

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Teaching—The Sacred Art: The Joy of Opening Minds & Hearts Rev. Jane E. Vennard

At the end of each chapter are questions to invite you to look inward and go more deeply into the stories and ideas in the text. I encourage you to reflect on and maybe journal with them in preparation for the discussion with your book group.

Before diving into the introduction and chapters, I invite you to begin by reflecting on your experiences as a learner. Everyone in your group may not be teachers, but all of you have been to school. There can be no teaching without students and learners, so exploring these roles in your own lives will establish a context for the exploration of teaching as a sacred art.

Happy reading and sharing! I hope you are willing to share from your hearts with one another. I hope you have different responses to the stories and the ideas presented in the book. I hope you are encouraged to claim your teaching as a vocation with all the struggles this involves. I hope you might see teaching a little differently as a result of encountering this book and others in your group.

Many blessings,
Jane E. Vennard

Introductory Discussion

- Share with your group your experiences of being a student. Did you enjoy school? Did you admire your teachers or did you believe that school had nothing to offer you? How important were your peer relationships in your experience of school and learning?
- What were some gratifying learning experiences you had outside of school? Did you teach yourself or did someone teach you? Who did you learn from?
- What are you in the process of learning now?

Chapter One

- What is your “call” story? I invite you to draw your story. This picture can simply be a line. Notice where the line is straight and when it curves or changes direction abruptly. You may make note of when you lost your way or indicate the different choices you made at different times of your life. Try not to judge; simply draw your journey and let the image speak to you. What does it reveal?
- How have your call and vocation stretched you beyond an image of yourself into a new way of being and living in the world and to a more authentic sense of purpose?
- What risks were involved in responding to your call? Do you resonate with Heidi’s experience of flinging yourself into the unknown? What words might you use to describe your understanding of call and vocation?
- Are you feeling discouraged as you read these stories, which are filled with passion and purpose? Do you long for the vibrancy they express, rather than thinking of your teaching as simply your job? What might you learn from the

lived experience of others that would help you reconnect to your original motivation to become a teacher?

Chapter Two

- Review the nine intelligences discussed on pages 24–27. Which three are your strongest and which are your weakest? Were these ratings true for you when you were a child, a teenager, a young adult? Were you encouraged to explore areas in which you did not excel? To become more aware of the multiple intelligences in your teaching and your life, see if you can pinpoint how others are intelligent.
- Recall a time you had to struggle to learn something you needed to know. What was it like to persevere? Did you give up? Were you tempted to give up? Did anyone encourage you? Try to rescue you? What did you learn from the experience?
- Think back to teachers who treated you kindly. What were their various ways of letting you know how they felt about you and other students? What effect did their kindness have on your learning experience? How do you show kindness?

Chapter Three

- Have you had teachers who loved their subjects? What was it like to learn from them? What do you love about your subject and what do you love about teaching it?
- What are your experiences, as both teacher and student, of teacher-centered, subject-centered or learner-centered classroom methods?
- How alive is your inner learner? Think back on a time when a student taught you something new. What was that like?
- How do you feel about keeping up with new developments in your field? When was the last time you explored a new area of learning?

Chapter Four

- When in your teaching have you experienced the power of using personal language?
- How do you feel when you get caught in a debate with another person? Do you love the challenge? Do you want to flee? Why do you react this way?
- When are you apt to cause conversations to turn into debates? Is debate a comfortable communication style for you?
- A colleague said of a friend, “When he listens I hear what I say.” Have you had such an experience of deep listening? What happened as a result of that experience?
- When in your teaching would the use of honest, open questions in any form be beneficial?

Chapter Five

- What has been your experience of shared responsibility in the classroom or with individual students? How has it worked for you? Where have problems arisen?
- As you think of the two models of power we have explored, allow images to emerge from your mind and heart for each of the models, and draw them. What

- do you learn from this visual aid? How might it guide you in claiming your own authority?
- Describe how you claim authority in the classroom, in your place of business, on the sports field, or any other place you hold the designated or informal position of teacher. How has your approach to claiming authority evolved over your years of teaching?

Chapter Six

- Using the guidelines on pages 91–92, envision a part of yourself that is often controlled by others' expectations. Draw the image and see how it may block your authenticity. Also take note of what gifts it may bring.
- Where in your life are you seduced by the idea of becoming flawless and perfect? How does that longing get in the way of your teaching authentically? What might happen if excellence, rather than perfection, were guiding you? Might you then relax and recognize the strength and competence that you already possess?
- As a way to explore how you might guard against surprise, stand with your feet slightly apart and your knees unlocked. Using your arms and upper body, move yourself into a defensive position. This might be by crossing your arms tightly across your chest or your belly. From this pose, say to yourself, "I will not be surprised, I will not be surprised, I will not be surprised." Then take a deep breath, feel your feet on the floor giving you steady support, stand up straight, opening your eyes and arms, and say to yourself a number of times, "I welcome the surprises life brings." Describe the physical and corresponding emotional difference in the two positions. How might this be useful in your teaching life?
- When have you experienced teaching as holding a mirror to your soul? Describe the situation in detail. What feelings arise? What did you learn?

Chapter Seven

- How do your ancestors and your history affect who you are and who you have become? What threads and themes do you see running through the generations?
- When have your teaching experiences been transformative, not only in your behavior but also in your deepest being? How has teaching contributed to making you who you are today?
- Lao-Tzu wrote that he only had three things to teach—simplicity, patience and compassion. What three words would complete this saying for you? What are your greatest treasures?