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Statement of Teaching Achievement and Impact

As a university educator and teaching artist, I help students achieve knowledge and understanding of Mythology and General Humanities by going beyond the standard classroom setting of teacher and pupils. I create a rich dynamic experience that reaches students through their senses and in new environments, which are then explored directly, metaphorically and dialogically, in relationship to the course disciplines. My teaching methodologies reach beyond the course into readying students for future achievement in learning.

To achieve these objectives, I utilize the somatic learning experience to foster student achievement. What I mean by somatic is an educational experience, using discussions on a concept, in an environment such as classroom or other venue, that employs objects to stimulate the senses. The somatic learning experiences also includes a Community of Inquiry curriculum helping students partake in a democratic, social, and safe discussion of ideas. I use these methods so that students achieve knowledge and understanding of Classical Mythology theories, historical contexts, literature, links to other mythoi, and subsequent impact. And similarly, in General Humanities I help students critically analyze, and write effective essays about art, philosophy, mythology, religion, morality, science, society, and more.

Below I will explain the methodologies I have researched, developed, and improved over my years as an educator.

I will discuss how I impact students' achievement of a richer level of percipience and learning through thinking metaphorically. I will then describe assignments I have developed to engage students, including constructing their own mythological demi-god and writing their own version of *The Inferno, Canto 1*. Moving out of classroom somatic methodologies, I will then describe

how I take my students to on-campus venues for relevancy and full immersion into a world outside the classroom.

My methods, while involved and interactive, are not the only ways I impact students and support their achievement. I also work closely with them in the development of research papers, midterm essays, quizzes and student presentations.

Helping students excel in academic achievement and enhancing their learning process requires a passionate enthusiastic facilitator. I will close with a statement on this.

Building Student Percipience

Students can be more present and aware (percipient) when they symbolize or name the innovative ideas, situations, realities they are experiencing. When students analogize or metaphorically name a new perception or concept, they “own it.” Through writing and metaphorical dialogue, students can then archive (write down) their perception. Unnamed perceptions, which remain “unarchived,” drift away. By improving student percipience, I help them achieve greater understanding.

Fostering Metaphorical Thinking

Metaphorical thinking is the bridge to understanding ideas that are new to students. To do this in my classes, I employ somatic experiences using the perception of familiar objects, drawing a bridge between what students know and perceive to what students are learning about. In other words, thinking metaphorically.

The other methodologies I use also have a great deal of impact on student learning achievement. These other methodologies include bringing Classical Mythology and General Humanities into the media environment in which my students live.

Constructing the Demi-God

Students are familiar with super heroes from various media. The Super-being Project lets students research the Classical Mythological literature to obtain knowledge about almost two

dozen deities, then assign these deities to the mission and narrative of their own motion picture character proposal.

The Super-being Project is thus an example of a relevant and media-inspired somatic exercise I employ in the classroom. The Super-being Project requires students to formulate a new fictional demi-god for an imaginary movie studio proposal. The demi-god must follow the archetypal hero pattern of events. In addition, students must articulate a clear and timely “mission” for the demi-god. There must be a total of at least 21 classical Greek mythology deities involved in some way in the genealogy, prophecies, enemies, and narratives of the Super-being.

Other requirements incorporated into this project that impact student learning and achievement include tasks such as designing a demi-god logo, writing a pre-history of the demi-god, telling the story of the mortal and deity parents of the demi-god, giving a Super-being name to the demi-god inspired by the ancient Greek language that defines its mission and more. (See more on the Super-being Project Rubric, pages 7 to 9 in Course Materials.)

Hearing *The Inferno*

I engage students through other projects as well. One is their Personal Inferno. As is true of the language Dante uses in *The Inferno*, this workshop also involves metaphors and explicit descriptions of sensual perceptions. For instance, the Sonic Evocation part of this workshop is just one of several tools I employ to help students “own” the literature. In Sonic Evocation, I use objects and instruments to make sounds that are then interpreted by students metaphorically.

Sonic Evocation therefore, adds to the development of a student writer’s palette of metaphors. Students are instructed to give details to the cause of the sounds within the metaphors they create. In many cases the students themselves operate the objects and instruments to make the sounds. In this project, I further engage and impact students through the employment of color

metaphors, aroma metaphors¹ and tactile experiences. These somatic sensual stimuli help fill the students' own writer's palette to help them restate a portion of *The Inferno* in their own voice.

I am committed to and stand by these and many other methodologies I bring to the experiences of my students to impact their minds, bodies and spirit to foster achievement in their college careers.

Finding Unexplored Places in Our Minds and on Campus

Alternative Venues at MSU

Performing Arts Venues--To truly engage students in a full somatic experience with community, context, meaning, and experiences of the senses, I have developed an ongoing relationship with Montclair State's Office of Arts and Cultural Programming (ACP). ACP commissions important artists who create, direct and perform innovative theater. I meet with ACP's Director of Community Engagement, Carrie Urbanic, before the academic year begins to select the writers, directors, composers, and performances that may be most relevant for Mythology and General Humanities students. Together we determine who can bring another allegorical perspective to our studies.

