

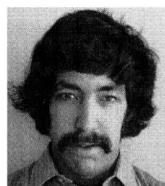
# Then / Now / Beyond

## (A Reflective View of My Changing Truths to Long-Standing Questions)

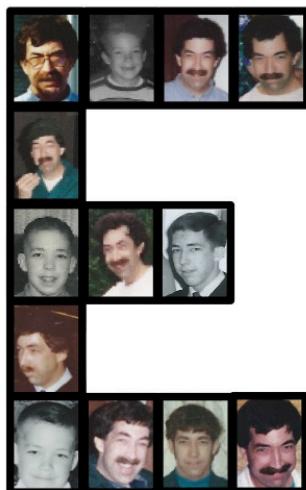
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Central Connecticut State University  
and  
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Current Edition – 04/20/19

Who are these men who share the same name,  
separated by 40 years of experience?  
Does the younger man know what would be in store,  
or is their meeting just some coincidence?



Looking back or looking ahead  
In the end does it really matter?  
You are who you are and  
I am who I am  
Whether you be the younger  
or the latter.



### The Phases/Faces of Ages

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## Acknowledgements

As I review the contents of this monograph, I recognize the influences of many people who helped shape the formative development of my career and the truths I learned to believe in during different phases on that career path. If they are not cited specifically in the body of this monograph, I would like to personally acknowledge the guidance and mentorship of the following individuals:

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**Robert Russell** and **Elena Sliepcevich** – faculty members at SIU whose professional ethics and values I seek to live by in my own current work at Central Connecticut State University.

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I know I have left out names of people whose influence may, in fact, be more significant than the people I identified in the previous sections. I view those named as representatives of hundreds more individuals who have shaped my career path.

A special Thank You to my wife, **Marsha**, and daughters, **Nadya & Natyra**, son-in-law **Randy** and grandson, **Leo** for providing me with the love and support it takes to have such a career as delineated in this monograph.

This publication is dedicated to my parents, **Ernest & Cynthia Pancsofar** who started me on this journey. Of specific note is the acknowledgement of my dad's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday on January 18<sup>th</sup>, 2018 and subsequent family reunion on June 23, 2018 to celebrate this momentous occasion.

**My walk begins - I start my journey:  
A labyrinth path of the life of Ernie.**

**I pass close to myself at each and every turn.  
I recognize the need to be more mindful as I learn  
To reflect on the activities in my life and the pace –  
To slow down and appreciate that it's a walk and not a race.**

**What was I thinking? How did I know?  
Where will my path take me? How did I grow?**

**The Changin' Truths \***  
**(to the Dylan tune – The Times They Are A Changin')**

Come gather round people and I'll sing you a tale.  
I'll sing you this song and I'll send an e-mail.  
It's a song about learning, teaching and fun.  
It's a song that continues and never is done.  
'Cause you better start lookin' & searchin' some more  
For the truths - - - they are a changin'.

We're talkin' about people with labels and names.  
Sometimes we're different & sometimes we're the same.  
We all have gifts and talents and skills.  
We all have minds and souls and wills.  
So look all around you and wonder in awe  
For the truths - - - they are a changin'.

Come teachers and students and everyone here.  
Come from your schools and gather all near  
And celebrate our unique diversity  
And welcome us all into your community.  
'Cause we all have ambitions and goals and dreams  
For the truths - - - they are a changin'.

The rules and the laws have helped pave the way  
So parents and families can each have a say  
About where, why and when and even ask how  
That all children can learn together and now  
Get ready for due process and advocacy  
For the truths - - - they are a changin'.

It's time to begin my teaching at last  
And remember the things that I learned in the past  
About the gifts and skills and talents and needs  
No matter the label, each child can succeed  
'Cause each student is a wonder and no one must fail  
For the truths - - - they are a changin'.

\* Let me express my gratitude for a final mentor whose life's work influences me in ways I can only begin to imagine: Bob Dylan

## Then / Now / Beyond Table of Contents

<b>Acknowledgements .....</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>The Changin' Truths .....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Table of Contents .....</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>An Introduction .....</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>Forward .....</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>Fourteen Questions</b>	
<b>1. What are my primary responsibilities? .....</b>	<b>01</b>
<b>2. How do I measure success? .....</b>	<b>04</b>
<b>3. How is information best shared? .....</b>	<b>07</b>
<b>4. What primary roles are part of my work? .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>5. Is my work more science or art? .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>6. How do I view mistakes in my work? .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>7. Do I have an avocation or a vocation? .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>8. What does a sense of objectivity mean? .....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>9. How do I help others make successful transitions? .....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>10. Who is in control? .....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>11. What are the answers? .....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>12. What is my style of instruction? .....</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>13. How have my thoughts on discipline changed? .....</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>14. What is my orientation to the individuals I support? .....</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>Selected References and Reading List .....</b>	<b>52</b>

*My aim is not to be consistent with my previous statement on a given question, but to be consistent with the truth as it may present itself to me at a given moment. The result is that I have grown from truth to truth ... (attributed to Mahatma Gandhi and a quote from my journals on October 24, 1974)*

*You are the sum total of everything you've ever seen, heard, eaten, smelled, been told, forgot – it's all there. Everything influences each of us, and because of that I try to make sure that my experiences are positive. (Maya Angelou, who died a month before the first edition of the Then / Now publication, May 28, 2014)*

## **Then / Now / Beyond** **An Introduction**

Several years ago, I developed a visual organizer with the following headings:

### **Questions Under Considerations** **- Current Truths -**

<b>Then</b> <b>1970 – 80s</b>	
<b>Back in the</b> <b>1990s</b>	
<b>Not Long Ago</b> <b>2000s</b>	
<b>Welcome to</b> <b>2010</b>	

For this current edition, I added a fifth time period:

<b>2020 and</b> <b>Beyond</b>	
----------------------------------	--

Periodically, I would record reflections connected to a current question that had gone through some transitions and interpretations as I advanced in my experiences working with students and adults with disabilities. I viewed the ingredients of this visual organizer as “truths,” as I thought them to be, beneath a consistent heading (questions) throughout my career.

I have found the process of completing this self-reflection to be life enhancing and thought provoking. I plan to share the results of this practice with my students who may be interested in their instructor’s advancements in his pursuit of these truths.

I believe this process of self-reflection is a necessary one as we transfer our knowledge to the next generation of teachers and students. I do not consider this a polished product and I will be updating and modifying its contents as I age. I will post a current edition on the cover and invite the reader to travel with me as I document my changes in thoughts and feelings on each of the dimensions upon which I have chosen to elaborate.

## Forward

Honest, authentic, self reflection is far too rare in these times. Our friend, Ernie Pancsofar, shares his personal and professional journey in vivid and creative detail. From “The Changin’ Truths” to “2020 and Beyond … They are us!” Ernie shares; questions; challenges; encourages and supports all of us with his poems, rhymes, graphics and insightful comments! His personal journey becomes a template for each of our own journeys through our lives!

His constant guide and mentor is the ever changin’ – ever the same – Bob Dylan. Ernie’s reflections, literally, illustrate how times changed him. An illustration is his statement that describes his movement from a focus on “independence” to a focus on “interdependence”!!

*2000s...I began to switch my orientation from helping individuals to be independent and, instead, aimed for interdependence as a viable goal. (p. 2)*

This most important shift and growth over 40 plus years changed Ernie’s thinking, teaching, and impact on his students AND himself. In 14 reflective sections each of us, as readers, “walk with” Ernie and fill in our own experiences to accompany his own. Very thought provoking, such as Reflection #3!!

*What you learn may not be as important as why you learn.  
What you earn may not be as important as that you yearn.  
To be is just as important as to do. (p. 9)*

Read with a creative, open mind and enjoy the journey with Ernie!!!

George G. Ducharme, Ph.D.  
Pat Beeman  
Co-Directors  
Communitas, Inc.

## Question 01

### What are my primary responsibilities?

#### **My truth in the 1970s – 1980s**

***The primary responsibilities of a teacher or care provider were to help individuals with a disability acquire their prescribed behavioral objectives typically developed from a standardized assessment.***

In my early days of teaching, I remember using a developmental assessment for adaptive behavior and completing a pre-test for students with quite significant disabilities. Then, I would target the activities from the assessment that the student could not yet do. After a sufficient period of time elapsed, I would administer the very same assessment to document and verify what a great teacher I had been. Just look at their progress! The irony in many of these situations was that the students used few of these learned skills back in their living environments. I felt comfortable letting the publishers of these assessments dictate the priority of what was important for me to teach. Professionals in far distant cities determined the scope and ingredients of a developmentally sequenced set of competencies.

#### **My truth in 1990**

***Assistance evolved into a life-style planning process through which a person described his/her dream of the future and a team developed supports to get there.***

Heavily influenced by the work of Marsha Forest and Jack Pearpoint, I embarked on the discovery of person-centered planning (Falvey, Forest, Pearpoint, & Rosenberg, 1997). This richness in the planning process completely altered my orientation about my roles and responsibilities in developing the goals and objectives for a person with a significant disability. Tools became available to facilitate my role as the organizer of information into a coherent display from which team members could note themes upon which to focus. MAPS and PATH became the benchmarks through which this process emerged (O'Brien, Pearpoint, & Kahn, 2010). Judith Snow addressed the importance of these tools in an eloquent manner through media and at presentations in Connecticut (Snow, 1990, 1994)

### **My truth in 1990 (continued)**

My reading from the work of John O'Brien and Connie Lyle O'Brien, along with the monographs published by Communitas, Inc., greatly influenced the independent consultations I completed in developing person-centered plans for individuals with disabilities as I worked from grants, funded in part, from the CT Council on Developmental Disabilities. During five years of this decade, I was an independent consultant spreading the news about person-centered planning and how to develop positive profiles that set the stage for building on strengths and capacities rather than a focus on weaknesses and deficits (Ludlum, 2002; Mount, Beeman, & Ducharme, 1988; Mount & Zwernik, 2008; O'Brien & Lyle-O'Brien, 1992, 1997).

### **My truth in 2000**

***It is best to listen to what families and their sons/daughters dream is possible. Facilitators attempted to capture the essence of what is being said and translate this into educational language.***

Individuals with the most severe disabilities typically have a lifetime of supports of varying intensity by family members and human service providers. I began to switch my orientation from helping individuals to be independent and, instead, aimed for interdependence as a viable goal. Parents were often concerned about the non-academic areas of growth for their son/daughter such as friendships with others, being interacted with in a respectful manner, being part of the fabric of the school culture, etc. I realized that how a student learned to advance his/her self-determined, quality-of-life outcomes was more important than the number of competencies that student learned. Many parents were advocating for inclusive practices in their neighborhood schools and I found this emphasis to be of equal concern in my own priorities of what I could concentrate on when presenting the content in my courses to future teachers and other professionals.

### **My truth in 2010**

***My interactions with teachers and pre-professional candidates involve sharing my life experiences and knowledge as I guide them in fostering respectful interactions with individuals with disabilities and their family members.***

My current work focuses greatly on introducing teachers and teacher candidates to the values and practices that will assist them to be caring, productive catalysts in the learning process of students with whom they come in contact - - - and expanding their abilities to welcome the complexity of challenges those students bring with them to the learning experience. It is difficult, at times, to remember that it has taken me 40+

## **My truth in 2010 (continued)**

years to arrive at the truths I now have. Why should I expect individuals without those experiences to automatically grasp what I say is a “truth” that should guide their interactions with future students who have disabilities?

