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This Digest will consider approaches to language arts teaching that are based on

"mythic" or "archetypal" ways of experiencing and knowing. Such approaches address students' inner lives more directly than do the usual instructional methods such as whole language or student-centered instruction, and thus can help to promote feelings-sharing, intuition, and imagery production in the classroom. For example, in attempting to balance the decades-old emphasis on mental skills and rote learning in language education, many teachers and researchers are starting to address the intuitive, holistic or "right-brain" functions of students (King, 1990; Roberts, 1989).

MYTHS, IMAGERY, AND SYMBOLS

Carl Jung (1966) called the images that we see after waking from a dream "archetypal." He also coined the term "collective unconscious" for the level of awareness from which this imagery springs, because he felt it was common to all human beings. According to Jung, the archetypes, or archetypal potentials for image-making found in the collective unconscious provide the basis for worldwide myths, imagery, and symbols. Myth follows certain identifiable tendencies and takes form in similar shapes because humanity at all times and places has shared a common unconscious fund of experience (Birenbaum, 1988).

Developing a personal mythology involves using a body of personal myths to form a system for organizing one's conception of reality and guiding day-to-day behavior. By using cross-cultural myths, fairy tales, and folklore, a teacher can help his or her students bring their personal mythologies into clearer focus and inspire them to use their own or other people's myths in creative writing. (For suggestions for creative writing, see "Notes from Beyond the Cognitive Domain," edited by Alice Brand and Dick Graves.) In this way, students can gain a more global perspective on their lives and an expanded sense of their place in the universe. As language educator Nancy King (1990) says, "working with myths to stimulate images and stories (metaphor and memory) enables students from cultures around the world to discover more about who they are and continue the lifelong process of 'making themselves.'"

MYTH AND ARCHETYPE AS INSTRUCTIONAL TOOL

Concerning the value of myth as an instructional tool, King states that myths and folk tales are a powerful source of wisdom and comfort that can be used to nourish and stimulate imagery and the expression of students' inner experience. Generally, the outward-directed awareness of students is stressed in language arts classrooms, so that inner sources of feeling, insight, and creativity are ignored. But working with myths can bring students back into contact with these inward forces. King discusses Feinstein et al's (1988) personal mythology approach and adapts it for use in the language arts classroom. Students create stories, dramas, and images, share memories and life experiences, and write narratives based on unresolved life issues. As King (1990) suggests, the folk tales and myths provide the stimulus, and the classroom work offers

the occasion for students "to discover and develop their authentic voices in an environment free of premature judgment." King's technique includes rewriting, inner imaging, and reflection by students to uncover the universal meaning contained in their own personal symbols, and the personal meaning to be discovered in universal symbols.

Crow (1986) introduces the classroom teacher to the study of archetypal patterns in literature and ways to teach writing that are grounded in students' experience of archetypal themes in their own lives. Employing the theories of Jung, Crow describes the general nature of archetypes and provides a writing assignment that guides students in writing about the "archetype of initiation." This cross-cultural archetypal pattern reflects humanity's need for rites of passage into new stages of life. Students are asked to look at their lives as texts, choose one initiation experience, and describe it in detail. As Crow points out, using archetypes in this way can lead students to define their values and initiate them onto "the path of wisdom."

In a different article, Crow (1983) shows teachers how to help students use "steppingstones" or "markers" to divide their lives into significant periods, and write about them by exploring dreams, fantasies, and "twilight imagery" (images that arise during the "twilight state" just before sleep). Through Crow's journal-writing procedure, students can uncover mythic-archetypal patterns such as the hero's journey, initiation, and death-rebirth. Thus, by moving from subjective, unconscious experience to the objective process of writing, students can see the links between their innermost feelings, images, and thoughts and the public world of autobiography and literature.

DREAM SHARING IN THE CLASSROOM

Pirmantgen (1976) discusses dream sharing in the classroom as a way to help students uncover the mythic themes underlying their inner processes. Pirmantgen's work with dreams in her own classroom led her to speculate on the idea that people's dreams are the primary basis of a culture's mythology. She asked: "Could it be that our culture's folklore and myth are cut off from a primary source--the people's dream experiences, which express the cosmic meanings underlying human life--those same meanings that inspire art and literature?"

Pirmantgen's (1976) dreamwork approach to enhancing students' mythic-archetypal ways of knowing and experiencing involves 3 processes: (1) developing a class's awareness, recognition, and memory of dream states and content; (2) creative work with students' own dream material; and (3) drawing parallels between students' dream content and the English curriculum. Pirmantgen admits that working with students' dreams will usually be a peripheral part of the language arts curriculum. But she also feels that dreamwork is important because it helps students open themselves up to an area of their being that is rich in personal meaning and closely allied to their creative abilities.

CONCLUSIONS

This Digest addresses a much neglected area of students' lives--their inner intuitive and image-making abilities and emotional states. As Jung and our other researchers insist, mythic forms of knowledge and experience resonate with the deepest levels of our nature as human beings, because they reflect the archetypal or fundamental forces within us. As we teachers and our students learn to access these inner resources, we may develop in the process a greater understanding and sense of our oneness with other cultures and with the universe as a whole.

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