Intro: Welcome to the Magic Mountie podcast. This is a podcast that's dedicated to helping faculty and other college employees as they try and navigate the challenging fabric of serving students, especially at Mt. San Antonio College, but everyone's welcome.

Christina: Welcome back to Part 2 of Marco Benassi's Experiential Learning Workshop. In this episode, we go on a field adventure in Palm Springs for a hike that yields not only physical experiences, but philosophical ones as well. Marco points out that nature provides the best metaphors for life and we got to experience that poetic combination firsthand. Before we begin crossing rivers and hiking dusty trails, we do have a few more inspiring words from the participants during day one in the classroom. Marco's pending question is answered during Power Point presentations given by the faculty members in the workshop.

Marco Benassi: In the back of your head, I just want you to start thinking because this afternoon, I want you think of something local that's very realistic that you could do, and of course, that you can attach to it. I want you to think of something exotic.

Speaker 2: Two courses of Oceanography 10 and ...

Speaker 3: Culinary 114 which is Sustainability and Culinary Arts.

Speaker 2: So you already saw the bottom two pictures of our brand new building, a facility for the cooking. On the top picture, you see the Wrigley Institute, which is out on Catalina Island. Then you see a kelp forest picture there. So we want to talk about combining culinary art and then how to do sustainable food and kelp forest.

Speaker 3: And how we protect the oceans so they can feed us for generations to come.

Speaker 2: This is the exotics of oceanography. I'd love to develop a study abroad program to take students to Germany. There's a lot of world leading research institutions there.

Speaker 3: I took to my advisory board a class called Food of a Place and then we could take a trip downtown L.A. and see what the food scene is there or we could eat our way through Italy.

Speaker 4: I teach a Counseling 2 class, which is College Success Strategies and so I thought a local place would be Irvine Outdoor Education Center where they have a lot of rope courses and just getting out of your comfort zone type of activities to help students. This would be like an engagement process for the students, getting out of their comfort zone and building relationships.

Speaker 4: As for my second one, I also am liaison to the fashion program. We thought maybe a full cultural experience would be going to Italy, Milan, to explore the fashion industry and fashion culture there.

Speaker 5: I teach Counseling 1, so Intro to College, so I just thought it would be interesting to teach class outside in a different area that we wouldn't normally go to and also I've never been there myself so I think it would be nice to go to. For my exotic one, I thought Yosemite to doing the stairs. A lot of the times in my class, I'll let them know that it's not always a straight path, that life happens and things will occur. So it's not point A, point B for a lot of people it actually looks very unorganized. I thought maybe taking them up the stairs to get a breath, maybe taking a break, and then discussing something, and then going, and then just to let them know that life happens, things happens, we need to pause. But at the end, we'll accomplish our goal.

Christina: All right. As we move into day two, we all piled into a campus van to head up to Palm Springs. As we did that, I asked just a couple people to recap some of their experiences from the day before. They elaborate a little on the exercises they underwent because there were many more than just the hula hoop featured in part one. Join us for more of their takeaways and the physical journey we embark on together with a special focus of communication at its heart.

Dalia Chavez: My name is Dalia Chavez.

Host: Just remind us what you do Mt. SAC.

Dalia Chavez: Sure. I'm a counselor in the Adult Basic Education part of the school and the school of continuing ed.

Christina: So you participated yesterday obviously because everyone that's here today participated yesterday. I was just wondering, what was your biggest takeaway from yesterday's experience now that you've slept on it?

Dalia Chavez: You know what? I think a lot of it was really getting out of your comfort zone. Even if you're not certain or just at least try it and really trust in the process because I volunteered to do one of the activities, which normally I would never volunteer for anything. I'm the last person sitting in the back of the room, but you know what? I said, "Okay, let's try this." And I ended up at the front of the room blindfolded, but it was a good experience and I really had to trust my teammates and get totally out of my comfort zone. So I think that was the biggest takeaway, like even when you do that, things turn out okay. You're not going to fall apart. There will be somebody there. It was really nice to see not only the support of my teammates who were also blindfolded, but everyone in the room, "No, go up. Go down. Make it this way. Turn around that way." And really just, I think the word he used was being vulnerable, totally true.

Christina: Yeah, very cool. From that experience or maybe from another experience you had yesterday, maybe you haven't thought of this yet, but maybe you have, what is one small thing you think you could apply right away to what you already teach?