## **My truth for 2020 and beyond ...**

***There is a need for advocates to work in conjunction with parents and their sons/daughters in securing quality-of-life outcomes throughout their lifetime.***

I will be a guest / consultant / advocate for the families in the neighborhoods in which I am settled. There is a sense of freedom with not being responsible for affiliating with a formal organization or university, which may restrict the scope of my involvement in the advocacy arena. I hope to keep up on the reading of evidenced-based practices (or whatever the buzz word will be at that time) and provide timely insights into the instructional and curricular aspects of student IEPs. The experiences of the previous decade will have introduced me to the electronic gadgetry that is sure to be prevalent for all individuals with information being widely accessible in multiple formats. Of all the skills I have learned in the later years of my professional career, none is as important as facilitating the decision-making process and offering strategies for families and individuals with disabilities to choose options that fit them best.

### **Reflection 1**

*One person's mistake is another one's stepping stone.*

*Even in a crowd, one can be quite alone.*

*One team's win is another team's loss.*

*One person's aide is another person's boss.*

*One person's strength is another person's weakness.*

*All the horses can't win in the Preakness.*

*One person's tall is another person's short.*

*One neighbor's snow bank is another youth's fort.*

*We live in a world of opposites.*

*Contradictions abound in our composites.*

*We are some and we are many.*

*We are none and we can be any.*

*Be content with who you are*

*'Cause our one sun is just someone's else's star.*

**Question 02**  
**How do I measure success?**

**My truth in the 1970s – 1980s**

***Success is determined by how many steps of a task analysis students complete independently.***

When I first started teaching, it seemed like there was a task analysis developed for almost any activity you could think of. There were manuals and folders of task analyses and if a task could be divided into smaller steps, it was done so: 50 steps to brushing your teeth, 75 steps to making a bed, etc. If a student could independently complete more steps of a task analysis after a structured set of instruction, that student was successful.

**My truth in 1990**

***Success should be measured from the unique perspective of the receiver of supports relative to his/her standards for an enhanced quality of life.***

Person-centered planning contained a focus on quality-of-life outcomes and not, necessarily, on the completion or independence of a predetermined set of skills/activities. Friends and family members met to help the focus person look into the future for his/her ideal life and then went about constructing supports and services to help that individual acquire steps to access those dreams.

**My truth in 2000**

***There needs to be an enhancement in communication among team members about multiple measures of success and how those team members can express their own perspectives on what success means.***

I began experimenting with the use of simultaneous Likert scales upon which different team members could express their sense of satisfaction that the focus individual had attained an important step toward achieving one of his/her quality of life outcomes. The individual elements of the assessment were in the control of the individual and his/her family members. This way, team members could place their initials on the Likert scale for where they perceived the person to be and compare this with the individual and family members' ratings. (See Figure 1.)

## Self-Esteem: Indicators I look at to determine my level of self-esteem

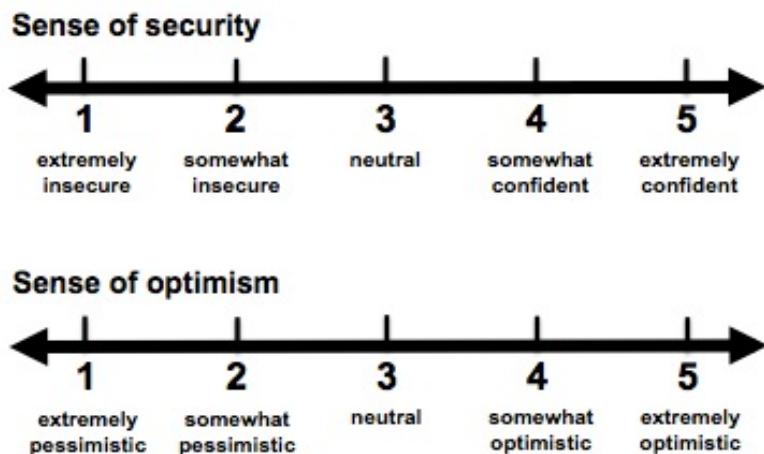


Figure 1. Self-Esteem: Two sample indicators to determine a student's perception of self-esteem.

### My truth in 2010

***Sometimes, the wrong people are in charge of determining what success means for students and young adults with disabilities. The current emphasis seems to be on uniform measures of success for all and individual quality-of-life factors may get lost along the way.***

I feel that overreliance on the general education curriculum as a guide to determine success for a student falls far short of acquiring the competencies necessary for successful functioning in one's community, especially in the areas of home living, recreation, employment and community mobility. In addition, only a small percentage of students are exempt from the highly punitive effects of the high-stakes assessments currently in effect throughout our country. The tide may be turning toward a more individualized approach to success, but I believe advocates for students with disabilities should carefully weigh the advantages and disadvantages of automatically thinking that current adoption of high-stakes assessments accurately represent success for a person with a disability (Turner, Foshay, & Pancsofar, 2013).

## My truth for 2020 and beyond ...

***Personalized learning will be the norm and each student will have an Individualized Education Plan that will be monitored with daily, formative assessment to better understand the power of the instruction the student receives.***

The high-stakes assessment phase of educational practices will be no more. The fallacy of a one-size-fits-all summative assessment will be replaced by daily, formative assessments that guide individualized instruction, personalized learning, and plans of action based on the daily assessments that technology permits schools to access for all learners. Personal goals will be charted and progress will be visually inspected each week in a small conference style interaction between teacher and student. There is no failing - - - there is only movement forward at one's own pace.

### Reflection 2

*All students you see  
Should have their very own IEP!  
My own Individualized Ernie Plan  
Could lay out my dream and goals that I can  
Be supported to achieve and grow  
As only I can know.  
School is not about memorizing facts.  
School is a place to have fun and relax  
And learn to find what we need to share  
With others - our gifts - so that we dare  
To expand ourselves in a separate, unique way;  
No two students have the same needs each day.  
Happiness to me is to find that path  
That speaks to each of us - it could even be Math.  
But, it could also be reading about history  
Or painting, or music or exploring a mystery.  
Individualize the way each person can learn.  
Be creative and help each student yearn  
For what no one else may want to seek.  
Each student is a wonder - each student is unique.  
How do we get there? When can we see  
That learning should be joyful for you and for me?*

## Question 03

### How is information best shared?

#### **My truth in the 1970s – 1980s**

***Information was best shared through journal articles in the professional literature.***

As a graduate student and beginning university instructor, I had files and piles of journal articles meticulously catalogued by subject areas and these boxes followed me from apartment to apartment and recently vacated work environments to new places of employment. Neatly trimmed and taped (and even placed in plastic sheet protectors), these journal articles summoned up the best of teaching strategies and state-of-the-art practices.

#### **My truth in 1990**

***Information was best communicated through the sharing of stories using less technical language to be understood by all.***

I soon discovered that many of the actual practices did not readily reflect the sophistication of strategies about which I read in my voluminous files. Instead, I worked with job coaches, group home support staff and undergraduate students who appeared to learn better while reading stories about assistance and supports in a far less technical way - - - but it appeared to be equally successful. One specific publication that surfaces from this era was *Remembering the Soul of Our Work* (O'Brien & Lyle-O'Brien, 1992). Also, I was able to put into practice some of the principles about which I was reading in *Members of Each Other* (O'Brien & Lyle-O'Brien, 1997). Although I did not know until later in my professional development, Trickett (1996) wrote an article (A Future of Community Psychology: The Context of Diversity and Diversity of Contexts) to which I would often refer when trying to understand the complexities that surround "real", community-based practices as opposed to the tightly controlled studies with which I had been more familiar.

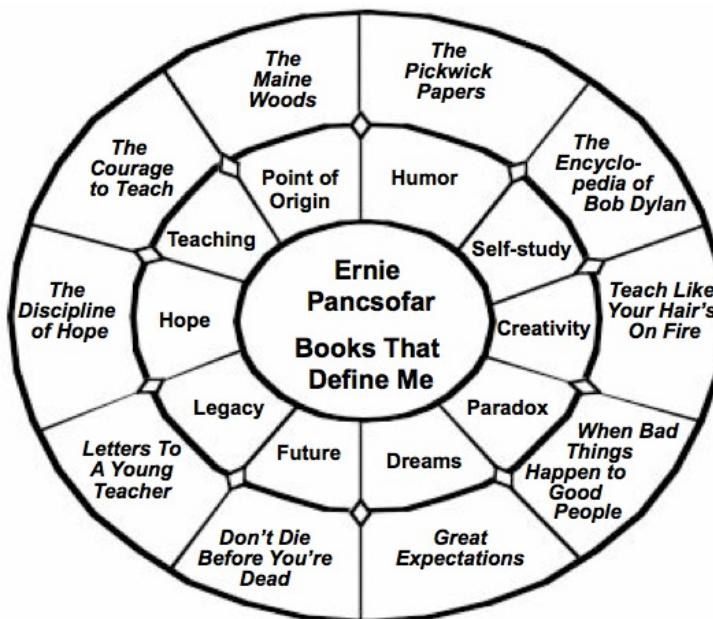
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*Our method for learning is simple: We locate people with developmental disabilities who have been involved in an important change, ask involved people to tell us their stories of how the change happened, invite their reflections on what was most important in making the change, look for common images and themes across stories of change, re-read the stories through different theoretical lenses, and finally, re-tell the story and ask the original story tellers to correct or extend our account of the changes they have made. (O'Brien & Lyle-O'Brien, 1992, p. 76)*

## My truth in 2000

***Graphic organizers and computer technology are coming into play to enhance the sharing of information among team members.***

I have been fascinated with how teachers use graphic organizers in both their instruction with students and communication with family members. Over the years, I have incorporated the use of these organizers in my work as a teacher educator and in my consulting with families in the person-centered planning process. One of the most versatile of the graphic organizers I use is the concentric circles template. It is amazing to me how creative some individuals are when they compose their own graphic to assist a student who struggles to remember important information from a lesson. Figure 2 contains a section of my own personal profile modeled after an adaptation created by a student in one of my courses.



**Layer 1** = important dimensions associated with my outlook in life.

**Layer 2** = books that connect directly with each identified dimension

**Figure 2.** Concentric circles form of a graphic organizer that often appears in the personal profiles I develop as part of person-centered planning.

## **Creativity: Teach Like Your Hair's On Fire** by Rafe Esquith

## **Paradox: When Bad Things Happen to Good People** by Harold Kushner

## Dreams: *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens

## **Future: Don't Die Before You're Dead** by Yevgeny Yevtushenko

## **Legacy: Letters to a Young Teacher** by Jonathan Kozol

## **Hope: The Dignity of Hope** by Herbert Kohl

### **Teaching: The Courage to Teach by Parker Palmer**

## Point of Origin: *The Maine Woods* by Henry David Thoreau

## Humor: *The Pickwick Papers* by Charles Dickens

## **Self-Study: *The Encyclopedia of Bob Dylan* by Michael Gray**

## **My truth in 2010**

***Information is at most people's fingertips via technology. Too much information can be overwhelming and contradictions abound.***

***Teachers, family members and other professionals need wisdom in trying to figure out what supports best fit within a person's ecology.***

In the past few years I have read and listened to people discuss the importance of knowing what to do with the information that is available – the act of wisdom. We, as educators, are not needed as much as in the past to provide information to teacher candidates or families. In many instances, they can readily find the information in a matter of seconds. However, we may need to fine-tune our skills as a facilitator of how to make sense of the facts and information and explore the consequences of the available options (Sternberg, Jarvin, & Grigorenko, 2009).

