



## A Teacher's Wonder

By JOHN BICKART, Ph.D. | *Science Education and Spiritual Transformation* / Chapter 2: You Are Your Own Best Teacher

### What is a Teacher?

A teacher is many things. Are you a teacher? Even if you are not employed as such, you are, just the same. We are all our own teachers. We listen to others, we listen to life, then we decide - as teachers of ourselves - what to take away. Every situation we encounter is a lesson. What you take away from an event forms your character. And this is always up to you.



Ten weeks ago, I was teaching this to a class, and I found myself saying, "Don't simply listen to anyone. Don't go into automatic mode. Don't automatically take what life gives you - but don't automatically reject it, either. Pay attention, be the greatest observer you can be of whatever comes to you. Then decide with critical assessment what you will take away." The students heard me loud and clear. They have missed a lot of live class time for the past three years (when the pandemic of 2020-2023 hit) and have been at home in front of screens and without social interaction. Their attention span has diminished and they can see their own selves treating me

like I was a video on the computer. They saw themselves slightly ignoring me or giving me a kind of automatic attention.

I then taught about the science and engineering of *friction*. We observed cases where friction can be unpleasant - like scrapes and bruises. Then we remembered cases where friction can be fun - like scratching an itch or rubbing your hands together to get warm. We looked deeper and deeper and concluded that without friction, everything would fall apart. We concluded that we need friction to function in the physical world. Then we examined psychological friction. It had parallel cases that were unpleasant - like arguments. We also remembered that sometimes friction can be fun or helpful. For instance, if a friend or loved one uses enough resistance to stop you from making a mistake, the friction in the relationship is helpful.

We then consciously, critically decided what to take away from our lesson on friction. I asked, "Does it make you wonder if there are always psychological parallels to every scientific fact?" We pondered this in a state of wonder for a minute, then I said, "Notice how you are your own teacher. And notice the two acts you just performed. First, you decided **critically** what to take away that is factual. Then you decided what idea to allow to resonate inside of you that was pure **wonder**. This is teaching."

## **Becoming Your Own Teacher**

So, if you are to intentionally become your own teacher, you may want to ask, "Is that all there is to being a teacher? Are there other aspects of teaching?" To this I answer a resounding, "Yes - there is so much more!" But,

if I had to list just two more of the most important qualities, they would be ...

1. Always keep **observing** - without judgement, without too much analysis - be the best observer you can be. Like a good scientist, a teacher stays awake in learning mode - a student of life.
2. Model learning. Listen to everyone around you - and look for the opportunity to be changed by another person or an event in life. And when you have been changed - and this is very important - be **grateful for the lesson, the gift**. And if this becomes a habit, you may even start being grateful before you receive the next gift.

## Observing

OBSERVING ... is learning to learn! Everywhere around you are advice givers, but you control the takeaway. You can quietly observe what they say - then pull out a metaphorical highlighter. What is a metaphorical highlighter? I'll give you an example.

Two students are watching while Bill teases Sue. He makes fun of her hair. The first watcher gets upset by the nasty teasing. The second watcher jumps to Sue's aid and makes her feel great. The first watcher highlighted the crime, while the second watcher highlighted the need for comforting. They both saw the same thing but used different metaphorical highlighters. By the way, the first watcher leaves feeling bad while Sue and the second watcher are uplifted. The highlighter is your way of controlling what you take away from an experience - how you exercise your ability to be your own teacher.

