Student Responses to Exercise Designed by UMass-Amherst Writing Program. 2009.


All authors and essays mentioned below, including Llarull’s piece, “Out of the Writing Closet: The Construction of a Bilingual Identity”, are published in the aforesaid volume.

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http://www.umass.edu/writingprogram/111/unit2expl5.html

Exploratory Writing #5

A. At the end of “The Poems Came Late,” David Wallace tells us (the readers) to “write yourself.” Briefly summarize how Wallace learned to “author (his) life” and why this was important for him. Then, consider his discussion of how the dominant discourse of his early life silenced him and how finding his voice relates to Mellix and Hong Kingston’s essays, or another essay of your choice.

B. Gustavo Llarull writes about his experiences with Spanish and English and with writing in general. How does his perspective add to some of the questions you have been thinking about throughout this unit? To consider this, you might want to compare his work to another text we have read or reread his experience through Szwed’s frame. In this response, which should be at least a page long, explain how Llarull adds to your understandings. Show what his perspective lends as you work through specific questions or interests that have come about through this unit.

Compiled Messages

Topic: Homework due 2/25 9.30 p.m. Date: Wednesday, February 25, 2009

Subject: Llarull Author: Arielle Bryce

I enjoyed the reading by Gustavo Llarull, but i found it to be very different from the other readings that we have done. Kingston, Mellix, and Hooks' stories all talked about a struggle, but Llarull did not seem to have as much of a struggle as the other authors did. My favorite part of the writing was his last sentence. I found it to be an excellent wrap up sentence and it made me smile. Some questions that i might have for this writer are:<br/>

1) What made you choose the phrase "come out" at the end of your essay? 2) You describe a teacher that made you "forget" about learning English, do you teach with the same stylings that teacher did?
I found the essay to be really interesting and definitely relates to my life. Maybe not directly but my father has a similar story. Where he grew up everyone had to take English as a class. His parents definitely encouraged him to excel particularly in this subject, was as forced to learn the language as Llarull was, mostly because his parents weren’t the one teaching him since they themselves cant speak english. I thought it was inspirational how Llarull took something that he hated at first and ended up making it his career. My father is also an English teacher as well so I found it interesting to here someone else’s story about the same type of circumstances. I thought the best part of the story was when Llarull wasn’t sure which language he was going to wake up and be better at. 

1. Without all the encouragement he received do you think Llarull would have excelled at English the way he did?
2. What exactly was implied when you were called a “closet writer”?

Llarull’s literacy history was very complicated. I thought it was interesting how he was able to adapt to different languages. He explains how he was “immersed” into the English language when he was 29, but he continued his Spanish writing on the side. What really caught my attention was when he talked about how he felt “wired” to speak certain languages, better or worse, on certain days. I can understand how this could be extremely frustrating for him. It is very impressive how he is still fluent in both languages, he is an English professor and he continues to write in both languages.

1) If your parents had not taught you English, do you think you would still be a writer?
2) Now that you are open about being a writer, has your writing style changed?
In Llarull’s writing what I found most interesting was the actually composition of this essay. For someone who’s original language is Spanish and originally had such a distaste for the English language, he writes so eloquently. What I found most interesting was near the end when he would have to wait to wake up and see which language would come more easily to him that day. I also found it interesting how confused he was when he started to take notes in English. Overall I think it was a well written essay about a non-English speakers journey to reading and writing in English.

1. After “coming out of the writing closet” do you still mainly speak Spanish or would you say you speak English/Spanish 50/50?

2. If your parents had not forced you into English do you feel and inner drive would have pushed you to better yourself in English?

The text “out of the writing closet” is very interesting. When the author confessed that he didn’t like English at the beginning, because her parents forced to learn English and then get a successful life his future. But he didn’t like English under her parent’s pressure and as academic study until he met a very good English teacher. Her English teacher helps her find an interesting way to learn English that make her like to learn English again. As years went by, Llarull suddenly found out that he likes to use English to express himself in his writing. One of his friend said that he was a “closeted writer” because his friend think that his can be a writer in the public, not just only write something in private. Though his English is very good, his never forget his native language, he still uses both of them in his writing.

