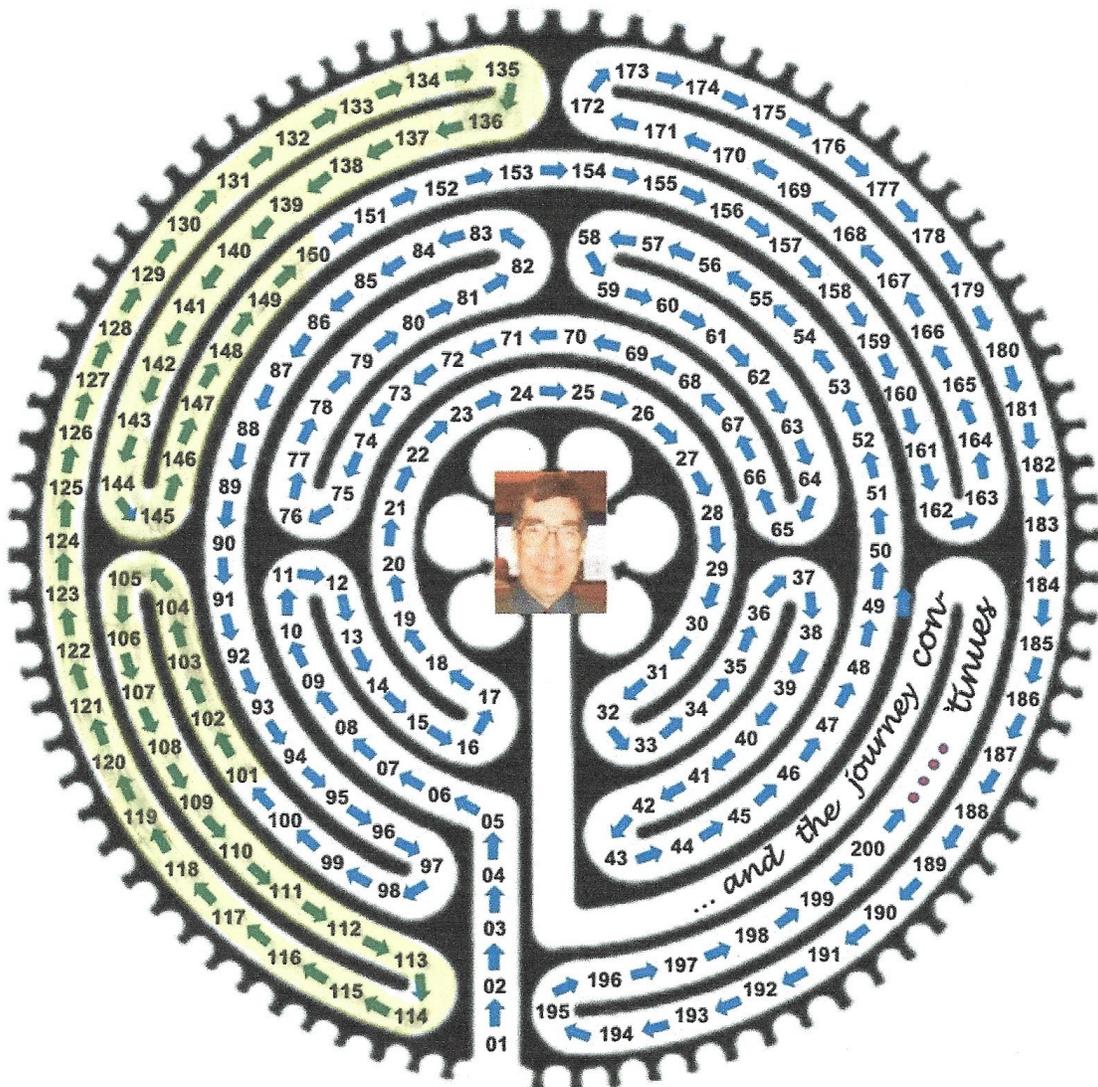


# On the Path of the Perfecting Teacher

Walking the Labyrinth  
Steps 101 - 150

Current Update: 02/24/26

Ernest L. Pancsofar



# Walking the Labyrinth

## Steps 101 - 150

In my opinion, the values of the "Perfecting" Teacher are captured within the acrostic organizer below. There is no such person as a perfect teacher. However, by following the elements for being a perfecting teacher, we are always in the process of reflecting and improving our relationship with our students.