## **My truth for 2020 and beyond ...**

***Self-reflection is a prerequisite for change, especially as insights evolve from experiences over a lifetime of service and support working with individuals with disabilities.***

Those of us who are formally leaving our life's work - employment will continue that life work during a time of reflection, mindfulness and contemplation. There is a lot to think about. There is still a lot to share with whomever chooses to listen. As you read the words in this entry, I thank you for taking the time to access my thoughts in the manner that makes the most sense to share.

### **Reflection 3**

*What you learn may not be as important as why you learn.*

*What you say may not be as important as having your say.*

*What you aspire to may not be as important as that you do aspire to something.*

*What you earn may not be as important as that you yearn.*

*What you do may not be as important as for whom you do it.*

*Who you know may not be as important as who knows you.*

*Where you go today may not be as important as why you go there.*

*To be is just as important as to do.*

#### Question 04

##### What primary roles are part of my work?

###### **My truth in the 1970s – 1980s**

***Teachers and providers of support were the experts and individuals with disabilities and their family members eagerly sought out their advice.***

Professionals in special education were taught to believe that they had the strategies and resources that were needed by schools and families to direct the content of curriculum and instruction for students in the classroom. This belief also extended to employment and community residences as well for adults with varying levels of disabilities.

Psychologists and/or special educators developed “packages of behavior strategies” or wrote lesson plans that focused on the skills that were lacking by the students according to accepted assessments and curricula. Journals contained detailed analyses of successful approaches that could be transferred to classroom settings.

###### **My truth in 1990**

***Professionals are more facilitators of ideas that result in suggestions for the individual and his/her family members to consider.***

Instead of the “answer man” approach, I developed options for families and team members to consider as I facilitated person-centered planning meetings and/or educational consultations throughout the country. I worked on capturing the current strengths and capacities of the individual and helped to draft plans for how to move forward using MAPS, PATH and other forms of person-centered planning tools. Capturing the advice of others was an important part of my contributions to the decision-making process (Pancsofar, 1998; Pancsofar & Steere, 1997).

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*It's a journey with a beginning -  
It's a journey with an end -*

*The only thing we can ever do  
is look 'round every bend.*

*(from my journals – 11/17/1985)*

## **My truth in 2000**

***Brainstorming sessions focus attention on creative strategies for overcoming barriers that hinder individuals from attaining their dreams.***

After participating and leading many brainstorming sessions, I developed a set of organizers targeted for the facilitator of such sessions. One of the key ingredients in this process is the identification of factors that might influence how different strategies may or may not be successful. Initially, the brainstorming process allowed for team members to compose a large quantity of ideas without passing judgment on any specifics or perceived usefulness. Then, team members evaluated options using a scoring system that allowed for the development of a priority of strategies that were thought to be most effective by those present.

## **My truth in 2010**

***Circles of support develop options from which the student and his/her family members can select choices that best fit his/her outcomes.***

Empowerment by individuals whose lives are the most affected with disabilities is of top priority. How can I provide information to teacher candidates, family members and individuals with disabilities in such a way that they can incorporate effective strategies to enhance the attainment of an individual's quality-of-life outcomes? I can provide the structure, facilitate the process and summarize the results of these interactions. However, I am not usually in a position to make any final decisions about what quality looks like in someone's life. Providing choices to others is of top priority.

## **My truth for 2020 and beyond ...**

***The teacher as guide and facilitator of learning begins to address the new skills needed as students pursue their own personalized education plans.***

I believe that teachers provide guidance for where students can go next to advance their levels of competence in selected areas of expertise. All students have unique gifts to contribute to the betterment of local, national and global communities. Teachers focus on "how" to learn within the social network of one's community and promote a growth mindset among students. [See Dweck (2007) for an introduction to the growth mindset orientation to teaching.] What to learn is replaced with "how" to learn. Who knows what precise skills a student of today will need in 10 – 15 years?

## Reflection 4

*When is the time to do what's right?  
How do I know what's in my sight  
Is worth my effort, my direction and focus?  
Who lets me know? Where is my locus  
of control - influence - guidance and pull  
To let me know when my dream is full  
Of wonder, at any age, for me to see  
What's looming right straight in front of me?  
Usually, our paths take us from there to here  
And all that we need is standing quite near  
For what to do next. What plan does exist  
For our energies to flow and even persist  
In what we next need to do and say?  
This pause was a welcome one as I continue my day.*

---

**M**indfulness **P**ractitioner  
**A** Continual **L**earner  
**A** Seeker **R** of Evidence-Based Practices  
**S**elf Re**F**lective  
**E**ngaging  
**C**reative  
**T**houghtful  
**E**mploys **I**nclusive Practices  
**K**i**N**d  
**E**ncoura**G**ing

**C**ulturally **T**rustworthy **R**esponsive  
**V**alues **F**ormative **E**valuation  
**P**rofessional **A**ssessment  
**C**ollaborative **A**nd **F**riendly  
**L**ives a **H**ealthy **L**ifestyle  
**A**sks **G**ood **Q**uestions  
**N**ever **R**emains **S**atisfied **W**ith **W**hat **I**s

In response to a student's question, "Is there such a thing as a *Perfect Teacher*?" I replied, "No, but there is such a person as a *Perfecting Teacher*."

## Question 05

### Is my work more science or art?

#### **My truth in the 1970s – 1980s**

***Working with an individual was mostly a science with some art.***

Many teachers were concerned with structure and following the dictates of a behavioral plan without exception. Specialists delivered in-services on the exact steps to follow and presented “if-then” protocols that must be followed. Journals contained “research-based practices” to guide the teachers and other professionals whose work involved students with a wide range of disabilities.

#### **My truth in 1990**

***Working with an individual was mostly an art with some science.***

I read a great deal in the area of community building and was influenced by the work of John McKnight (McKnight, 1995), George Ducharme, Pat Beeman, and Cathy Ludlum (Ludlum, 2002), Beth Mount, (O'Brien & Mount, 2006), Marsha Forest (<http://www.inclusion.com-/forestcentre.html>), and Bob Blue (<http://69.195.124.95/~joeolive/-BobBlueorg/>) among others.

I also participated in circles of support and conveyed part of that experience in a tribute to a colleague, Todd Kilroy, upon his death in 1991. I witnessed the development of The Community Place in Manchester, CT, and worked closely with George Ducharme and Pat Beeman in several capacities (Foran, Jackson, Beeman, Ducharme, & the Communitas Circle of Friends, 2007).

#### **My truth in 2000**

***There is a blending of our skills that include both art and science and it's difficult at times to tell which is which.***

We often know what we do well, but do not always know what to do next. The science of what we do contains the building blocks of the content we teach. The art of what we do helps to determine how we present those building blocks in a way that assists others to become life-long learners. I view the art of what I do as the process, effort, perspective and orientation. The emphasis is not on the final product. For example, if I am working with a team who is focusing on discovering ways to better support a person, I do not enter this process with a final solution in mind. Instead, I offer a process through which options emerge. Those who are closest to the person can then identify which of the potential options might fit that person best.

## My truth in 2010

***We need to be well versed in the science of our craft. At the same time, we have to know when to use what we know within the ebb and flow of our relationships with our students. Rigor and caring are the cornerstones of both art and science.***

As I advance in my profession, I must realize that the teacher candidates and pre-professional certificate candidates with whom I interact all had different paths to my course. I should not expect them to immediately adopt my values and outlook on providing supports for individuals with disabilities. I can share what I believe to be true and listen to each student's own version of the truth - - - with comment. I can emphasize how and why I have come to believe what I do and, hopefully, influence them along a similar path of investigation and discovery.

## My truth for 2020 and beyond ...

***Teaching is like jazz.***

I first heard of the analogy between teaching and jazz in an article by Tomlinson and Germundson (2007). There is a blending together of talent among jazz musicians, each of whom is well schooled in their craft. Skilled professionals meet to create something beautiful by combining their talents where improvisation and creativity are both process and outcome. This is what I see happening in a classroom with a masterful teacher who knows the craft of teaching well but wisely chooses when and where to use that craft depending on the immediate feedback from each student. It's beautiful to see in action.

### Reflection 5

*Who gets to decide what is most important to know?  
Who can predict in what direction you should grow?  
What facts will go in and out of vogue?  
What do we do with the rogue  
Students who have a different need?  
Is it your job to help sow the seed  
To explore more of what might interest them?  
But, it's not in the curriculum! - Ahem -  
Isn't the process of learning what is most important;  
Asking questions and to be a proponent  
Of searching and wondering and spreading your wings  
And learning about many wonderful things  
That aren't in the curriculum - What can we do?  
I search for some answers and I wish I just knew  
What to tell the future teachers in front of me.  
You can make the difference in the students that you see.  
Do what you're told some of the time  
But, let your students find their own rhymes.*

## Question 06

### How do I view mistakes in my work?

#### **My truth in the 1970s – 1980s**

***We tried to make few mistakes and didn't tell many people about them.***

Just as mistakes on exams at the schools we attended were punished by lower grades, many of my fellow teachers and I were reluctant to admit to making any mistakes during our initial years of teaching. There was also a false sense that our recently acquired teaching credentials somehow bestowed all knowledge to be at our disposal for teaching the students in our classrooms. We didn't make the mistakes -- the students did!

#### **My truth in 1990**

***We believed it was just as beneficial to make mistakes as to have successes and shared both with our colleagues.***

Thomas Edison is credited with a quote: "We now know a thousand ways not to build a light bulb." Mistakes get us closer to a strategy that might work. We need to recover quickly from engaging strategies that are not effective with each student. Circumstances change and what may not have been a successful strategy at one time in a person's life, may now be just the right approach to take.

#### **My truth in 2000**

***I do not look upon my past as containing mistakes or successes -- just experiences that bring me to the present situation.***

When I look back on my life and the different paths my career has taken, I am generally quite satisfied with the accumulated experiences that brought me to today's challenges. I remember an article I read about an investigator of airplane crashes when he was asked by a reporter how he could determine what circumstances led to the disaster in quite a short period of time. The investigator replied that when he was at his first or second plane crash, he did not have a clear idea of how the plane met its demise. However, at his 100<sup>th</sup> plane crash, he had all of the previous 99 crashes as experiences and this helped him arrive at a current explanation in a more efficient manner. I think this is true with me as well. I could approach a student with significant learning challenges at the same time as a novice teacher and we could both be baffled about how to proceed. However, I should figure out what to do next in a more efficient manner than the novice teacher based on my hundreds of experiences with prior students with learning challenges.

## My truth in 2010

*I believe we all need to be continually learning something new: a new skill, craft. It is only when we experience the setbacks and errors of our newly acquired activities that we appreciate the effort and hard work by our students in learning their new skills and acquiring their competencies.*

During this age in my life my new endeavors were learning Tai Chi and including more yoga stretching in my daily exercise routine. I had taken classes once a week for over three years and still considered myself at a very basic level of practice. The instructor encouraged each of our advancements as she built on our current abilities and always had encouraging words for the effort we put into our movements. One of my colleagues began his study of the cello at age 60 and initially played simple tunes for his grandchildren. Later, he became a member of a local orchestra and advanced his skills at a rate determined by his lessons and ability to practice. I have gained a renewed sense of progress and appreciation at how everyone has his/her own pace for learning a new skill. The most important connection is the feedback between the teacher and learner that allows for satisfied progressions along a positive, individualized path.

## My truth for 2020 and beyond ...

### **Grades No More!**

I look forward to a time when there is no need for grades because they are an illusion of what has been learned. Individualized learning plans will be the mode of recording progress toward self-defined goals, achieved under the guidance and facilitation of a mentor teacher. Formative assessments will identify the rate of progress and contain recommendations for what to do next. Self-reflection and goal setting will dominate the path of learning in diverse content areas without comparison to how well a peer may be doing on that same activity / skill development.