Dalia Chavez: I think during the hula hoop exercise, I really liked when he said, "Who hasn't said a word?" Then elected that person to then lead and really giving that person the opportunity to step out of the shadows and really shine. Not everyone will take that opportunity but some people are waiting for it. "If it's what the teacher said, then I can do it." I think that that would be something that I can really take and make my own.

Donna Necke: My name's Donna Necke and I work in Adult Basic Education, which is in the School of Noncredit.

Christina : What would you say your biggest takeaway was from yesterday?

Donna Necke: Oh, there's so many. It's hard to just pinpoint one. First of all, I learned a lot about Mt. SAC, about other departments, about other people who work on campus. Then the other thing is it allowed me to see things through the student's eyes instead of on the other side of the lecture. Being able to put myself in a student's shoes to facilitate learning has really changed and opened up my mind.

Christina: With that being said, is there one small thing that you think you can apply right away to one of the things you're teaching now?

Donna Necke: Most definitely. I don't have to be in control of my class to facilitate learning. Students are capable of learning, being self directed. So I plan on immediately changing the structures of my lectures and not just give the information, but allow them to discover the information.

Christina: Oh, that's big.

Donna Necke: It is. I've really enjoyed it. It was worthwhile and I hope they repeat this because I think other faculty would really get a lot from it.

Marco Benassi: First of all, if we need to stop at any point, maybe for like 20 minutes or so or 10 or 20 minutes and see how we're feeling, there's this first little stretch and then it gets into a valley. Then in that valley, we start heading into the oasis. You'll see it. At that particular point, we can sort of stop, just check in, make sure everybody's okay, then we'll continue with the hike. All right? Group hug? Group hug? Get it started.

Marco Benassi: Let's start to the right. Your word, what was your word?

Dalia Chavez: Social.

Marco Benassi: Social.

Donna Necke: Change.

Christina: Open.

Dafna: Interesting.

Tanya: Genuine.

Jan: Centered.

Jason: Clarity.

Daisy: Open.

Liesel: Release.

Marco Benassi: Cleanse. Think about that word and think about what it means to you and what it represents and then later on, we'll talk about why you chose that word. One more time, real fast.

Dalia Chavez: Social.

Donna Necke: Change.

Christina: Open.

Dafna: Interesting.

Tanya: Genuine.

Jan: Centered.

Jason: Clarity.

Daisy: Open.

Liesel: Release.

Marco Benassi: And Cleanse. All right. Let's go.

Christina: We're beginning our hike. This is just the beginning so we'll see how everyone feels at the end.

Marco Benassi: Seriously, if time is of the essence, which it kind of is today, time is ... We do need to move quickly. The good news about pictures is everything we're seeing on the way in, we're going to see on the way back.

Christina: Maybe they'll be some pictures that people will take that I can post in the show notes of this episode, but for now, we're just going to see how it goes. Marco set it up so that people take turns being in the front and in the back. It's all about immersing everyone in all of the experience. So we're going to see how that goes. We have an entire troop of horses coming by.

Christina: Okay. We're officially on the hike and I'm going to talk to Daisy for just a moment. I'm going to ask her a little bit about yesterday. Daisy, what would you say your biggest takeaway was from yesterday's experience?

Daisy: Different perspectives, learning ... Pretty much learning that ... Well, one, that there are different areas in Mt. SAC that I am still am not aware of. Two, that you're put into a group and you really don't know, but you really have a lot of commonalities with them, a lot of things in common, which I really enjoyed and appreciated to get to know my colleagues on a deeper level.

Christina: One other question for you. Is there anything that you experienced yesterday that you feel like you could apply right away in either a class or something that you do at Mt. SAC?

Daisy: Yes. The teaching your class in a different area, that part I really like. I think that's something that I want to incorporate into my classroom because I think just by changing the environment that you're in, you really could change the attitude of the students in the classroom. So I'm looking forward to that.

Christina: The five mile hike took a few hours to complete. We crossed many rivers with slippery rocks and were faced to choose to get wet and be a little safer or risk hopping across unstable boulders to be a little drier. I think we all ended up pretty wet by the end. We also climbed a few rocky areas and helped each other along quite a bit. But a huge part of this day was about communication and relationships. Each person had to take a turn at the front of the group and the back of the group and we had to pair up with every person there to have a conversation, always beginning with a little info about our families. I was able to catch up with Marco towards the end of our hike to get his perspective on our little adventure.

