students' learning and empowering their construction of meaning" (283).

Intergenerational dynamics, a central theme in the first two volumes of Slimani's trilogy, represent an effective way of discussing growth mindset. Aïcha's evolution from a self-conscious little girl, animated by her fervor for her Catholic faith, to a highly educated woman and doctor who embraces the freedom of the 60's both in her behavior and her attire, is a (fictional) model of success which transcends the frontiers of her background and circumstances. Another character relevant to the diversity of perspectives is Selma, the protagonist's niece. Selma's libertine behavior is not aligned with traditional Moroccan values and creates an opportunity to discuss one's prejudices against unconventional conduct and place (im)morality in a broader, more empathetic discussion frame. From a pedagogical perspective, it is advisable that early in the semester, as soon as these characters are introduced, the professor conduct a simple poll, utilizing an application like Poll Everywhere, to ask their learners to make predictions about how these two women characters will evolve. Their prognoses might reveal a plurality of opinions, commonalities and differences, and lay the foundation for respectful and fruitful engagement.

The language employed by Slimani in her novel is forceful and biting to the end. The choreography of misery, boredom, disillusionment, passion, and ambition transports us into heavy spaces, difficult to tame. Such a space is the literal and metaphorical land of Amine, a Moroccan veteran who fought for France in the Second World War. His return home is filled with the hope of imminent abundance as he fantasizes about the immeasurable fertility of the lands of his French settler neighbors. It is a powerful and vitalizing dream. For her part, Mathilde, a young Alsatian transplanted into this area promising wealth, sees only ugliness and dryness. Through her eyes, she takes measure of the lack of potential of her future home as she contemplates in horror the few olive trees which survived as if by some miracle in the middle of the rocky ground. And the so-called house in the middle of it all, with its small damp and dark rooms, appears hostile, cold, and infinitely disappointing. An effective educator should seize the opportunity and engage the students in an understanding of the texts by the means of multi-media resources that illustrate colonial rural Morocco. Employing UDL (Universal Design for Learning), which is a set of principles that ensure accessible and effective learning environments for all students, instructors can diversify the ways that learners engage with the materials, with an eye to expressing their learning outcomes by interacting with scaffolded activities. This enables the exploration of content in various formats to ensure that students with different learning needs and preferences can access the material. Student research of paintings, songs, traditional dances, videos and journalistic material that depict rural Morocco right before its independence can be used in conjunction with jigsaw, an active learning strategy. Students are divided into small groups, with each group assigned to gather heterogenous artistic representations of rurality. They then come together in

different groups, with each student sharing their segment with others. Jigsaws in the Francophone literature course encourage collaboration and ensure students learn from each other. On a complementary note, groups may share information in a multimodal activity. After a period of analysis, each group appoints of spokespeople to remain at a table. Others circulate about the room, asking questions of the other groups' spokespeople. After some length of time, the groups reconvene at their own tables and exchange notes about what questions they asked of other groups, what questions other groups asked them, and the responses they got and gave. This exercise is "a textbook example of multimodal learning: visual, auditory, interpersonal, interactive, situated, gestural" (Scoville 545).

As articulated above, the use of media content like video, audio, and graphics is a practice that actively considers the needs of diverse audiences. These tools can additionally be employed to enhance comprehension of cultural practices. Mathilde, although still hostile toward her new home, learns its language, fasting rituals, and culinary traditions, in a first attempt to reconcile with her new home. The battles she faces are difficult because the traditions associated with *Eid* upset her. Through her eyes that carry in them a very explicit disgust, we follow the path of the streams of hot and bubbling blood, flowing from house to house. Slimani therefore seems determined to launch a merciless attack on the sensitivity of readers whose olfactory, visual, and even tactile imagination is stimulated. Everything is laid bare, including the tense relationship between Mathilde and Amine. In this book of winding spaces inhabited by characters who are constantly looking for each other, no one finds their place or even space. No one appears to belong. Students are invited to explore the hypothesis that the main subject of this trilogy is to actually tell the story of this couple, France and Morocco, viewed as a "couple" whose love is intermingled with hatred and a desire for interdependence confronted with a desire for independence. Divided into teams, learners can take opposite sides of this issue and engage in a structured debate, which is another evidence-based active learning strategy. Second language acquisition researchers enumerate the numerous learning benefits of the debate which "requires students to acknowledge opposite viewpoints, develops listening skills, demonstrates need for supporting evidence, encourages research and examination, discourages simplistic approach to complex subjects" (Gholami et al. 72).