### **Thoughts on Teaching My Current Courses**

*Mastery is an illusion –  
We must stop teaching to this delusion.  
Connecting with the content matters –  
Let's use our strengths and gifts together  
For new insights and ways to grow  
That only we can really know  
How to live a better life  
Amid the joys and amid the strife.*

## Reflection 6

*Mistakes will come and mistakes will go  
But lasting learning comes real slow.*

*Stay with me as I journey on.  
There are many more verses to my song.*

*You were part of verse 103.  
Thanks for coming along with me.*

*Maybe we'll hook up again  
In verse 1,210.*

*Every day builds on the last.  
Every day is a little of the past.*

---

### Work With What You've Got

**Work W**ith **W**hat you've got.

**D**on't **D**ig **D**eeper in a rut.

**T**ry **T**o **T**ake your best shot.

**S**trike **S**ome **S**parks while the iron's hot.

**N**obody **N**otices **N**ew attempts.

**Y**et, **Y**earn **Y**outhful exuberance.

**C**learly **C**ount **C**arefully again.

**F**ight **F**or **F**uture women, men and them.

**B**e **B**rave **B**etween each defeat.

**S**acrifice **S**oftly **S**omewhere down the **S**treet.

**P**ersistently **P**lodding **P**atiently to each goal.

**G**ently **G**oing **G**racefully to your inner soul.

## Question 07

### Do I have an avocation or a vocation?

#### **My truth in the 1970s – 1980s**

***Our work and out-of-work activities were separate and quite different.***

I am reminded of the Robert Frost poem – Two Tramps in Mud Time (Lathem, 1969) and the quote:

*But yield who will to their separation,  
My object in living is to unite  
My avocation and my vocation  
As my two eyes make one in sight  
Only where love and need are one,  
And the work is play for mortal stakes,  
Is the deed ever really done  
For Heaven and the future's sakes. (p. 277)*

That would be my goal – to unite my personal interests and work interests into a unifying whole. In the beginning, learning one's vocation takes time and there are traditional categories of learning that must be addressed. I had worked as a schoolteacher in the 1970s working with students with quite severe cognitive and physical disabilities. I was composing the syllabi for courses to be taught in my initial four years of teaching at the university level and this took a great amount of energy to focus my talents in this area. In the later years of the 1980s I was absorbing the outgrowth of work from the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center at Virginia Commonwealth University, which was under the direction of Paul Wehman (Wehman, 2006; Wehman, Inge, Revell, & Brooke, 2007; Wehman & Moon, 1988). In addition, I was working under the leadership of Tom Powell in Connecticut at the Corporation for Supported Employment (later to become The Institute for Human Resource Development (Powell, Pancsofar, Steere, Butterworth, Rainforth, & Itzkowitz, 1991).

#### **My truth in 1990**

***What out-of-work experiences!***

For a good part of the decade of the 1990s, I worked as a private consultant traveling around the country taking on the multiple roles of marketing specialist, developer of in-service training, billing agent, writer of curriculum resources, etc. I had retained contacts from previous work assignments and relied on contracts and supports from the Connecticut Council on Developmental Disabilities and Communitas, Inc. and its Community Place store in Manchester, CT. Work seemed to take up to 60+ hours a week with much travel and preparation for one-of-a-kind presentations at conferences, agencies and public schools.

## **My truth in 2000**

***Work and out-of-work experiences shared more in common than they were different.***

As I worked on developing person-centered plans for individuals with disabilities, I began formulating my own positive profiles and the ingredients of a person centered plan for moving forward. I became quite intrigued with the concentric circles organizer and developed a profile with the title Who Is Ernie – Metaphorically Speaking? the components of which I included in Figure 3.

## **My truth in 2010**

***As I wind down my formal career activities, I realize that who I am outside of my class influences who I am as my student's teacher. My out-of-class experiences bring me to a new awareness of the importance of how I present myself to others.***

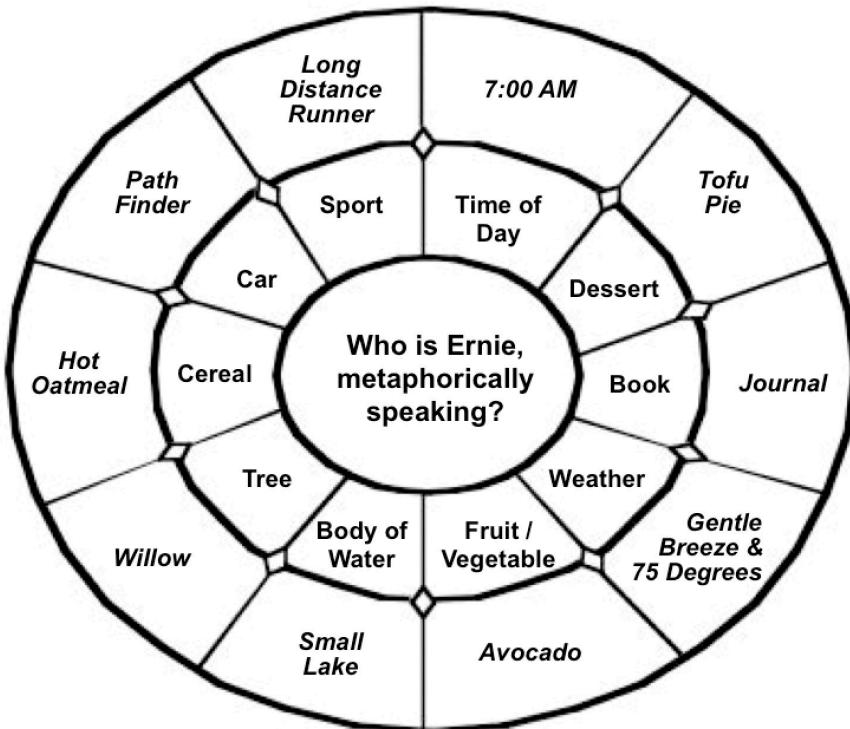
Perhaps Parker Palmer (1998) represents what I mean by the statement above. He states that *good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher* (p. 10).

Therefore, you bring who you are to the learning situation and are vulnerable in front of the students when you acknowledge that you are not the “answer man” with a solution to all their questions/problems. You are a fellow learner, whose path is now crossing his/her own path in learning more about the content currently under consideration. I bring the totality of who I am to this situation with my flaws and weaknesses along with my values and strengths.

## **My truth for 2020 and beyond ...**

***Retirement will be a time of reflection and writing all the thoughts I had, but was too busy to take the time to record them.***

My students in each course were my audience to the thoughts and feelings I had about special education and education in general, as far as that goes. I want to blend the experiences I amassed and the wisdom from the teachers and students with whom I interacted and develop a series of professional development modules that emphasize creative decision making in a mindful manner. I want/will connect the out-of-work life of teachers with the work they do in the classroom and as leaders in the school. The school, as a community of learners, involves everyone in the local out-of-school environments, each member of whom shares gifts and talents for the benefit of all.



**Figure 3.** Concentric circles form of a graphic organizer that contains responses to the question: Who is Ernie, metaphorically speaking?

This person called "Ernie"  
Is on a long journey.  
**A marathon man**  
With a long distance plan.  
*To lead a life of quality*  
*Currently at the university.*

**A gentle breeze** flows by  
**75 degrees** and a sunlit sky.  
Refreshing air  
Blows through his hair.  
*To lead a life a quality*  
*One needs a bit of tranquility.*

**7:00 am** is a great time of day.  
The sun is up as I pave my way  
To that first cup of coffee  
Sets my mind to move free.  
*To lead a life of quality*  
*A drink to add some clarity.*

**Tofu pie** is a nutritious snack  
For his vegetarian knack  
To eat good food  
For a pleasant mood.  
*To lead of life of quality*  
*As he eats most healthily.*

**A Path Finder** would be an admirable car  
To search for truths in places afar  
And venture off the open road  
And use the 4-wheel driving mode.  
*To lead a life of quality*  
*In an out-of-the way locality.*

**Hot oatmeal** warms from inside out.  
It may even cause a person to shout  
That there will always be more than one way  
As I get out and begin a brand new day.  
*To lead a life of quality*  
*With good food to aid vitality.*

An **avocado** is a unique type of food:  
A shell on the outside the substance of wood.  
But the nutritious substance that lies within  
Adds richness to salads when sliced pretty thin.  
*To lead a life of quality*  
*With food rich in diversity.*

The **willow tree** bends but does not break.  
Its leaves reach out to those who ache  
And need shelter from the gathering storm  
When their behavior fits not the norm.  
*To lead a life of quality*  
*Bend like a tree most gracefully.*

An abundance of life lies in a **small lake**  
With enough room for everyone to plan and make  
Their presence known and felt by all  
Whether they be big or whether they be small.  
*To lead a life of quality*  
*Live within your own ecology.*

Finally, a **journal** is a constant friend  
That will stay with you right up to the end.  
Pages of words of poems and thought  
And important lessons to me have taught.  
*To lead a life of quality*  
*Live out your dreams in their entirety*

## Reflection 7

*What's it going to take to survive?  
In 50 years I won't be alive  
But loved ones will still exist.  
It's for them that we must insist  
That growth begins with an inward journey  
Which can't be measured by fame or money.  
Breathing in and breathing out-  
That's what life should be all about.  
Nothing more - Nothing less  
Get us out of the killing stress  
That rules most of us by night and day.  
Don't we have anything to say ...*

*Or do that can turn this earth  
Around so that each new birth  
Will have a peaceful place  
No matter their country - no matter their race?  
It's hard to know just what to do.  
It's hard to know how to be true;  
To live a life of meaning  
And not of leaning  
Toward destruction, but to build anew.  
It starts with me. It starts with you.*

## Question 08

### What does a sense of objectivity mean?

#### **My truth in the 1970s – 1980s**

***We shouldn't get too emotionally involved and should remain objective.***

Many of the students with whom I first had contact in the mid to late 1970s had led lives of incredible hardships and institutionalization. It was difficult not to feel sorrow and remorse for the wrongs committed by care providers whose jobs were more of a custodial nature in the lives of individuals with quite severe disabilities. My experiences working in group homes alerted me to a more humane way of interacting with adults but still was heavily connected to behavior intervention systems that I would not implement today. A person's interfering or upsetting behavior was targeted for reduction and quite sophisticated programs were constructed by behavioral psychologists for us to follow with little input on their development.

#### **My truth in 1990**

***It was necessary to get very emotionally involved but we tried to remain objective, but with feeling.***

I learned from George Ducharme and Pat Beeman (Communitas, Inc.) the value of “walking with” individuals and being present in their lives to provide supports and assistance as directed by the individual through a person-centered approach. The typical “experts” tended to get in the way of a personalized view of a positive future and often the funds would end up in agencies whose goals were often quite different from what an individual would want in his/her life.

#### **My truth in 2000**

***It's hard to know how involved to become in an individual's life as I get to know more and more people and their families.***

I worked closely with the Office of Protection and Advocacy in Connecticut as I consulted with parents whose family member was experiencing difficulties with the local school system. Often, I would accompany family members to IEP meetings and assist in translating the dreams they had for their son/daughter into the official language suitable for an IEP. Over the course of working with families, I developed the following list of statements that I have shared with teacher candidates in the courses I would teach in the future.

