Practically Impractical: Contemplative Practices in Science

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Abstract

Contemplation has been described as a "long, loving look at the real," a characterization that could equally well apply to science. In this paper, I frame a contemplative approach to the teaching and practice of science which draws strongly on the Christian monastic traditions. Students, in particular, struggle with the ever increasing information density in their course work which can cloud their understanding of the relationship of their work to broader contexts. I suggest that the monastic counsels of intentional simplicity, deep listening and constancy can provide a foundation for the design of science courses which help students engage more deeply with their work in the midst of a deluge of information, particularly visual and graphical information. I present four different contemplative practices suited for use in the scientific classroom and research lab: a simple, discreet stilling exercise for focus and attention, a 'beholding' approach to exploring visual data and two writing exercises designed for laboratory researchers.

Keywords

Teaching; Science; Deep Listening; Ignatian Spirituality; STEM education; Contemplative Pedagogy

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References