## The Grateful Learner

And, if you are a professional teacher, and you observe so well that you can glean a lesson from a student, then you know you are on the right track! What do you do next? "You thank the student. That's true teaching! Right in front of your student, you have just stopped *telling*. A moment ago, you were doing the talking, now you have shifted to so some *listening*. You have become the student. And now, you have the opportunity to become *grateful*. You just modeled the best thing you could ever wish for your student - to be a **grateful learner**." (Bickart, 2022, p. 15)

## The Two Kinds of Wonder

Let me give you an example. You walk into a science lesson. It is teaching about how to wonder about how gravity works. But perhaps you are wondering about the *mechanism* of gravity. Perhaps the ostensible use of this lesson is to make better and more innovative devices. In a STEM class, you might discuss products you could invent and bring to market. Perhaps the WONDER is to see how we humans can use resources of our environment to serve us. But, I'm here to say, "Watch out!" A science class can have a social impact. Be careful not to fall into the pattern of using the idea of WONDER in science to ONLY learn how to manipulate and control and perhaps even, exploit nature.

Instead, we can balance out the desire to learn science for the purpose of getting something for ourselves - with the kind of learning that observes something to simply see the WONDER of it. Do you ever look at how a tree holds up its branches and say how full of wonder it makes you feel - simply calling it wonderful? Now, you are not

wondering what the tree can do for you or how much money or control it can give you. You are appreciating the tree for its intrinsic value. Do you ever observe trees' shapes for their beauty? Do they ever put you in a state of awe and inspiration?

This is a right brain use of science. Perhaps you could have great fun pairing this right brain kind of WONDER and appreciation with the left brain kind of WONDER that uses science to ask how and why things work. There is more to life than the cause of things - there is also the awe-inspiring, wonder of things. And when we use science to practice observing life for both its use to us and for its innate, incredible qualities we grow our character.

### **Critical Thinking and Relationship**

But what about critical thinking? Well, this little excursion into the philosophy of science used some pretty great critical thinking. If you can see the two kinds of wonder: to wonder about the mechanisms versus to be in a childlike state of wonder, then you have had to be a very clear, critical thinker! But critical thinking is a head activity. To become a great teacher of yourself, you also need heart activity. How do you know if you are growing the part of your character that uses your heart? Below is a test you can use. It shows whether you feel in a heart relationship with whatever science you are studying.

Heart Relationship Test ('YES' answers are not good)

- Is nature a shopping mall of resources?
- Are you looking at people to see values and bargains of what they can do for you?
- Did you forget to think of how an innovation affects the environment?

- Did you forget to ask if an invention displaces other plants, animals or people?

Relationship is the balance to the thinking part of science. Using science to seek relationship with nature is like making a friend. If you were answering 'yes' to the test questions above, please don't look to be my FRIEND. The relationship of having a friend may be one of the greatest things on earth; and if you look to another person as a resource - to see what you can get from them, then, be careful - that may be exactly what you will get. They may look back at you and ask, "What can I get from you?"

What is a friend, anyway? Isn't a friend, someone who thinks you are pretty great? Isn't a friend the one who likes you as you are? And isn't it true, as Emerson said, "the only way to have a friend is to be one"?

Well, we are practicing being friends with each other and with the whole world of nature every time we learn something and decide what to observe. If we look for inspiration, we'll get it and build our own character. If we look for mechanisms, we'll learn that too - and that's fine - as long as we don't stop there.



## #132 The Lamb Prodigy



*Mama ewe was teaching her little lamb the ways of the world. She showed her how to feed on the delicious hay, grass, and grain. She hardly had to show her how to run and jump, for the little lamb seemed to know how to do this just about as soon as she could walk. Then came the time to teach her the most important lesson. “Listen carefully,” began mama, “this is the maxim you will need to know to have a good life - and you will need to remember this all the days of your life.” The little lamb bleated out, “Ok, mama. I’m listening.” “I cannot teach you everything you need to know,” said her mama with a soft and gentle voice, using her eyes to say how much she meant this. “You must not stop at what mama tells you, or the other leaders of our flock. It is good to listen to all of them, but it is most imperative that you watch and learn from life on your own. If you are always observing what is all around you, then you will keep on learning. Always remember, **you are your own best teacher!**”*

**YOU ARE YOUR OWN BEST TEACHER**  
(Bickart, 2020)

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### References

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