## **What I am Learning by Interacting with Families**

- 01 Let parents tell their story!
- 02 Parents are always right . . . in wanting what's best for their child!
- 03 It is often what is unsaid that is most important.
- 04 Avoid jargon and "education speak."
- 05 Meet on neutral ground.
- 06 Feelings don't mean facts.
- 07 A relationship of trust builds slowly.
- 08 A grieving process exists and is different for everyone.
- 09 Translate their vision and dreams into goals and objectives.
- 10 Our own vulnerability comes through as we find we can't solve all the challenges.
- 11 Assist parents to ask the right questions at meetings.
- 12 Observe son/daughter and provide feedback in the form of a report / written information.
- 13 Develop ways parents can provide feedback about their satisfaction with progress in their son/daughter's IEP.
- 14 Research topics in journals, files and/or web resources relevant to a son/daughter's learning challenges.
- 15 Respect the beliefs and values of family members even when they do not agree with my own beliefs.
- 16 Express my own values and beliefs and, accordingly, how I can support or not support their son/daughter.
- 17 Deliver what you promise!
- 18 Siblings should be considered when addressing the needs of a son/daughter with a disability.
- 19 Often, parents feel that their son/daughter's behavior and challenges reflect on their own parenting and they feel responsible for the difficulties their child has at school.
- 20 Parents often lead very stressful days and nights and appreciate an acknowledgement of the dedication it takes to stay on top of everything in their child's life.

## My truth in 2010

*I am an outsider in most situations in which I am asked my advice or consultation. I try to present options and help individuals weigh the pros and cons of those options. I refrain from advising which of the options will be best for them to choose.*

Over the years I have refined my facilitator role by developing a set of 5 steps for assisting individuals to participate in the brainstorming process.

**Vent** – Allow an initial period of time for team members to express their feelings / frustrations because during the actual brainstorming process, negative input is not allowed.

**Brainstorm** – Ideally, a process facilitator and a recorder work in tandem to solicit and record ideas and suggestions from team members in a nonjudgmental manner. Every idea is recorded with no comment about the probability of its success. The goal is to generate as long a list of possible reactions to the challenge as possible.

**Adherence to Values** – Now, the team reviews the current list of suggestions and eliminates any item that violates a basic value of the school / organization / family. For example, if maintaining a person's dignity is a prime value, any item on the brainstorming list that violates one's dignity is now eliminated.

**Equal Vote by All** – At this point, team members are requested to voice their opinion about which of the suggestions / items from the brainstorming list has the greatest chance of success. The facilitator can use a rating system of:

- 0 – I don't think this will work.
- 1 – I think this has a slight chance of working.
- 2 – I think this has a moderate chance of working.
- 3 – I think this has a high chance of working.
- 4 – I think this has the best chance of working.

**Top 5 Suggestions** – The facilitator/recorder identifies the top 5 suggestions from the tabulated votes by team members. The facilitator then presents these options to the individuals who have the most vested interest / time with the focus person and this small group of people decide which of the top 5 suggestions will be implemented first within an agreed upon time frame.

## My truth for 2020 and beyond ...

***Evidence-Based Practices should be a starting point for effective instruction - - but not necessarily the ending point.***

There is a requirement for teachers to use strategies that have been shown to be effective based on an accumulation of research studies that meet rigid criteria of validity, fidelity and cultural responsiveness. However, once such a strategy is in the hands of a competent teacher, there is room to “tweak” that strategy to match the unique needs and characteristics of each student with whom the teacher works. There are some critical features of a strategy that should be constant, but the effectiveness of that strategy may be based largely on how well a teacher / professional adapts that strategy to the ecological considerations of each student.

### Reflection 8

*Sometimes, I wonder  
if I've given you enough  
Resources that emerge  
from my piles and piles of stuff.  
  
Then I realize that there's always  
more that I could give  
About the ways to teach and help  
the students learn to live  
  
And use their strengths and  
gifts and talents more  
And help them with their struggles  
so that they can explore  
  
And meet their daily challenges  
from what our teaching brings  
To help them find their rightful place  
within the scheme of things.*

## Question 09

### How do I help others make successful transitions?

#### My truth in the 1970s – 1980s

##### *A transition was a formalized process.*

The two main resources for transition supports emanated from Virginia Commonwealth University under the direction of Paul Wehman (2006) and the University of Oregon under the direction of Tom Bellamy and Rob Horner (Bellamy, Horner & Inman, 1979). I took a keen interest in both programs and read as much as I could while completing my doctoral work at Southern Illinois University under the able mentorship of Paul Bates. This combination of people and research provided me with a strong foundation for how to effectively assist individuals from making the transition from school to post-school settings and/or from sheltered to supported employment in the community.

#### 1990s

##### *Transitions happened every day and more on an informal than formal basis.*

I learned about the development of Circles of Support and was a member of a circle for a co-worker, Raymond "Todd" Kilroy. I learned about how important it was to focus on who were members of the circle rather than what each person necessarily did. I learned that circle members benefited as much from the relationship with a focus person as the focus person gained from the circle members. I learned more about the dying process when Todd experienced cancer and the ins and outs of hospice care and relationships among circle members. I learned about the small accomplishments and that movement toward a dream was just as important as achieving the dream. After all, once a person achieves a major dream in his/her life, there is always another one just around the corner! What follows are the final stanzas of a poem I wrote about my experiences with Todd.

*Todd does it his way and there's no telling why  
He's been living that way since he was just five.*

*Maybe I'll do it. Maybe I'll wait.  
Just do it soon 'cause maybe's too late.*

*I want suction. I want love.  
I want a touch without a rubber glove.*

*It's cold in the room. Todd's warm to the touch.  
Put on a coat, mittens, a scarf, gloves and such.*

*Different reactions, from people who come near.  
Some bring sadness and some bring good cheer.*

*We all have our needs each and every one;  
But Todd's needs come first, he's the one on the run.*

*He's not running for Congress, nor running a race.  
He's running to heaven with a smile on his face.*

*There's peace in his soul. There's joy in his heart.  
There are tears in our eyes as we watch him depart.*

*Maybe it sounds a little bit odd  
But, no one on earth has the spirit of Todd.*

*He brings friends together, they're all pretty handy  
From Columbia, Manchester, Bristol, and Granby.*

*To be continued ... This isn't the end.  
We'll all be together when the circle meets again.*

### **My truths in 2000**

***I can reflect back on multiple transitions and see the similarities and differences among them as I assist a current individual with his/her transition.***

Transitions occur at multiple times in each person's life: being single to becoming married, living at home to living in an apartment or with a roommate, attending high school to going to college, moving from the world of work to retirement, taking a vacation. All of these events include a move from the known to the relatively unknown. Remembering these transitions and what supports we needed for each one helps us to organize supports and resources for an individual on whose team we may be a member. Following an adventuresome trip from Hartford, CT to Lexington, KY, I wrote the following summary statements:

- 01 *There are many supports available in the community ... if we search for them.*
- 02 *The attitude we each have about our ability to reach an established goal is only limited by our ability to keep searching for the right supports to get there.*
- 03 *At the first sign of inconvenience, some people opt to give up and go home.*
- 04 *Other people have supports offered but they are not suitable to them and they are willing to experience the unpleasant consequences instead.*
- 05 *Getting to your goal is not always pleasant, convenient and easy.*

- 06 *Often, I need to rely on other people who I did not know well to guide me closer to my goal.*
- 07 *Throughout this trip, I had no doubt whatsoever that I would make it to Lexington to meet my contact person at the pre-established time. I just didn't know at each juncture of the trip how I would do it.*
- 08 *At times, the supports that we put in place don't work. What are our backups?*
- 09 *Unexpected supports will come from unexpected sources.*
- 10 *I was in pretty steady contact with my home base of support, my wife. Without her caring, concern and love, I would not have attempted this journey. Who provides the support for the people you assist? Where is their base of strength from which to venture forth to reach their established goals and dreams?*
- 11 *Luckily, this exact travel experience will not repeat itself, but I will have delays, cancellations, long, extended periods of time at airports, etc. I will remain calm and immediately begin to plot how to successfully remedy this new challenge as I hear irate passengers yelling at the ticket agents displacing their anger in an unproductive manner.*
- 12 *If we look hard enough, there are numerous experiences in our personal lives that provide insights into how we choose to support friends with disabilities. These learning moments contain significant connections for each of us to share with one another.*

### **My truth in 2010**

***I view transitions as a bridge between the known and unknown: the current and the future. The bridge contains the supports in the form of people, activities, objects, money, etc. to facilitate this movement.***

The image of a bridge is a powerful one when commenting on the topic of transitions in both our own life and the lives of the students/individuals with whom we have chosen to work. Our role is not to rid a person of his/her disability but to provide supports to lesson the impact of that disability on his/her advancement toward dreams of a better life as depicted in Figure 4.

## Profile



**Figure 4.** The Bridge Diagram of making a transition from a place of comfort (the known) to a place of greater uncertainty (the community / inclusive class settings).

### My truth for 2020 and beyond ...

***We are always in the act of transitioning. We are never static or standing in place.***

As soon as we are born, we are in the transition process toward death . . . and whatever may lie beyond. Outwardly, we age and others can witness a change in our appearance. However, what is happening on the inside? How old is the voice inside our head? What values do we hold dear? What are we living for? Who will benefit by our presence in this world? What will be our legacy? Do we have time to get it right? What are the important questions to still be asking?

### Reflection 9

*Tevye shouts from the rooftops, "Tradition!"  
Today the challenge becomes one of "Transitions!"  
We all all in the midst of one transition or another;  
Whatever our beliefs and whatever our druther.  
Some have retired – I wonder what that will be like.  
Others are moving on – Just one more step on their hike.  
We age one second, one minute, one year at a time.  
Some days we're creative and other days don't rhyme  
With where we are heading – both ourselves and our country  
HOPE is the word I cling to for company  
To see me through one transition at a time.  
This seems to be when we chime  
In on holiday festivities, family and many a friend.  
Thank you to ALL who have helped me contend  
With what is most meaningful in life:  
To be mindful of one's presence amid both joy and strife  
And help each other celebrate our traditions  
As we each make our own unique transitions.*

## Question 10

### Who's in control?

#### My truth in the 1970s – 1980s

***Professionals should control the money and have the power.***

It seemed that the more degrees and credentials a professional had, the more credibility and expertise that person was assumed to have. They owned the language about what was happening to a person with a disability and often held the purse strings as well. A medical model of addressing the weaknesses or shortcomings of the individuals was prominent and “fixing” the person to fit into society was the value held by many professionals of the day.

#### My truth in 1990

***Receivers of support, with the guidance of consultants, neighbors, and family members, gained more control over financial resources.***

There were pilot studies where individuals with disabilities received greater flexibility in how funds were allocated and spent and the phrase “self-directed” supports became known. Individuals with physical disabilities started taking more control over hiring and firing personal care assistants and arranged for support circles to facilitate their independence and provide needed supports (Ludlum, 1998).

#### My truth in 2000

***There is never “enough” money. Creative problem solving strategies require natural supports, ingenuity, commitment and perseverance.***

This was the time when I investigated the realm of “natural supports” in more depth and explored the concept of active and passive social enhancers.