**Mindfulness P** ractitioner  
**A** Continual **L E** arner  
**A** Seeke **R** of Evidence-Based Practices  
**S**elf Re **F** lective  
**E** ngaging  
**C** reative  
**T** houghtful  
**E**mploys **I** nclusive Practices  
**Ki N** d  
**E**ncoura **G** ing

**Cul T** urally Responsive  
**V**alues Formativ **E** Assessment  
**P A** rent Friendly  
**C** ollaborates With Peers  
**L**ives A **H** ealthy Lifestyle  
**A**sks Good Qu **E** stions  
**N**eve **R** Satisfied With What Is

# On The Path To Becoming a “Perfecting” Teacher

## Table of Contents Steps 101 - 150

<b>Step</b>	<b>Entry</b>	<b>Step</b>	<b>Entry</b>
<b>101</b>	Albert Cullum Quotes	<b>116</b>	I’ll Take Values for \$400 ...
<b>102</b>	Who is Olivia Wise?	<b>117</b>	<i>All Things Considered</i> - Quotes
<b>103</b>	Thoughts Upon Completing ...	<b>118</b>	BRUCE PERRY
<b>104</b>	Welcome Back	<b>119</b>	SPED 501 Acronym
<b>105</b>	Things ... About Teaching	<b>120</b>	What’s Important Today?
<b>106</b>	Dr. Pancsofar’s Principles ...	<b>121</b>	The Value of Experiences
<b>107</b>	COLLABORATION	<b>122</b>	A Simple Formula for Success
<b>108</b>	Advice for Future Students	<b>123</b>	Our Sphere of Influence
<b>109</b>	SOCIAL SKILLS	<b>124</b>	My 31 <sup>st</sup> Dylan Show
<b>110</b>	When I Review Your Work	<b>125</b>	INSPECTOR MORSE
<b>111</b>	Value of Self-Reflection	<b>126</b>	<i>I Missed Class Tonight</i>
<b>112</b>	... Pancsofar Syndrome	<b>127</b>	Next Door to Me
<b>113</b>	A Letter to the Editor	<b>128</b>	This Must Be the Place
<b>114</b>	ENGAGEMENT	<b>129</b>	A Response to an OP ED
<b>115</b>	Burton, Gunnar & Bob	<b>130</b>	Who is Likely to be Taking ...

## On The Path To Becoming a “Perfecting” Teacher

### Table of Contents Steps 101 - 150 (continued)

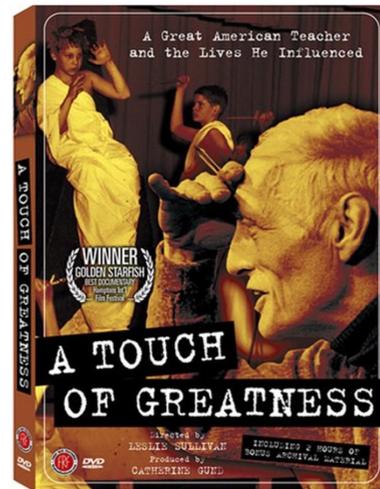
<b>Step</b>	<b>Entry</b>	<b>Step</b>	<b>Entry</b>
<b>131</b>	BOSTON Marathon	<b>141</b>	Traits of a Creative Person
<b>132</b>	Developing a Mindful ...	<b>142</b>	Quotes of Note
<b>133</b>	Satisfaction from a ...	<b>143</b>	Brad: INTERRUPTION or ...
<b>134</b>	The Data Are Neutral	<b>144</b>	PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT
<b>135</b>	Wisdom Interspersed in ...	<b>145</b>	Palace Theater Review
<b>136</b>	Random Thoughts ... Dylan ...	<b>146</b>	A New Year’s Toast
<b>137</b>	Accuracy of Assessment ...	<b>147</b>	Welcome to the Best ...
<b>138</b>	The Paradox of ... Feedback	<b>148</b>	Shush!
<b>139</b>	Community Connections ...	<b>149</b>	Celebrate – Don’t Replicate
<b>140</b>	Tangled Up in Bellevue	<b>150</b>	Was That a Good Question?

## Step 101

### Albert Cullum Quotes

One of the more creative teachers I have viewed is Albert Cullum as portrayed in the DVD – *A Touch of Greatness*. He was truly a creative and masterful teacher.

- *Teachers can be bearers of gifts. Not only do we have the privilege of introducing great literature to young, imaginative minds, but we also have the priceless opportunity of giving each child the gift of believing in him or herself.*
- *Through movement, through emotions, through activities, through projects, all the basics fit in and they're learning without realizing they're learning. Learning's not painful; learning should be joyful .*
- *I think everyone has a touch of greatness within them.... The trouble is, sometimes we don't help children sense it. If it's sensed early, it really has an impact upon all of their lifetime. It becomes a non-destructive life, rather than a destructive life.*



## Step 102

### Who is Olivia Wise?

A few years ago, I viewed a video clip in which a young teen with a terminal disease recorded a Katy Perry tune, *Roar*. I was quite impressed with this clip and share its link with my current students along with a poem I wrote as follows.