Christina: So we are towards the end of our trail experience today. We're walking back and I'm walking alongside Marco. I'm just going to get him to recap a little bit what today was about, what kind of sort of exercises, assignments that he gave us as we walked along in addition to the actual terrain and trail. So, Marco, do you mind telling us just a little bit about today?

Marco Benassi: I think it was an incredible group that was really willing to push themselves a little bit. We had a lot of river crossings and we broke into pairs and discussed all kinds of concepts like trust, is it earned or lost? I think people really were honest and sharing. It's amazing at how quickly you get to know people even in just a five or 10 minute discussion that's really focused. The terrain was beautiful. The land was beautiful. I think they really grasped the whole concept of how you can take an experiential opportunity and turn it into something that could be meaningful and lasting and really reveal insights about who you are and where you're going and how you relate to other people.

Christina: Yeah. I like that you ... We talked about family a lot. Each time we repaired up with a new person, the idea was to talk to everybody today, each time we were supposed to start with the family part. But I'm curious what inspired that idea? Why do you think that works so well in getting to know someone?

Marco Benassi: Well, I think when you talk about your own parents and your own family dynamics, it's such a rich source of understanding, of dynamics, of who you are, where you came from, how you relate to people in different ways, and why you trust, why you don't trust. Our parents are just a great example that we can either understand how we follow their example or how we've really diverted and gone into a completely different direction and become different people from who our parents are. It's such a universal thing that anybody can share and anybody can relate to, that it's never been an issue for people to share. It's probably one of the most personal and meaningful things in our lives that we can all relate to. We go right for the jugular and that's going to tell people right away, are they somebody who reveals things easily, ere they somebody that holds on to things as well.

Liesel: Okay. So we're almost done with the trail. Something that's come up for me, Marco ... This is Liesel. That I thought that one of the purposes of this trip or the purpose of this trip was to sort of help faculty understand how they could lead classes, how they could develop their own courses. It strikes me that there's really two reasons to bring faculty out here. One is that, to be able to change how they teach, but the other is ... Sorry, bumpy trail. Personal renewal, the faculty coming ... and coming with other faculty is an opportunity to reflect, to grow, to collaborate, and to reignite their interest in teaching. I know this is the first time you've done this. Do you have any thoughts on that?

Marco Benassi: I was talking to Barsi about this earlier. I think we get caught up in faculty development and personal development as trying to impart techniques or give strategies or show how to use the library, not that those aren't valuable things. I think they're all practical and valuable, but to me, the greatest resource that a faculty has is who they are and how they're able to fully be who they are to their students, to model what a good student is and what a good person is. To me, true faculty development and one of the purposes here is to really be able to give them ... I'm sorry, we going uphill here ... is to give them the opportunity to truly take a look at themselves and see if they like who they are and they like what they're offering to their students.

Marco Benassi: I think by helping them become more whole and clear and intentional about what they're doing and about how they feel, they're going to be better educators. They're going to communicate more effectively to their students and they're not going to get burned out. They're going to continue to see the value there. Every new class and every new student is truly another great opportunity to connect and to help somebody move forward in their life. That's really what I'm trying to do and it's something that I keep trying to do for myself in every experience that I share with these other members.

Marco Benassi: Tanya, what was your word?

Tanya: My word? In the beginning?

Marco Benassi: Yes. Your word.

Tanya: Wow. Genuine.

Marco Benassi: Genuine?

Tanya: Yeah.

Marco Benassi: How did you feel you did on the hike? Do you feel like you were genuine?

Tanya: Yeah. Well, I guess I understood you more as of what is an important word for us in our lives and how we do things? I just like being with people and doing things when everybody's genuine because I try to be.

Marco Benassi: Okay. Did you feel like you were pretty genuine with people?

Tanya: Yeah.

Marco Benassi: All right. Donna?

Donna Necke: You know, it's funny coming in. I picked change, but after coming out, I feel like bonding, I mean that's really what ... I mean I've worked with all you for over two years, but I feel like I have a different relationship with her now and then with everybody else too.

Marco Benassi: And Dalia?