*Natural supports refer to people who are not disability service providers, who provide assistance, feedback, contact, or companion-ship, to enable people with disabilities to participate independently, or partially independently, in individualized employment or other community settings. Individuals providing natural supports, typically, receive assistance and constructive support from disability service providers, and provide natural supports with or without compensation, depending on the situation. (Storey & Certo, 1996, p. 62)*

Much of my thinking originated from John O'Brien's work and publications like *Members of Each Other* and *Remembering the Soul of Our Work* (O'Brien & Lyle-O'Brien, 1992, 1997). For example, in the book *Members of Each Other*, the following list of commitments rings true for supporting individuals with disabilities:

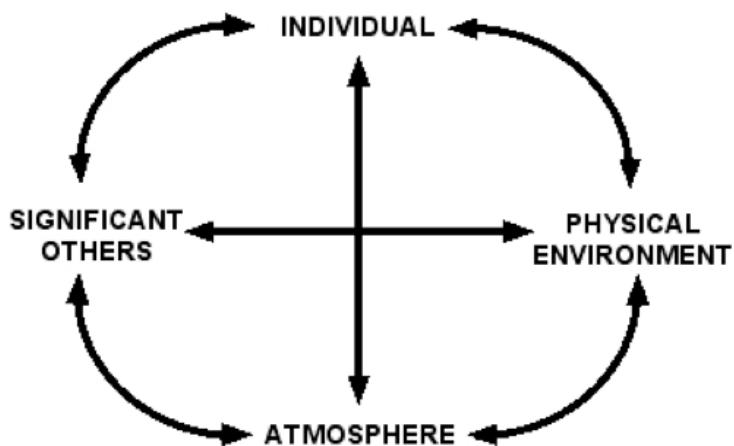
- **Anchors** - (who) love that person and are concerned with that person's well being over time.
- **Allies** - (who) share their time and resources with the person to make a jointly meaningful change.
- **Associations** - (which) are the social structures (that) groups of people create to further their interests.
- **Assistance** - (which) provides the help a person requires to deal with the effects of disability so that they contribute their gifts to the change effort.
- **Agendas** - organized political action to insure just and effective public policies and their proper implementation. (pp. 82-85)

### My truth in 2010

*A feeling of being “in control” is an elusive one. We exist in a world where activities are constantly in flux. We do the best we can with what we know. Hopefully, when we have the resources to support others, we will do so wisely and with empathic understanding.*

A word first brought to my attention by Jack Pearpoint is chaord: a combination of chaos and order (Hock, 1999). We often work within an atmosphere that is constantly changing, and somehow, we have to make sense on how to respond to those changes when we support individuals with disabilities. This concept makes a great deal of sense to me and I connect it to Figure 5, the contents of which were brought to my attention by Robert Russell (1975) and incorporated in an opening chapter from a book that I co-authored (Pancsofar & Blackwell, 1986). The elements within this ecological analysis are continually interacting with each other in synergistic, changing ways. A team member must have a good understanding of the ecology of the situation before gaining confidence that a recommended course of action will result in positive outcomes.

## ECOLOGICAL ANALYSIS



**Figure 5.** Elements of an ecological analysis to decision-making

### My truth for 2020 and beyond ...

***Personal, individualized learning will put the student at the center and the adults will listen to the dreams and aspirations of each student and help that student plan for a future built on strengths and competencies.***

In a book I was reading recently, I happened on this sentence: *What you bring is what we work with*. This struck me as a very apt statement for personalized, individualized education. Each student's past experiences bring that student to the current learning activity at a different point in the process. We need to get away from a one-size-fits-all assessment for all students when a common activity is the focus of instruction. Students should have their own baselines from which progress is measured and the progress is used as data to inform the teacher about the difference between an expected goal line of achievement and current trends in that data. Formative assessment is not used to "grade" a student's path to success. Rather, the data are used to gage the effectiveness of current instructional supports. Inherent in this approach is the belief that all students do not need to be at the same level of competence in all content areas. Students will tend to excel and prefer different content and spend more time with resources / information that feed their curiosity/interest. Some schools are taking this approach with anecdotal success. I believe this philosophy of learning should be the cornerstone of our education system.

## Reflection 10

*What's the important stuff on which to dwell?  
What wisdom for my students can I tell  
What's important to impart today?  
What will my students take from what I have to say?  
What difference does it make?  
What worth will they take  
From all that I know  
And sift that down to show  
Them to be guides for learning how  
To be respectful, kind, honest and true?  
That's what's important to know and do.  
Help each student find and share  
Their gifts for all so that their teacher can care  
Enough for each person to shine  
And discover how each one can be a one-of-a-kind.*

---

### **Afterthoughts Upon Reviewing Student Feedback** (written to my students following the Spring 2018 semester)

*You make the long hours of planning worthwhile!  
You make me want to walk the extra mile!  
Your enthusiastic welcoming of what I did offer  
Warms me on the inside like no other  
Type of incentive could ever do.  
I appreciate your kind words through and through.  
And, when I teach this course once again,  
I'll remember your feedback just when  
I'm tired and think about calling it a day,  
I'll look for something else that's important to say  
Because I know they will use those new resources  
To help make this one of their favorite courses!*

## Question 11

### What are the answers?

#### **My truth in the 1970s – 1980s**

***Our college courses and professional reading contained most of the answers to the challenges we would face.***

As a graduate student, I read chapters, articles, proceedings, conference summaries and other documents the university library had to offer. I had boxes of reprinted articles that contained information about the most up-to-date strategies for assisting individuals with disabilities in school and community environments. I began writing articles for some journals and contributed to the volume of knowledge that professionals wrote and that professionals read. If I encountered a challenge in a school setting, I searched for suitable articles that addressed a similar circumstance.

#### **My truth in 1990**

***Our personal and professional development occurred on a continual basis and from some unusual sources of wisdom.***

For five years in the 1990s I was a freelance consultant traveling across the country and finding employment mostly through word of mouth marketing and picking up some grants to support some avenues of interest that would play prominently in my later, university teaching. It was during this time that I read Herb Lovett's (1996) book *Learning to Listen*. Quotes from Chapter 5, with my additional comments, are included below:

***I feel a strong mixture of sorrow and anger when adults present a behavior card with checks or stars or stickers on it showing they were 'good' during certain intervals of the day. (p. 74)*** I remember many behavioral programs in which I employed points, check marks, or other symbols to let someone know that his/her behavior was acceptable during specific times of the day. I think Lovett is cautioning us not to fall into an 'us' – 'them' mentality. We can deliver check marks to comment on someone else's behavior, but woe be to anyone who tries to give me check marks for 'good' behavior. Just because someone has inherited a label that is associated with difficulties in learning or controlling his/her behavior, we should not be looking for methods of responding that reduce our impression of them as less than an equal. However, for children, using stars and stickers may be a useful tool as a reinforcer and appreciated by both children and parents alike.

***Essentially we are coercing people to do our bidding, and, more often than not, their submission is more for our convenience than theirs.***

(p. 75) I think it takes a history of interacting with people in our past to truly appreciate the validity of this statement. I often now wonder, who was working for whom? Did the people I support exist in order for me to have a job and do what I wanted them to do? Or, did I exist to support a person by providing strategies to enhance each individual's own quality of life? Providing consequences for behavior that we direct can be a powerful force "over" people. Learned helplessness is not a "next" step toward interdependence.

***If you like ice cream, you have to pretend you don't. Otherwise, they make you do things for ice cream.*** (p. 76) This is my favorite quote in the book spoken by a receiver of supports - a survivor of professional supports. It is an extremely wise saying and one not to be taken lightly. This quote reminds me of another one I heard at a conference in Colorado Springs at which a speaker commented, *"Why should I tell you my dreams? You aren't going to help me get to them, anyway!* The underlying message here is that I've been burned before. I have told my dreams to others and those people have gone away.

***We cannot mandate excellence; we can only work to inhibit carelessness and indifference.*** (p. 79) Excellence can be part of who we are and what we do, but we cannot demand it of others. Our society tends to reinforce the status quo whether it be for teachers in schools or individuals working in other jobs in the community. Excellence comes from within and involves a desire to learn from each experience as one grows in wisdom and creativity. We may often be disappointed in the quality of the work performed by others around us but our influence on their mood and character will probably be best left to subtle, behind the scenes strategies. (I'm not sure if this is a pessimistic outlook or a realistic one.)

***One of the pleasures and difficulties of adult life is that it so often requires us to recognize opposing ideas as simultaneously true.*** (p. 82) Paradox sheds an imposing light/shadow on events as we work with students/adults. I once heard another quote - "A great truth is that for which the opposite is also a great truth!" attributed to Niels Bohr, a renowned Danish physicist. Many people have glimpses of the truth but no one has THE TRUTH. Many seemingly contradictory approaches could all be equally effective.

**Positive approaches encourage us to see clearly and honestly the good reasons and adaptive qualities of even the most troubling behavior, no matter whose it is. (p. 88)** This is not easy to do. The immediate quest is for the “quick” fix! To listen to what someone is saying through their behaviors is a humbling experience because we are more often wrong in our guesses than we are right. But, when we are right, it is all worth while having taken the extra time to investigate, among people who know this individual best, what to try next.

***This mutual back-and-forth sharing, or listening through someone's bad hours and knowing that over the years they will take the time to hear yours, is one of the fundamental gifts of friendship. (p. 89)***

People need others who lend an ear and don't try to solve their problems. Maybe this is hardest for those of us who often are called upon to give advice and counsel. The expression, what goes around - comes around is most apt here. Burton Blatt has been attributed as saying, ‘In the absence of feeling and belief I resort to data’ (p. 94). To me this does not mean, “Take no data!” Rather, it reminds us that the relationships that evolve between people cannot often be adequately assessed in traditional data formats. Stories do this job more eloquently. Data are neutral. It's what we do with the data that is sometimes scary.

***When we use time-out, our behavior - whether we acknowledge it or not - communicates our frustration, our inability to teach, and our limitations. (p. 99)*** Time-out strategies typically remove an offending student from the presence of the teacher for a period of time in which the teacher does not have to deal with the student. This procedure is seldom used for its intended purpose: to decrease the behavior that immediately preceded the use of the time-out procedure. Time out is often a quick way to restore calm without influencing the behavior that led to time out.

***The emotional neutrality of time-out is everywhere present in theory and nowhere visible in practice. (p. 102)*** As with many procedures, what is written on paper is seldom the way it is implemented under real circumstances.

***Most of life is not so much about good and evil as it is about the interplay of strengths and weaknesses within ourselves and among others. (p. 107)*** The relationships among significant environmental events envelope most challenging behaviors. To be best understood, challenging situations must be investigated within the context in which they are occurring - ever changing and dynamic sets of forces.

***As we have collectively learned, schools of therapy do not help, therapists do; the therapists do not change behavior, people themselves do. (p. 109)*** Once again, Lovett emphasizes the development of a relationship between those who support and those who receive supports - and these roles are changing constantly.

### **My truth in 2000**

***Reflecting and debriefing upon our current experiences best prepares us for our next experiences.***

At the conclusion of each semester I ask students for feedback about what they learned in the recently completed course. I use both the department generated feedback questionnaire and a more informal process to solicit this feedback.

In response to one student's feedback, I composed a new set of lyrics to Billy Joel's "Piano Man". The chorus and two of the verses include:

#### **Lesson Plan Man**

It's two o'clock on a Saturday and  
My friends are nowhere in sight.  
All of my lessons in front of me and  
Oh how they give me a fright.

This is the end of my journey.  
I'll be a real teacher quite soon.  
Just a few more weeks in front of me,  
As I add more words to my tune.

La la la, de de da  
la la, de de da da da  
(chorus)

Give me an "A" for my lesson plan.  
Give me an "A" for my work.  
I've stayed up till five  
On a Krispey Kreme high  
So I won't have to be a sales clerk!

Now Mary has a label of L.D.  
Bob has that label too.  
Nick is so quick to want to be picked  
ADHD sticks on him like glue.  
Do I teach to a label or the child inside?  
Do I teach to the labels I see?  
Or are Mary and Bob and Nick and Diane  
More than labels to you and to me?