**Who is Olivia Wise**  
**students leave this room**  
**for reflection and a reason**  
**to believe we make a difference**  
**of opinion and truth in**  
**lending our expertise**  
**sometimes matters little**  
**sense when teen dies too soon.**

## Step 103

### Thoughts Upon Completing a Training Session

I wrote this poem when I was in Hampton Beach, NH relaxing after a three-day in-service training on person-centered planning.

I'm looking out onto the beach  
From a porch, so I can't quite reach  
And feel the sand between my toes  
And know which way the soft wind blows.

For three days I have met new friends  
Talking 'bout person-centered planning trends  
On helping people reach their dreams  
By being members of planning teams  
And also see things in a different light;  
Not to see everything as wrong or right.

One of my dreams was to share my poetry  
As I read some samples in their entirety.  
I received some bits of sage advice  
And steps to follow that were quite precise.  
I have a direction and things to do  
To help make this one dream come true.

I offered some graphics on which to record  
The progress of people who move on toward  
Closing the gap between now and then  
And capture quality-of-life outcomes when  
Team members convene and look at their pages  
To view their supports by these assessment gauges.

It's nice to pause and take a breath  
And ask some questions of greater depth  
About the way we can provide  
Help so people can decide  
How to live lives of greater quality  
Becoming members of their own community.

As we leave and go on our way  
And remember what each of us had to say,  
How will I put into practice what I did learn?  
How will I react when it becomes my turn  
To advocate more strongly for someone's dream  
As a new member of that person's team?

## Step 104

### Welcome Back

I was thinking of a theme song for an IEP meeting and I heard the *Welcome Back Kotter* tune in my head. I modified the lyrics as a welcome back to all team members as a new school year starts off in a creative way. I like the results and encourage those who are responsible for assembling this group to think about the way that music can contribute to a more welcoming atmosphere for all participants, especially family members and the student of focus.

Welcome back, your team  
is your ticket out of here.

Welcome back, people  
are here to give you cheer.

Well, they meet to help you  
plan your future around

For your dreams to begin  
on some solid ground.

Who'd have though they'd lead yah.  
(Who'd have thought they'd lead yah.)

We will never leave yah.  
(We will never leave yah)

Yeah, your dreams mean a lot  
And we give it all we got – Welcome back.

Welcome back, Welcome back, Welcome back.

Welcome back, Welcome back, Welcome back .

---

*Accept that you are a work in progress, both a revision and a draft: you are better and more complete than earlier versions of yourself, but you also have work to do. Be open to change. Allow yourself to be revised.* **Maggie Smith**

## **Step 105**

### **20 Pretty Important Things to Know About Teaching**

During one of the final sessions of a course that I taught, I liked to supply the students with my take on what I considered the “pretty important” things to know about the profession of being a teacher. This list contains a very subject array of elements from a very biased perspective. However, I do feel that those of us with years of experience owe it to those just entering the profession our “wisdom” or advice, at the least.

- Nobody knows all the answers.
- Respect another’s opinion.
- Be open to suggestions.
- Everyone is a unique individual – the same strategy does not always work equally well with each student.
- Do not be judgmental – Keep an open mind.
- Work well as a member of a team.
- Rely on other people.
- Learn from your mistakes.
- Give most things a chance. What do you have to lose?
- Give people the benefit of the doubt.
- Trust in your colleagues.
- Have patience and understanding. Don’t expect things too soon.
- Try to see the humor in unpleasant situations.
- Mirroring and modeling are good ways to teach.
- No one is perfect or a miracle worker!
- Everyone makes mistakes!
- Be genuine in your caring
- Set a good example for others.
- There should be multiple ways in which you handle your stress through positive outlets.
- Practice active listening.

## Step 106

### Dr. Pancsofar's Principles of Critical Thinking

Over the years I have developed a Top 10 List of practices that lead to more critical thinking. It has taken me many years to appreciate the wisdom from the mentors whose works I cite among the entries in this list. I hope you are drawn to the work of a few of these individuals as you advance along your own career/personal paths.

- Asking good questions can often be more productive than trying to immediately solve a current challenge (Burton Blatt, Syracuse University);
- Looking at a challenge from multiple frames of mind (perspectives) helps to enlighten alternative strategies (Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind* and *Multiple Intelligences*);
- Looking at a challenge from a contextual perspective – ecological analysis – helps develop connections among important factors and looking for relationships to understand rather than merely a problem to solve (Robert Russell, Southern Illinois University);
- Opening our minds to paradox, serendipity and the unknown lies at the heart of improvisation (Robert Sternberg, formerly of Yale University);
- The debriefing process allows us to analyze our own style of learning, patterns of strategies, trends, connections, current truths and insights (Pancsofar – Then/Now manuscript);
- Acting as a consultant to others involves bringing out the wisdom of team members to contribute in an organic way to changes in that team's organization/school (Institute for Human Resource Development, 1986 – 1992);
- Realizing that education is not primarily about the acquisition of knowledge, but rather, about the art of knowing (Helen Harrington, University of Michigan);
- Reacting to a person with a challenge involves truly listening to that individual's needs and responding with feedback and support removed from manipulation and control (Herb Lovett, *Learning to Listen*);
- Understanding the Tripod approach (content, pedagogy and relationships) and its influence for effectively teaching minority, urban students (Ron Ferguson, Harvard University);
- Acknowledging that the process toward a goal is the journey worth recording and remembering (mindfulness).

