



Scholé Muses with Jennifer Dow

Cultivating Wonder in Our Teaching

Outline:

Cultivating Wonder in our Teaching

- Cultivating wonder is about stewardship, demeanor, and atmosphere more than content or particular things we study.
 - This begins with the teacher as the first student.
 - Transitions to the students imitating the teacher catching your love and humility as you seek truth.
 - Culminates in students becoming co-learners with the teacher.
 - Reflection on your own teaching and saw how students responded and in response to that asking what needed to be changed and making changes each year.
 - From middle school interest to the last two years of high school when students begin to seek out knowledge on their own.
- How do we get there?
 - There are definite things we can know and practice.
 - Begins with the view of man as a deep mystery.
 - This view of man is related to cultivating wonder because wonder is a mystery.
 - Quote from Tale of Two Cities Part 1, Section 3
 - Considering that each person has their own thoughts fears and hopes that are known to themselves results in the difference between working with someone versus working on someone.
 - When we fail to acknowledge is a deep mystery we tend to work on them.
 - If you see the child in front of you as a deep mystery it's easier to work with them and to recognize there are things you can't do.
 - The nature of the cultivation of wonder is a mystery.
 - We have to work the ground, plant, and to water seeds.
 - We have to wait upon Pentecost, we have to wait on God to bring the growth.
 - We are stewarding the land.
- David Hicks "Classical spirit of inquiry" from Norms and Nobility.
 - Spirit of inquiry is equivalent to the cultivation of wonder.



- “Concerned with a development of style through language and conscience through myth.”
- “Everything springs from the special nature of the inquiry. The inquiry dictates the form of instruction and establishes the moral framework for thought and action.”
- 3 attributes to the spirit of inquiry
 - General curiosity - a state of mind that any question is on the table
 - Opposed to the systematic nature of modern science
 - A generative state of mind that wants to ask any question
 - Create an atmosphere that allows for all sorts of questions and where curiosity is celebrated
 - Forming an imaginative hypothesis
 - Maybe it’s this or that?
 - The far flung nature of the questions often makes impossible what qualifies today as scientific hypothesis
 - Speculation, imaginative solutions
 - One completes the inquiry by devising methods for testing the hypothesis.
 - Restrictions placed by modern science not adequate
 - May include reason or observation, logic or experimentation, emotional or religious experience
 - The Seven Liberal Arts- the arts of truth perception. To justify knowledge and to come to terms with something
 - Provide lenses through which to come to terms with your question or to test it
 - Not the norm of modern culture which needs precision and certainty
- This allows the educated man to go on educating himself.... This is the person who as Aristotle says ...is competent to judge what the experts say without being the expert himself.”
- “The wonder is the feeling of a philosopher.”
 - *Confessions* by St. Augustine



- Read through with primarily the lens of what he is saying, asking and through the lens of a spirit of inquiry into truth.
- He is transparent and shows his thoughts so we can imitate how he asks questions, how he forms hypothesis.
- Sense of wonder and of playfulness: a repentant man confessing both his sins and the works and wonders of God.
- He asks any question, whatever the answer is he wants to know truth
- Sometimes we avoid asking a question for fear of the answer
 - Also, Wendell Berry “On Poetry and Marriage” essay and C.S. Lewis in *Perelandra*
 - Socrates also wants to always know the truth.
 - Is truth most important? If so how does that impact how one lives and ask questions?
- High school students reading *Confessions* through this lens learn how to read better and inquire better
- In our schools or homes we begin with a conversation around questioning
 - Dorothy Mills in *Ancient Rome*
 - About questioning: “No honest and sincere question does one any harm....The questioning of big minds which is honestly seeking to understand something which is vast and great and beyond the questioner and the questioning of the little mind which is not based on sound knowledge, on that which has already been comprehended but which only seeks to cast doubt on that which for various reasons the questioner would find it either more convenient or more comfortable not to believe.”
 - When beginning a class with this concept, gives students something concrete to imitate.
 - Questioning is a skill set that can be learned but needs to have an atmosphere to thrive in.
 - We see this embodied in Augustine and look for it embodied in other characters in literature.
- Practices to cultivate wonder
 - Practicing repentance
 - Learning one is small and that’s okay. Consider the awe of looking at an ocean.



- Nature study, art, music is the fertile ground to make us see awe and less afraid to feel small in a way that makes us want to know our Creator.
- Release the need to be certain.
 - Example of Augustine: struggled with wanting to be certain, but it's not how things work.
 - Wonder is a generative and living thing.
- Give them the right mental furniture.
 - Older works require knowledge about how writers and readers thought differently.
 - There are things that must be known in order to enter in to the way people from different ages thought.
 - Part of cultivating wonder for older students
- Set up the understanding of big mind and small mind questions.
 - Is truth most important?
 - Are we brave enough to ask the questions?
 - Does our home and classroom have a spirit to seek truth?
 - All questions are on the table.
- Encourage inquiry in all realms
 - Mortimer Adler - syntopical reading - write the questions that come to mind while reading in the margins.
 - Make notes when you are reminded of something.
- Hold the answer loosely.
 - You cannot possess the whole ocean.
 - You can know aspects.
 - It's living, there are always more to learn and more layers.
- Celebrate connections and seeing.
 - Share in the excitement of connections.
 - Don't discourage children by dismissing their excitement because it doesn't interest you.