In this course ten points of emphasis that you will/did learn about include:

- communicating using people first language;
- using the home as an enriching environment to practice skills recently learned in the classroom;
- practicing decision making skills to work as a member of a team when resolving a current challenge;
- learning how parents are a key player in the development of goals/objectives for their son/daughter;
- delivering instruction that follows a levels of intensity framework in which you provide increasing depth of feedback based on each student's response;
- investigating a lesson using a curriculum matrix organizer to identify how students in special education can participate more fully in the general education classroom;
- identifying the role of stereotypes in the media and among the general public that get in the way of providing a welcoming environment in the general education classroom;
- assessing students can take multiple formats and the teacher holds great power in choosing to accentuate the learning process as opposed to "completed product-based" evaluation;
- setting a positive atmosphere/climate in the classroom through the use of universal design for learning that tends to lessen the stigma of differences and embraces the concept of commonalities;
- viewing challenges from an ecological perspective and appreciating the paradox of circumstances within which teachers function.

Naturally, the course covers much more than the ten highlights I have articulated, but notice there is no mention of:

- distinguishing among the major types of cerebral palsy;
- writing out the definition of "intellectual disability" as it is followed by the CT State Department of Education;
- identifying the difference between Down syndrome and Turner syndrome;
- defining the physical characteristics of a student with Fetal Alcohol syndrome;
- facts, facts and more facts . . .

At no time do I intend to limit the amount of information to which you can access in this course. I have scripted some assignments and in-class activities that connect with my overall orientation of introducing teacher candidates to the wonderful experience of providing instruction to students with diverse learning needs and challenges. Some of your learning will occur because you choose to adopt the role of a student on a path of self-discovery in areas I might only briefly mention.

My style of teaching correlates highly with my own way of learning. I like to make connections from what I am reading to another resource that helps to address a question I have going on in my head. The search for that answer leads me to additional resources and sources of information. This process is the basis for the investigation of disability-specific associations with students in special education.

I know I may be naïve when urging students to devote 2-3 hours a week to the content area of special education. I specifically phrase the reading from the text as “read from chapter 2” and not “read chapter 2”. I want you to come to class with questions that I might not think of asking. I want you to investigate more fully areas in which you are personally interested and for which there are no points toward your grade! I have sometimes heard, “Why should I study this or read this? It won’t be on the test!” Hear me well. Ninety percent of what I studied for that was on the test has left my brain many, many years ago! I don’t want to crowd your brain with similar trivia.

Well, this is a rather lengthy response to a student who wrote in his/her feedback, “I wish the class would cover more information about disabilities.” The students in your future class will not look like nor function like the stereotypes associated with individuals with each specific label with which they have been identified.

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*Here is a simple formula for how to help students who are in special education and may have acquired a label like autism spectrum disorder. Talk to five teachers / paraprofessionals / colleagues / parents and ask them to tell you about a success they had with the focus student. Ask them to identify strategies they tried that did and did not seem to be effective in helping the student learn what they were trying to teach. Look at the list of strategies that did or did not work from each of the five people. Look for a pattern of support that seems common to each list. Compose your own list of ideas to try based on those common elements. You now have a starting point for how to support the student with whom you are now interacting. There is more to it than that, of course, but you have a better idea of the range of options from which you will select in your work with this student - - - regardless of what label that student has acquired. The more past successes you can document in this manner, the higher the probability you will find the right match between your style of teaching and the student’s way of learning.*

## My truth in 2010

***My focus becomes how to frame better questions that more accurately address one's quality of life and contributions within one's community.***

In a speech I heard, Burton Blatt, a pioneer in Special Education and Rehabilitation, once cautioned us to stop looking for the right answers to situations but focus instead on asking the right questions. He provided the following story to emphasize his point.

*There once was a town in which property was being stolen by an unknown process. Town elders decided to post a sentry at the only road leading from the town to check all travelers in hopes of discovering the thief. On one occasion a man arrived at the checkpoint with a wheelbarrow full of hay. The sentry searched through the hay and, finding nothing, waved the man through. This same sequence of events occurred for the following four days. At the morning briefing on the following Monday, the sentry viewed the list of property that had been recently stolen from the town. Heading the list were five wheelbarrows! The sentry had not asked the right question that would have resulted in confiscating the stolen property.*

[Blatt (1984) and Blatt, Biklen and Bogdan (1977) wrote books of note as I was influenced by Burton Blatt's values and outlook toward providing services for individuals with a disability.]

This concept of asking the right question became quite clear to me at a past presentation that I was conducting. I gave the following example from which to define the term "functional activity". In this example I related that five individuals were at a table. The first person picked up a bolt from a box and handed it to the next person. This person picked up a nut and screwed it on the bolt and handed it to the person to his right. The third worker tightened the nut and passed it on to the next person who unscrewed the nut. The final person received the nut and bolt and placed them in separate boxes. I asked the question: "Is this a functional activity?" I expected the participants to see the ridiculousness of this "make-work" as a nonfunctional activity. One participant immediately raised his hand and said, "Yes, that's a functional activity because you have to keep them busy!" I stopped for a few seconds and changed my tact. "Yes, if the question that you are asking is 'How do I keep these five workers busy?', then the activity that I described could be considered functional within that context. However, if the question is 'What work can I provide to the individuals that will assist in enhancing their quality of life?', then the 'make-work' becomes a seriously nonfunctional activity."

## My truth for 2020 and beyond ...

***Social and emotional learning takes center stage in the preparation of today's students to prepare for a future of ambiguity and uncertainty.***

For too long, educational leaders have focused on academic content as the main emphasis for preparing youth for success as they enter adulthood. Now, I believe it is time to prepare students to function in an emotionally healthy way as each one pursues an academic tract of their own choosing and not laid out in a “one-size-fits-all” curriculum. Who determines that geometry / algebra / trigonometry are necessary for high school graduation? Who determines that a single course in biology is required of all high school students? How much have I forgotten from each of the courses I took these many long years ago. Today, if one is interested in any of these topics, resources are available instantaneously at little to no cost. The formative years of one’s education should be one of choice and guidance from a teacher who helps each student develop in an emotionally healthy way as that student pursues an academic tract of choice (Valerie & Pancsofar, 2017).

### Reflection 11

*What will my contributions be  
When I conclude my work at the university?  
What will be the measure of my success?  
Right now the answer is just a guess.  
Many students have passed through the door  
Of my classrooms each year and more  
Of them left with a change of heart  
As they go out to start  
A new career path in schools  
Bounded by such archaic rules  
That stifle their own creativity  
To practice their versatility  
In meeting the needs of the students they see.  
There's got to be more and maybe  
They will be the ones to make the change  
In schools so that the range  
Of student growth can be individualized  
And success, at last, can be realized.*

## Question 12

### What is my style of instruction?

#### My truth in the 1970s – 1980s

***A formalized system of least prompts was the best instructional process.***

Researchers and authors suggested that individuals with disabilities learned best when the instruction was delivered in a systematic way beginning with the least amount of assistance and progressing in a consistent manner toward the most amount of assistance. The information below was included in a chapter I coauthored with a colleague (Steere & Pancsofar, 1995).

*The ability to successfully negotiate complex environments is dependent in part on one's ability to know which cues to respond to and how to respond to them. The role of the instructor is to highlight important natural cues and then teach the learner to respond to them appropriately. Least prompting, most prompting, time delay, and error correction strategies are all powerful tools to draw attention to natural cues. Progress in the instructional process is best assessed by documenting learners' responses to natural cues. (p. 52)*

#### My truth in 1990

***The investigation of several paths-to-success alerted teachers to the best sequencing of instruction.***

Teachers should not bring to the learning environment any preconceived teaching strategies for individuals based on their inclusion in a group whose members share common disability conditions. People with intellectual disabilities, for example, do not all learn equally well by following the exact same sequence of instructional cues, or “prompts”. A useful strategy is to talk with people who have successfully taught the individual a skill or activity in the past and document the instructional strategies used and the results of each approach. By obtaining this information, we should be able to discern a pattern and a set of strategies to try first, second, and third. This “path to success” method allows a support person to individualize teaching approaches and sequences of instruction according to what has been effective in the past.

## My truth in 2000

***Involve as many of the senses as possible within a single lesson to help reach a greater number of students.***

Whole group instruction should involve ways in which students can be matched with peers based on multiple dimensions, i.e., interests, complexity, learning style, prior knowledge, competencies, etc. Many activities can be completed via music, the arts, literature, physical activity, journaling, social interactions, as well as the more traditional means of learning (Stanford, 2003).

One article, 50 Ways to Keep Your Co-Teacher (Murawski & Dieker, 2008), offers a rather lighthearted way of addressing the multiple learning styles (and therefore multiple teaching styles) that should proliferate today's classrooms. Creatively mirrored on Paul Simon's There Must be 50 Ways to Leave Your Lover, the authors offer the following advice regarding multiple intelligences.

42. ***Address their MI, Guy.*** As a co-teaching team, consider how you can plan lessons that address the various strengths of the learners in your classroom. Educators too often focus on the use of sight and sound (e.g., lecture and overheads), yet these are the two areas in which many students with disabilities have limited skills. Therefore, think about how to address in your lessons all the multiple intelligences (MIs), as well as the various ways that students learn (Stanford, 2003). Ask the specialists in your district: Does anyone have more information on MI theory, and can you provide us with subject-specific strategies that we can use with our students? (p. 46)

## My truth in 2010

***Ron Ferguson says that there are three legs to a tripod approach to good teaching: pedagogy (how to teach), curriculum (what to teach) and caring (respect and warmth toward the learner).***

I have enjoyed reading Ron Ferguson's writings about teaching individuals using brain-based research (Ferguson, 2008). He has paid particular attention to urban, minority students and established guidelines for facilitating the learning of these groups of students. Although some of his work may not be new to the current reader, I find that he assembles some terrific principles of learning within a framework that makes a great deal of sense. (<http://tripodproject.org/about-the-tripod-project/>)

## My truth for 2020 and beyond ...

### ***Evidence-Based Practices and High Leverage Practices are the benchmarks of effective instruction.***

As teachers who facilitate the learning of our students, we owe it to them to use instructional practices that have been assessed as the best that the profession knows of for teaching specific content to a widely diverse group of learners. Known as evidence-based practices, these strategies have been meticulously reviewed by researchers who assess each strategy's adherence to rigorous standards for replication, generalization and transferability to the students with whom a teacher currently works. High leverage practices refer to the way in which the evidence-based practices are delivered through small group instruction, use of existing principles of reinforcement, sequencing of instruction, use of task analysis, to mention but a few (Council for Exceptional Children, 2017).

### **Reflection 12**

Teaching is not about what is taught.

Teaching is always about what is sought.

Teaching is more about finding our path.

Teaching is not only about reading and math.

Learning is not about what is learned.

Learning is more about what is yearned.

Learning is about understanding oneself.

Learning is taking more books from the shelf.

Testing is not about what's on the test.

Testing is not about knowing who's best.

Testing just makes us compete for the prize.

Testing just brings on a great, big demise.

Education is not about who is educated.

Education is more about who is dedicated.

Education is about building community.

Education is about individuality.

Grades are not about what is graded.

Grades are a curse that need to be faded.

Grades cause harm and move us apart.

Grades exist for only the smart.

Success is not about who can succeed.

Success is for all of the students in need.

Success is about finding our own abilities.

Success is for ending all hostilities.

Achievement is not about who can achieve.

Achievement brings promise and can't deceive.

Achievement occurs when all can advance.

Achievement brings honor and joy to enhance.

Students are teachers and learners too.

Their paths connect each day that they do

Believe that creativity and learning can be fun

After each school day's work is done.