Dalia Chavez: My word was social because I'm not the most social of creatures normally, so I wanted to kind of venture out. You made it super easy for me to get to talk to everyone here, so that kind of made that happen, but as well as the bonding. I found out about other people's families and all these things that I was bonding and social, so I got a little bit of both.

Marco Benassi: Daisy?

Daisy: My word was open. For me, it was more being open to any changes that were going to happen or just spur of the moment things. I thought it went well. When you asked, "Who wants to lead," or if you would ask someone to do something, I felt myself already trying to go first.

Marco Benassi: And Chan?

Chan: My word was centered and I really wanted to embrace this day for myself because I'm a mom so, I do things for my kids and I do things for my students, but I don't get to really do things for me, so this was my moment to just really embrace everything and feel centered for myself.

Marco Benassi: Do you feel like you'll be able to take that back with you a little bit? I mean did it resonate?

Chan: I hope so. Yes, I think so.

Marco Benassi: A chance to really reflect on that. Because that's one of the real goals of this, it's not just to have this experience, but it's to be able to say, "Hey, here's something concrete that I can really take back and apply to my life." We were talking about that aha moment that when you see a student have that, it's so powerful, but just ... It's not going to always happen in a couple of hours of one hike. Sometimes it doesn't happen until on the airplane on the way back, landing at the airport or at the baggage claim and a person will be like, "That was the most powerful experience that I've had when this happened." You never know when it's going to happen, but putting yourself open to that possibility. Cool.

Marco Benassi: And Jason?

Jason: Mine was clarity. For me, if I have uncertainty in my life, I usually retreat or I fear things, but once I gain more clarity ... For example, getting to know everyone else. Also, at the hike itself. Hiking in general for me is being able to clear my mind a bit more, so clarity is very important and that's what I got a lot more of, more so with, like I said, getting to know each other. I didn't know that part of the clarity, where I didn't know anyone, it was a big unknown. Then as the fog started to clear, I felt a lot more ... like a little bit more empowered and little more connected with everyone, so that was cool.

Marco Benassi: Dafna?

Dafna: My word was interesting. It's just important for me to do interesting things and part of having an interesting life and sometimes life isn't that interesting. I was really happy for this opportunity to get the side of experiential learning, but also in a way that's related to my field. So I was really excited that this wasn't just at Mt. SAC and that we got to go out here and hike. It was awesome.

Marco Benassi: Yeah. I want to thank you, Dafna, for being able to point out the poison oak and the sage. So you pointed out something spiritual and beautiful and something very dangerous and toxic, which are great metaphors. Again, the earth is providing us with all these metaphors to help us understand communication through nature.

Marco Benassi: Liesel, what about you?

Liesel: Mine was release. I've had some stress and angst about things that I need to let go of that I can't change. That was my personal agenda, but it was sort of funny because as we realized we were running late, which I wasn't aware of. I was like, "Oh, we're doing so great," because I feel a need to try and ... This is our first time and I don't want people to go back and feel we didn't respect their time and I've been so stressed about it. I'm like, "You know what? I have to release that. I'm not fully in control of this situation. It is what it is." I'm not 100% responsible for making us get back at 3:00. There's horses, there's creeks, there's weather, and there's all of us. I'm letting that go. So I hope you're all okay with that. I've released. I've released.

Marco Benassi: So we'll see those if there's any surveys that you have to fill out later.

Marco Benassi: My word was cleanse and for me, it was very ... It was cleansing. This hike was very cleansing. I still bring so much insecurity to any of these experiences when I work with other schools and other faculty members and professional development. I still have a film on me, that sense of fear that I think a lot of our students have as well too. Again, interesting to sort of work through that and try to be calmer and relaxed and just appreciate what I'm doing and not be so concerned what other people think. I think I do. I still care too much about what people think. I still take things too personally and I really believe today, I felt even better, more comfortable of just sharing and being who I was and being in the moment. A lot of that is because I felt comfortable with the people that I was with and sharing this journey with them.

Speaker 1: Hey, thanks so much for joining us for the Magic Mountie Podcast. We love your likes, we love your shares, and we love your comments. So please engage with our community, download from wherever you love to get your podcast, iTunes, Google, Rate My Professors. We're there and we want you to be back with us next week. Remember, any opinions that are expressed in this podcast do not necessarily represent Mt. San Antonio College or any of its agents. We'll see you next time.