Not Just Anything Goes--In the Spring Semester 2018, I invited Mythology students to the musical comedy *Anything Goes*, performed by the Department of Theatre and Dance at the Alexander Kasser Theater. Almost every student in my class came to one of the performances. I discovered letters written from Paris in 1934 by the composer and writer of *Anything Goes*, Cole Porter, while he was authoring the musical comedy. I reviewed these letters with students. In them Porter states the classical and mythological influences on his characters, script, and personal writing process. These influences included Aristophanes, Dante, Proust, Juvenal, and Homer. Identifying these references, we did further research on them together. I then added

¹ The instruments I employ in teaching students to select aroma or emotion suggest ways to categorize their thoughts on a topic. The Aroma Wheel, for instance, (see Course Materials) categorizes the possible aroma metaphors for wine effects. In addition to the Aroma Wheel suggesting Dionysus, it also provides students with a critical thinking model that categorizes and then details ideas, sometimes referred to as scaffolding. By perceiving aromas and being able to name them categorically, students may analogously understand how scholars may categorize theories of myth, genres of literature, archetypal structures, and sociological divisions in our current and historical mythoi.

these primary-source references to the Play Review Instructions I have developed for students. The Play Review is designed to incorporate General Humanities or Mythology studies into students' writing about their theater experience. See Course Material for the Play Review Instructions and other support materials for *Anything Goes*. I have written about this approach for other disciplines as well in the article available through the following link

<http://teachingandlearningatmsu.wordpress.com/2013/04/30/performing-arts-as-pedagogy-by-christopher-parker/>.

George Segal Gallery-- George Segal Gallery is a venue I visit with students during a normal class period, which ensures 100% attendance. Segal Gallery often has an exhibit featuring contemporary or historical paintings, masks, or sculptures displaying mythological heroes, deities, or stories. For instance, the current show at Segal Gallery exhibits the work of very relevant artists as most are adjuncts in the College of the Arts at Montclair State. At least one collection of large paintings by the artist Kyle Staver directly portrays classical Greek mythology stories. As an example of how much I immerse myself and students into the gallery experience, when possible I also discuss the intention of the art not only with the Educational Coordinator Adam Swarth, but also with the artists themselves. In a panel discussion at the Gallery, which I attended, Ms. Staver provided insight into the mythologies narrated in her paintings. Mr. Swarth also engages my students from his unique perspective as an artist and gallery educator.

Yogi Berra Museum--I set up an appointment, consistent with class time, through Eve Schaenen, Executive Director of Yogi Berra Museum and Learning Center. At the museum, I facilitate a somatic educational experience because the Berra archives impact student understanding of the Classical Mythological concept of the hero. For example, by perceiving Yogi Berra artifacts such as his catcher's helmet, chest protector and shin guard, we can draw perceptual analogies to the classical hero's helmet, shield and armor. As well, love letters between Yogi and his wife Carmen, suggest the hero's archetypal female support from a spouse, lover, or goddess.

I foster achievement by helping students develop their own voice to enhance “owning” curriculum concepts. I have immersed students into the learning experiences utilizing techniques I have studied and developed for over 35 years of service as a teaching artist, adjunct professor, and through earning a doctorate in pedagogy and philosophy.

Still, as mentioned, the above methods are only a part of the full impact of the complete college course I offer to my students. I also program twice-weekly online quizzes. I support their progress in a midterm essay. I rehearse student-conducted presentations. Moreover, I assign the traditional research paper but present it as a complete experience as well.

A New Read on the Research Paper

First, I help students clearly identify and state a purpose for their papers, which leads them to more accurate research subjects and helps them ask the right questions to produce a solid, informative research paper. Next, I conduct a Research Library Lab, in collaboration with the Reference Staff at Sprague Library. I have worked with most of the Reference Staff in my time at MSU, so whoever we are working with understands my lab objective. The objective is for each student to find and cite a peer reviewed/scholarly journal article relevant to their research topic. Subsequently, student paper drafts are workshopped in class, with myself and an *American Idol*-style panel, consisting of three or four students. The paper is shared by way of a projector screen presentation, and read to the class. Then the *American Idol*-style panel comments on the paper giving research support and suggestions to improve organization and focus when helpful. This has an impact on all students in the class, as they learn from the research efforts of the student-author and participate in classmates’ critical thinking dialogue. This allows students to encounter ways to do their own papers more effectively.

In addition to the Research Paper, alternate on-campus venues, metaphorical thinking and somatic learning experiences, I also offer other educational media to my students. I provide links to YouTube, library multi-media, and other sources addressing relevant subjects. I regularly

design, edit, and improve PowerPoint presentations to support lectures. As well I utilize traditional media like chalkboard, whiteboard and handouts.

My Presence to Help Achievement

The methods I employ passionately require a classroom personality to carry them and impact students' achievement. I put much energy into my interactive class periods with students. I walk up and down every aisle. I speak directly with students. I use body language to add to the meaning of my voice. I provide life application lessons from my own experiences, which tend to draw extra focus. I listen attentively to student questions and comments. In these ways, as well as the planned and well-conceived pedagogical tools I give, students know I care about their personal achievement.

My pedagogies help students understand the consequent impacts, archetypal images, history, theories and information of Classical Mythology. Likewise, students achieve social, moral, religious, mythical, philosophical and aesthetic understanding of General Humanities.

To support their achievement, I use my expanding tested toolkit of

- somatic learning experiences
- metaphorical thinking exercises
- alternative campus venues
- live performance attendance
- Community of Inquiry dialogue
- research paper workshops and more.

The dynamic learning experience I bring to students engages them to come out ahead in their personal learning. What begins in my teaching environments then gives students the tools to go beyond the course, preparing them for future academic achievement and for their lives.