

A Sense of Wonder

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Background

The important thing is not to stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existing.

Albert Einstein

Ravenshall School is a school in Dewsbury catering for students with Complex Needs. There are approximately 150 students and we welcome students from Reception to Sixth Form.

Science is taught throughout the school and we have a purpose built laboratory to deliver a dynamic curriculum.

When I took over as Subject Leader I detected a malaise within the department and a reluctance of the students to engage. Whilst attending a course, I was reminded of the importance of stimulating *awe and wonder* as an integral part of science education.

How do you develop a curious mind? How do you coach curiosity? How do you awaken interests and fascination in the world around us and what has gone before and how it links with our lives? How do you awaken an interest in Science so often suppressed by academic teaching and over-quantified in our examination regimes? How do we provide access for students with learning difficulties and allow them to explore the world of mystery and miracle whilst allowing them to experience awe and wonder?

Last year, I attended a training course run by the Local Authority. The keynote speaker was Matthew McFall, a consultant who specialises in promoting the Wonder of Science. He is a self-taught magician and author. He also runs a Wonder Room at Nottingham University Samworth Academy. This is aimed at promoting learning through wonder and curiosity. His approach can be summarised as follows:

'I am seeking ways to bring manifold 'wonder' to classrooms/ learning spaces, with the intent of generating engagement, delight, curiosity, and memorable educational experiences.

This magpie project draws from history, philosophy, and psychology, leading to the generation of a theory of learning through wonder, with the production of accompanying artefacts and curricula: 'a box of learning delights'.

We visited the Wonder Room and immediately captivated by the wonder boxes, cabinets of curiosity and the Wonder Maze. We were also struck by the effect that this Room had upon students with learning difficulties, especially those with Autism Spectrum Disorders and behavioural problems.

We returned to plan how we could transfer our inspiration into a tangible training resource which could also provide a beacon of positive learning and good practice throughout the area.

We also thought how we could use the principles of the maze in our outdoor areas. We thought that a Wonder Walk in our environment would provide an ideal area to promote creative learning. This would also incorporate a plan to develop students' love of the natural world

Method

We have begun collecting a diverse range of artefacts by a variety of methods and approaches. These include:

- Advertising project amongst colleagues to request donations
- Contacting local universities and museums for donations
- Visiting curio and antiques shops
- Online purchasing e.g. eBay
- Using local Press

We have also instructed a local landscape gardener to design a learning area that we can designate as our Wonder Walk.

What can we expect from this?

- Heightened engagement in Science
- A refuge for students in a world of hi-tech
- A link with the past to feed into the creative curriculum
- A place to provide sanctuary for the disaffected
- An oasis of awe and wonder
- A centre of good practice
- A way of promoting inclusive practice
- A focal point for local schools to share learning
- A way to bring industry and academia into special education
- An ideal way to promote the cutting edge of special education

References

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-nottinghamshire-13711015>

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2011/may/31/wonder-room-nottingham-university-academy>