1. Why do you want to read your father’s big complete work of Jorge Luis Borges after you were rejected by a girl?

2. Why do you still feel hesitate when someone asks you “so, you’re a writer too?”
Topic: Homework due 2/25 9.30 p.m.  Date: Wednesday, February 25, 2009
Subject: Llarull Response  Author: Abby Login

This essay was very interesting to read, although it was a lot like the other stories we have been reading. First of all, I found it interesting that Llarull was so pressured into learning English. It was interesting to his transition from writing in Spanish to writing in English. It is ironic how much he hated it first and how he became so comfortable with it. Being able to write stories in two different languages is a talent not many have. This essay, like hooks’ and Rodriguez’s, emphasizes the importance of literacy. The main point is if you do not know how to express yourself, you can always express yourself through literacy, especially writing.<br/>
1) Why was writing fiction in English so intimidating to you at first?
2) Why do you hesitate when someone asks you if you are a writer?

Topic: Homework due 2/25 9.30 p.m.  Date: Wednesday, February 25, 2009
Subject: Llarull  Author: Zachary Koncki

In Llarull’s literature I like how in the end Llarull fought his was to becoming an English writer. It shows determination and hard work to get through it and if it wasn’t for all of the support from everyone I don’t think he would have been able to do it. That is what made this story good because it shows that with help from family and friends they will get you through the times when you want to quit. Also if it wasn’t for Gabriela then I don’t think that he would have had the courage to publish his book and be where he is today. What ever happened to Gabriela?
If it wasn’t for everyone helping you do you think you will ever published your story?

Topic: Homework due 2/25 9.30 p.m.  Date: Wednesday, February 25, 2009
Subject: Llarull Response  Author: Widlynn Louis

This reading was very interesting because I could relate to Llarull. As a young child i hated reading and writing; I still dislike writing. English seem like such a hard language to learn and the books were so long. The first person to ever get me reading was my fifth grade writing teacher. The that she gave us was Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone. After reading the first few pages in class I became addicted. I was on the third Harry Potter book by the time the class finished the first book. Harry Potter opened up a whole new world of reading for me. I learned
that reading was not only informational but also entertaining. Even though I love reading I still struggle with getting my thoughts on paper.

1) Why does Llarull hesitate when using the term bilingual?

2) When Gabriela calls Llarull a closet-writer is it to say that he has not become fully comfortable writing in english, or that he must breakaway from writing in spanish?

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**Subject: Llarull Response**

Author: Kenneth McCumber

Llarull talks about how hard it was for him to want to learn English, because he regarded it as a chore until his English teacher disguised the form of the language behind interesting stories. And then through his letter writing, and eventually note taking, he subsumed the English language to the point where some days he woke up in English mode and some days he woke up in Spanish mode. I find it very interesting that someone could be... better at writing in a language other than the one that they have spoken since their first words. Its gives new meaning to the idea of becoming completely immersed in a discourse community.

What made you go back to writing in English after speaking to your English professor?

Why were you so excited to take literature classes in English?

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**Subject: Llarull response**

Author: Bhavik Patel

In the article "Out of the Closet" by Gustavo Llarull, it's obvious he doesn't really like learning English but his love for Gabriela made him write poems in English. His motivation grew as well because his mother was right there standing next to him, motivating him as a child. After reading short stories from other various authors, he was influenced to write on his own and because the more he kept writing and teaching others he turned into the writer he is today. Now he teaches at Umass as English teacher.

1. If you weren't an English teacher what would you have been?

2. If you could would you back to only knowing Spanish?
Response: I think that Llarull's story shows determination and perseverance. His motivation to learn the English language came from his parents and then teachers inspired him with interesting topics. Learning English opened up a vast world of knowledge and new ways to express himself. Llarull mentioned that some days he was "wired" into English. This seemed interesting to me because it shows that it became natural to him over time. Both Spanish and English are apart of Llarull's literacy. Since he mastered how to use both to write he gained confidence. Llarull's accomplishment was that he became bilingual and realized that he is a writer and has the potential to do more great things with his English.<br/>Questions: Why was it intimidating to write fiction in English? When your emotions got in the way of your writing, how did you overcome it?