---

**As a teacher, you have a great gift  
Of hearts and minds each day to lift  
Higher and higher than anyone knows  
As a community of learners grows and grows.  
You are "famous" to each student each day  
As we help each other along the way.**

## Question 13

### How have my thoughts on discipline changed?

#### **My truth in the 1970s – 1980s**

***Punishment procedures were the rule when considering strategies for decreasing an individual's negative behaviors.***

I remember students engaging in meaningless tasks being punished for not being willing to complete steps to an activity they had already done many times before. It appeared that the main focus was for the student to obey the teacher's directives and receive rewards for doing so. However, if the student engaged in disruptive behaviors, the student received punishment to decrease the future occurrence of that disruptive behavior. Control appeared to be the overwhelming value and atmosphere of the classroom.

#### **My truth in 1990**

***Punishment procedures should rarely be used and an emphasis instead be placed on positive reinforcement of alternative behaviors.***

Many researchers were advocating for teachers to better understand the communicative intent of misbehavior and provide a more acceptable avenue for the student's needs. The beginnings of Positive Behavior Support emerged from leaders including Rob Horner whose in-service sessions I had attended and whose work has continued to influence my values and methods throughout my career (Crone & Horner, 2003; Horner & Carr, 1997; O'Neill, Horner, Albin, Sprague, Storey & Newton, 1997).

#### **My truth in 2000**

***All punishment programs must be reviewed often and if they aren't working, scrap them! They must not be used for administrative convenience.***

There is an irony in the experience I once had with a group of teachers. I was curious about the type and range of punishment practices they used. I asked them to tell me which of the strategies they felt was the most effective. "Time-Out", was the response. I inquired about why that was. "We use it every day!" was their response. Punishment, by its very definition, is a response to undesirable behavior that decreases the future occurrence of that behavior. If you use it every day, it is not a punishment procedure. Call it something else like a "get-you-out-of-my-hair" program.

## My truth in 2010

***Discipline is directly related to the atmosphere created by the teacher including a clear set of expectations and boundaries and well articulated consequences for stepping outside of the boundaries.***

There is a lot of attention being given to the teacher's role in providing an engaging activity in which reluctant learners want to participate. The manner in which the teacher assesses student progress by rewarding effort and participation as opposed to knowing the "correct" answer goes a long way toward increasing the on-task behavior of many students. Formative assessment should be a measure of how well the teacher's instructional strategies are affecting student outcomes. The summative assessment at the end of a specified unit could be used as the major indicator of competence.

## My truth for 2020 and beyond ...

***The development of positive relationships and a focus on student engagement reduces the negative behaviors often found in schools.***

The literature to which I am exposed contains articles by researchers who emphasize that adolescents thrive on activities/projects in which they are making a difference in their local communities. When engaging in such meaningful activities, negative behaviors due to participation in non relevant school work tends to diminish. Students want to see a relationship between what they are learning and the betterment of society or the enhancement of life in their neighborhoods. As I write this commentary, high school students around the country have been influenced by the activism of students from Parkland, Florida and their push for a dialogue about the wanton violence in educational settings across the country. What will the results be from such activism?

### Reflection 13

*I may be bored in class today;  
There's nothing interesting that comes my way.  
I often act out – it's hard to refrain  
But I also have energy to focus my brain  
On things that matter to me and my friends  
So give me an activity that sends  
Me out to my streets, in my neighborhood.  
Let them see how I can bring some good  
To solve a problem – to support a need.  
Let me show you that I can succeed.*

## Question 14

### What is my orientation to the individuals I support?

#### **My truth in the 1970s – 1980s**

##### ***We were instructors and deliverers of reinforcement.***

Many activities with which I was involved used tangible reinforcement on designated schedules and the students' abilities were graphed to note daily progress. There was not too much attention paid to the worth of the activities the students were completing. A major priority was on keeping students busy and following an assessment that focused primarily on the developmental sequencing of tasks that advanced in complexity over time.

#### **My truth in 1990**

##### ***We became detectives and investigators.***

I started to view teaching through the analogy of a puzzle. In fact, one day I presented an in-service and asked the participants to solve a crossword puzzle as a group activity. I wrote statements about the generic strategies they were using to solve the puzzle and I presented them with this list in a follow-up set of notes. I was quite intrigued with the comments I wrote that could tie directly to their ability to develop solutions to the challenges being faced by the students with whom they worked. A brief sample of my notes follows:

##### **Communications Within the Brainstorming Group**

Experts who know specific strategies can facilitate what team members discover on their own rather than immediately giving his/her version of what will work.

It is hard not to suggest everything that's on your mind before other team members have an opportunity to share their ideas. Some of the ideas may be the same but resentment could surface if they originate from the same person.

##### **Patterns**

At times, the new pattern of suggestions and ideas don't seem to fit.

At times, we all make good/bad guesses based on the available information.

Making connections among suggestions in order to come up with totally new ideas is a great strategy and the foundation of creative brainstorming.

## **Patterns (continued)**

Note patterns of each individual's reactions and advice and see a common thread emerge that ties most (all) of the ideas together.

Some team members are better than others at seeing a pattern in how strategies and clues fit together.

Sometimes things just seem to fit nicely together and other days nothing seems to go right.

Sometimes we get stuck in a rut and can't seem to get out.

Sometimes when you come up with a response that doesn't seem to fit, your very next response could be just the right fit.

We may need to change what we originally thought was true because we now have new information to challenge our original assumptions.

## **Styles Among Team Members**

Asking questions about the challenge can yield new insights and observations.

Change of scenery may help.

Different styles of facilitation range from direct assignments to a free flow of ideas.

Don't always count on others for an answer; they may not have it.

Focus on a part of the challenge for a while because this may help in narrowing the scope of the brainstorming session and result in immediately useful information.

We are sometimes hesitant when we come up with a strategy, are not sure about it, and discount it without getting feedback from the group. It could have been just the suggestion for which everyone was waiting.

When involved in a conflict with another person's idea, agree to one of the suggestions for now and agree to change it later only after other information verifies its lack of application to the current challenge.

## My truth in 2000

### ***We are conductors and focalizers.***

Shaffer and Anundsen (1993) cited David Spangler's (co-leader of Scotland's Findhorn community) definition of the role of *focalizer*: "This new style leader, like a lens, gathers together the elements and enables synthesis to take place through the focusing of these elements into a unity" (p. 274). I began to wonder whether this captured some of the roles I have/would play(ed) in the lives of students with whom I come in contact. Accordingly, I developed a new set of roles (titles) that I thought might best represent my position in the manner in which I interact with teams both at school and community agencies.

### **Changing Roles**

<b>Puzzle Solver</b>	<b>Promoter of Ice Breakers</b>	<b>Story Teller</b>
<b>Community Educator</b>	<b>Profile Maker</b>	<b>Bridge Builder</b>
<b>Supports Broker</b>	<b>Tracker of New Paths</b>	<b>Values Seeker</b>
<b>Dreamer</b>	<b>Questions Maker</b>	<b>Options Provider</b>
<b>Measurer of Success</b>	<b>Creativity Developer</b>	<b>Truth Seeker</b>
<b>Believer in Serendipity</b>	<b>People Gatherer</b>	<b>Gift Giver</b>
<b>Connections Weaver</b>	<b>Talents Facilitator</b>	<b>Task Delegator</b>

## My truth in 2010

### ***I wanted to create learning environments in which students become empowered to be life-long learners and to find their gifts to contribute to their family, community and personal lives.***

I was influenced several years ago when I heard a speaker at a conference talk about empowerment. She stated that we do not empower people. We don't have that authority. However, we nurture the environment in which people become empowered. Empowerment is a self-discovery and initiated process and not one that is externally made to happen. I like this definition although I know it is not universally agreed upon.

## My truth for 2020 and beyond ...

### **They are Us!**

Interestingly, I awake each morning with a few more aches than I used to have. I forget words more than I used to do. I need a different amount of supports than ever before. My balance isn't as good as it once was. How do I want to be supported? What attitude do I want from those paid to be of assistance to me? What are my choices? It comes full circle after all. How do I define my current quality of life? What assessments do I value when I am the object of those assessments? My life is full of questions. The answers come more slowly.

### **Reflection 14**

*There's never enough time to go to all those places.*

*There's always time to wonder in our spaces.*

*There's never enough time for all to get done.*

*There's always time to have some more fun.*

*There's never enough time to read all those books.*

*There's always time to stop and look.*

*There's never enough time to reach all our dreams.*

*There's always time to be mindful, it seems.*

*There's never enough time to view all that I see.*

*There's always time to sit and just be.*

*There's never enough time to sing every song.*

*There's always time to wander along.*

*There's never enough time ...*

*To make everything rhyme!*

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### **What Are You Getting Into by Becoming a Teacher?**

- One of the best jobs in which to influence the direction students take in their lives;
- A career in which your creative powers will be challenged;
- A line of work that makes you a better person;
- A chance to practice over and over again and hope you never get it exactly right;
- An opportunity to self-reflect on your own values and beliefs;
- A network of peers who help each other become better at what they do;
- An exciting job in which no two days are ever alike;
- Working on teams in which people bring their collective wisdom to improve the lives of students;
- A challenging atmosphere to do what's right - - - not what's easiest;
- A profession in which reinforcement might come 10 years later from a student who tells you just how much you have influenced his/her life.

## Conclusion

This manuscript took most of a lifetime [roughly 40 years] to create as I added, modified, clarified and edited how I viewed my role in the lives of individuals with disabilities. No one has taken my path nor been influenced by the exact number and names of the pioneers whose work I cite on these pages. This is true for you as well. Several readers have commented that they appreciated this account and wondered how their own truths have changed over the years and what the future may hold in store. Thank you to those who took the time to travel with me through time and stop occasionally along the way while I reflected on changes that occurred in how/why I provided supports and assistance to individuals with disabilities. My truths continue to evolve.

### A Final Reflection .... For Now

I picked up a book<sup>a</sup> from off my shelf  
to see what Parker Palmer had to say  
About aging and being on the brink  
of how to live out your best self today.  
  
The world is full of questions, wonder and awe  
as I pursue new goals and dreams.  
  
I remember from my past of the lessons I learned  
just like the *river teeth*<sup>b</sup> of the streams.  
  
Where to go? What to do?  
What is in store for me?  
How many miles have I got left to go  
to discover who I am meant to be?  
  
The answer always lies in the process  
of how you live out each day.  
  
My journey continues on  
in my own unique "Ernie" way.

<sup>a</sup> Palmer, P. (2018). *On the brink of everything: Grace, gravity & getting old*. Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

<sup>b</sup> Duncan, D. J. (1996). *River teeth*. New York: Bantam Books.

*He described a phenomena called "river teeth," which are the scattering of the knots from fallen tress long since decomposed that lie across the width of many rivers. These hardened, knotty parts of the tree do not dissolve; instead, they create ripples in which the river receives new oxygen and divert the flow of the river along new currents. Duncan's book includes the "river teeth" of his life: stories stuck in his memory, stories that once belonged to other activities long since forgotten.* (Pancsofar, 1997)

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**T**omorrow I will ha**V**e to  
**R**eview my words that are cont**A**ined in this  
**U**nusual form of self-ref**Le**ction.  
**T**he new day may bring new versions of the tr**U**th.  
**H**ow will I respond to this proc**E**ss?  
**S**tay tuned for the decade of the 2030**S**.

**After all is said and done,  
this much I know is true:**

***THERE IS NO***  
***"ANSWER"***  
***BUT THERE ARE MANY***

**choices reactions**  
**suggestions**  
**responses options**  
**Questions Ideas**  
**thoughts**  
**strategies feelings**  
**approaches beliefs**  
**connections**