This teaching method helps them to develop critical thinking skills, because it is "encouraging an active and careful approach to an issue; generating a questioning attitude toward knowledge and beliefs; and stimulating learners towards a critical view of the world around them" (Rear 56). Through debates, learners provide diverse perspectives and practice respectful engagement with divergent views. I recommend the use of freely available web-based team-maker digital tools such as CATME (Comprehensive Assessment of Team Member

Effectiveness) to assemble diverse groups, a method that has the potential for equitable co-creation and polyvalent contributions.

As educators eager for engagement, it is important to embrace knowledge checks designed in collaboration with students. Such pedagogical means promote a growth mindset in students and enhance their sense of agency and belonging in the course. In addition, at the end of the semester, educators might consider asking their learners to engage in a short reflective writing exercise, which incorporates their perceptions of what they learned as well as how they experienced their learning.

Conclusion

Exploring Francophone Maghrebi literature through the lens of active learning practices is a process in which instructors take specific steps to demonstrate to students their commitment to incorporate their voices in the design and execution of the course. Requesting their inputs before the commencement of the course as well as during the semester and acting upon their inputs is a transparent form of feedback and accountability that cultivates respectful engagement. Students' emotional and social needs are met, which enhances their educational experience. Intentional use of texts that explore a variety of experiences, identities, and historical contexts in a contemporary Francophone literature course promotes empathy, a more extensive understanding of the world and a sense of belonging for our diverse learners. In Bey and Slimani's works, students explore how race, gender, socioeconomic status, sexuality, ability, and other aspects of identity intersect and influence the characters. As effective educators, we strive to co-design with our students a learning experience that meets their needs and rightly attuned wants and is collaborative and adaptable. Co-creation embedded into daily classroom activities is community-building, empowers students with agency while reinforcing a sense of belonging in an academic environment in which sharing and learning from one another occur naturally. While admirable and a skill that needs to be internationally cultivated, this commitment to supporting each other's academic journey needs to be characterized by coherence but also a great amount of flexibility. Literature educators must be ready to adapt should students miss class (in already under enrolled courses), reorganizing groups based on the number of attendees or rectifying competence imbalance and filling in the knowledge blanks when students' preparation for a given class session is less than ideal. Ensuring that an adequate amount of time is allotted for creative activities is a foundational given. Continuous transparency regarding the educator's choice of methods and activities is equally important in the co-creation process, as well as articulating inevitable changes in the course execution.

Literature courses have the potential to become less challenging when learners engage in highly structured activities based on active learning methods that allow them to think critically both individually and as power groups. Our courses can thus become educational environments for open-mindedness, engaging, civil, and cross-cultural discourse, and deep learning born from a growth mindset that both learners and educators share.

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Appendix A: Two Before Start of Semester Questionnaires

Questionnaire 1: Previous learning experience in French courses

Please think about previous French classes you have had. Specifically, think about the activities or assignments that your instructor(s) used that were particularly effective in helping you learn.

1.What class time activities did your instructor(s) use that helped you more easily learn French?

2. Please describe 1-2 graded assignments that your instructor(s) used that were effective in helping you learn French.

3. At this point in your career, you have taken both basic, intermediate, and/or advanced level French courses. How do you think higher level French courses should be taught, as compared to basic level courses?

4. This course focuses on learning and developing advanced reading and culture skills. Imagine that you were asked to design this class. What activities and assignments would you include?

Questionnaire 2: Effective teamwork and engaging behaviors in the classroom

1. In this Francophone literature course, most of the work will be completed in teams. Reflect on your prior experiences working on teams, both in the academic and non-academic settings. In your experience, what are some of the characteristics of effective teams?

2. Continue to reflect on your prior experiences working in teams, both in the academic and non-academic settings. In your experience, what are some of the characteristics of ineffective teams?

3. If you were a student in a classroom where respect and dignity for all was valued, what behaviors would you expect to see from your instructor? Please be as specific as possible.

4. If you were a student in a classroom where respect and dignity for all was valued, what behaviors would you expect to see from other students? Please be as specific as possible.

Appendix B Beginning of the Semester Questionnaire

1. For this course, I am considering different types of assignments and assessments for you to complete. Please consider which of the following assessments you prefer, and rank them in order of your preference, with your most preferred assessment at the top of the list. The descriptions of these assessments have been provided by your instructor, but please feel free to ask for clarification if you need more information before making your choice.

2. As you consider your ranking from question #1, please explain why you would prefer to do your top choice in this class.

3. As you consider your ranking from question #1, please explain why you would prefer to NOT do your least favorite choice in this class.