I feel so proud of the author, because he went through so much to be better at the language and writing skills. Trying to be good at two languages at the same time is really hard. I really understand his feelings because I am facing the same problem too. Also his mom played an important role in this, because she "forced" him to be better at English. His story told us: nothing is impossible if you never stop trying. Questions: 1. What did you feel when your mom forced you to be better at English? 2. Did you ever think you'll be a Spanish writer?

I thought that the story showed a lot about the author's character, because even when things were difficult for him, trying to work with two different languages, he still persevered so that he could become more educated as a writer. I also felt that his determination could teach students struggling with language or writing to keep working and one day they will overcome their problems. (***I don't know if this was supposed to be a summary or a reflection, so I reflected.***) Questions: 1. What motivated you to keep trying harder in your attempts to improve your grasp on English and
embrace it as a second language? 2. Now that you are learning and working at an American, English-speaking school, which language do you consider your "primary" language?

Llarull didn’t think that he will ever like to learn English, but his love for Gabriela make him to write poems in English. Through the poems that he make and the reading he was going through he became to like the use of English. Sometime he don’t think he can do both English and Spanish, and sometime he can. Majoring philosophy have make him confuse about the use of English since Spanish was still best for him. It was later when he became a teacher he finally consider himself as a writer. How is it feel to use one language at the beginning while still trying to get English, then all over sudden English the second language have become a major role in your leanings through school’s academic courses?  What did you like about English that is similar to Spanish? Is it any easier/harder or are they the same?

Response: Through the entire article, Llarull was really got refuse to English at every beginning, and then refuse to accept that English was became part of him. I think that English turned to be part of him when he met his first English teacher, who taught him in a free style way, and really interested Llarull. Then is the English love poems. I feel that the English poems really shocked Llarull, he never realized before that English can be that beauty and a precision. He then realized the power of English and the power of the Writing. He got the motivation from the poems. Llarull used considered himself as a “closet writer”, which means he usually write to himself, the private poems, not to other people. Maybe just because of this kind of free writing developed his interest in English. After I finished reading the article, I felt l that Llarull was a little scared that English would share the equal importance as the Spanish in his life; he felt it came too suddenly. But in my point of view, it comes in a long process. He learned English for a long time and then practice a lot as he keep writing letters to his friend and also writing to himself. As what he said at the end of the essay, the writing and teaching made him more like a writer. One of the great things about both teaching and writing is that one learns constantly, which means: one has to face challenges, and grow up, and question oneself”at same time.”It is really hard for a non-native speaker to
accept a new language, but to accept a new language is not means to forget or get rid of the new one, just give you another advantage and another way to literacy to express yourself, like how Llarull considered it as a personal form of expressing. <br/>Question 1: What actually make you pick up your confidence on English after you got the advice from that English literature professor? What becomes your motivation on English literacy?<br/>Question 2: Did you feel any difference at the time you learned English and you teach someone then? Because you are not a native speaker, how can you handle this challenge?<br/>

Topic: Homework due 2/25 9.30 p.m. Date: Tuesday, February 24, 2009

Subject: Llarull response and questions Author: Kristen Riverin

I really enjoyed reading Out of the closet written by Gustavo Llarull. He writes about his how mothers determination and love persistance helped get him where he is today, which is a English writer. At first, he had no desire to learn english but his mother pushed him throughout his childhood. He would read short stories by Jorge Borges, which was a source of happiness because he suffered from girl problems as a teenage. He could relate to Borges stories because he was going through similar situations with the girl he liked. These stories influenced him to write some of his own, which expressed his emotions and feelings. He would switch from Spanish to English when he wrote his poems but eventually became more comfortable with English. Eventually his friend Gabriela persuaded him to come out of the closet because he was afraid to admit his true identity, which was being a writer. He eventually did come out and became an English writing teacher at Umass. Questions: If your mother did not persuade you to learn English, do you think you'd be where you are today? Do you still ever write in Spanish?