Appendix C: In-class Focus Group Administered Mid-Semester Examples

1. In this course, you have been asked to give your input on assignments and class activities.
    a. Have you felt like you were a partner with your instructor, in terms of designing the course? Why or why not?
    b. How has having the opportunity to give input impacted your engagement or interest in the course?

    c. How has having the opportunity to give input impacted your learning in the course?
    d. Did you like having the opportunity to give input? Why or why not?

2. In this course, your instructor has been using engaging teaching practices, such as working in teams and small group discussions.

    a. How has the use of these practices impacted your engagement in the class this semester?
    b. How has the use of these practices impacted your learning this semester?

3. In what ways has your instructor established a classroom environment where respect and dignity for all was valued?

    a. *Follow-up:* In what ways could your instructor do more to establish a classroom environment where respect and dignity for all was valued?

Appendix D: End-of-Semester Questionnaire Measuring the Effectiveness of Class Activities, Assessments and Instructor's Methods

1. Indicate the level of benefit for your intellectual growth for each type of perspective highlighted in the course materials this semester.

Different perspectives	I perceived no benefit	I think there might be benefit in the future	I think it's likely that they will benefit me	I absolutely believe they will benefit me
Language				
Gender				
Race				
Socio-economic background				

Explain your responses.

2. Reflect on in-class activities facilitated by your instructor that helped you learn the most in this course. Rate <u>your level of engagement with these activities</u>.

Class activities	Not engaging at all	Little engaging	Somewhat engaging	Very engaging
Engagement with video materials				
Engagement with written materials				
Engagement with audio materials				
Teamwork				
Scenarios				

Explain your responses.

3. In this course, your progress was assessed through the means of (list of assessments). Rate the <u>effectiveness of each assessment in meeting your learning needs</u>.

Assessments	Most effective	Somewhat effective	Least effective

Explain your responses.

4. Students' inputs and contributions in the areas of course design, including materials, and assessments have the potential to create a strong student-teacher partnership. Comment below on your sense (or not) of being a "partner in learning" whose voice and perspective were incorporated in the learning experience in this course.

5. Do you have any other feedback or recommendations for your instructor pertaining to this course activities, materials, and assignments?

Appendix E Structured reading guide for Leïla Slimani's *Le Pays des Autres*

Colonial Legacy and Post-Colonial Identity:

- How does the novel portray the impact of French colonialism on both the colonizers and the colonized?
- Consider the contrasting identities of the characters: Mathilde, as a French woman, and her husband, Amine, as a Moroccan man, navigating the cultural and social divides between them.

Gender and Patriarchy:

- How does Mathilde's role as a wife and mother intersect with Moroccan society's patriarchal norms?
- Reflect on the ways in which gender roles are depicted in the novel, especially through the experiences of Mathilde and other women characters.

Family Dynamics and Intergenerational Struggles:

- Explore the relationships within Mathilde's family, particularly between her and her husband, as well as with her children, Aïcha and Selim.
- How do the younger generations react to the legacies of their parents and grandparents?

Identity and Belonging:

- The concept of belonging is central to the novel. Who belongs to Morocco, and who remains an outsider?
- Mathilde's struggle with her identity in a foreign land is a major motif; how does she attempt to reconcile her French heritage with her life in Morocco?

Political Change and the Struggle for Independence:

- Morocco is in the midst of a revolution against French rule. How do political events shape the lives of the characters, particularly in their understanding of freedom, loyalty, and resistance?

Character Analysis:

Mathilde:

- Mathilde's character is central to the novel, and her perspective is key to understanding the tensions of colonialism, gender roles, and familial obligations.
- How does her background as a Frenchwoman shape her experience in Morocco?
- What does Mathilde's relationship with her husband reveal about the complexities of colonial power dynamics and cultural differences?

Amine:

- A former soldier and Mathilde's husband, Amine is torn between his loyalty to his country and the pressures of modernity.
- How does his experience in the French army and his return to Morocco shape his worldview and relationship with Mathilde?

The Other Characters (Aïcha, Selim, Mourad, Selma, and Omar):

- Consider the roles of other key figures such as the children, in-laws, and neighbors. How do their experiences reflect the societal divisions in Morocco at the time?

- Highlight at the generational differences in attitudes toward French colonialism and independence.

Literary Style and Structure:

Narrative Perspective:

- The novel alternates between different perspectives, especially Mathilde's and those of other family members. How does the narrative perspective shape our understanding of the story?

Symbolism:

- The title, *The Country of Others*, suggests a theme of alienation and displacement. What symbols in the book reflect this theme, and how do they contribute to the characters' sense of being "outsiders"?

Setting and Atmosphere:

- How does Slimani use the setting of Morocco to evoke the sense of political and social upheaval during the 1950s? Consider the descriptions of the landscape, the contrast between rural and urban life, and the impact of the colonial history on the environment.