## Step 107

### COLLABORATION

As I read through information in our text regarding the important role that collaboration plays in being an effective teacher, I completed an acrostic – COLLABORATION. The ingredients in this visual are based on my previous years as a consultant and collaborator with teams who develop educational supports for students in special education, as well as adults with disabilities across the age span.

- C**ooperation among team members is essential.
- O**ffer your commitment to team goals.
- L**isten to the thoughts of others.
- L**isten, again, to the thoughts of others.
- A**sk questions when you need more information.
- B**e flexible in your thinking.
- O**btain training in group dynamics.
- R**emember to be positive.
- A**llow differences of opinions.
- T**eamwork means to share the credit and responsibilities.
- I**ndicate your willingness to accept creative options.
- O**btain information to support your point of view.
- N**ote the good ideas of others.

## Step 108

### Advice for Future Students

During a debriefing session at the conclusion of one of my courses, I requested students to give advice to the students who would be taking this same course the following semester. What would you tell them that would be beneficial based on what you now know about the course? When I reviewed their responses, I was pleased to note how frequently the word “creativity” surfaced.

- Open your eyes and really look at everything that you do and ask, “Can EVERY person do this?” meaning to put yourself in another’s shoes.
- If you teach children, seriously consider/reflect on how Dr. Pancsofar teaches this class! He is a role model for us all!
- Be open to a different way of teaching and learning. Enjoy.
- Focus on things that interest you most. Don’t get overwhelmed by how much information is presented.
- You will get out of this class what you put in. If you work hard, it will come back to you.
- Be creative. Desire to learn something new and you will !!
- Use your own experiences to connect to the class. Make it relevant and individualize – creative!
- Be creative. Develop quality products that you can use in your classroom. Think about all students.
- Lower your guard and get ready to be creative! You will learn a great deal and enjoy the class even more if you are open to being creative.
- Review and reflect on the slides and the supplemental materials and think about how they can make your practice more inclusive.
- Time management is key.
- Have an open mind. Use the projects to develop your own interest.
- Think outside of the box. Tap into your creativity and you will be amazed at what quality products evolve.
- Leave your preconceptions at the door and just roll with it. You will learn more than you think.
- Be creative-
- Think outside the box.
- Do not stress over trying to learn as much as possible. Relax! Read what you want and take in as much as you want, relate to what you already know or want to know.
- Be open-minded and creative.

## Step 109

### SOCIAL SKILLS

A school counselor in one of my courses was intrigued with using an acrostic organizer as a means of communication among team members. She expressed much frustration when interacting with a team on which she was a member for a student for whom there were several targeted areas of focus for social skills. However, there was a vast difference of opinion about what each team member thought social skills should include. So, she brought in a blank acrostic with the word SOCIAL SKILLS prominently displayed in a vertical column. She then led a discussion among team members, with the parents of the student present, to pin down the exact nature of social skills for the specific student of focus. She told me that this visual was a hit and everyone now felt they had a better handle on how to individualize such a broad category to the specific needs of the student.

**S**elf-control

**C**ommunication

Eye - **C**ontact

**D**ialogue

Self - **A**wareness

**L**aughter

**S**elf-esteem

**K**indness

Shar**I**ng

Emotiona**L** expression

**L**istening

Re**S**pect

## Step 110

### When I Review Your Work

I let my students know how much I appreciate reviewing their work and how enjoyable it is to provide them with feedback. Many remark at the end of the semester how much they liked receiving feedback and comments on their approach to the topics covered in that course.

When I review your work during the hours of my day,  
I often wonder what it is I am going to say.  
When I have a conversation about what you are learning,  
You cause me to stop and reflect on what I'm discerning  
Are the important parts of what I share  
To help you progress and become more aware  
Of the diversity of learning from each student's presence  
As you investigate that person's unique essence  
And discover your role in helping them see  
The awesome person they are meant to be.  
Thank you!

## Step 111

### Value of Self-Reflection

We are always in the process of getting better by selecting from among the hundreds of pieces of advice that seem to materialize out of the blue each year by "experts" whose backgrounds can, at times, be suspect. I believe striving for excellence raises us up to who we are: unique and different than any other teacher/counselor/administrator our students have or will ever meet. As long as we realize that we are not "there" yet, our own self-reflections are the best professional development tool there is.

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*Teachers who communicate that they enjoy helping students with mistakes or confusion create better learning outcomes.*

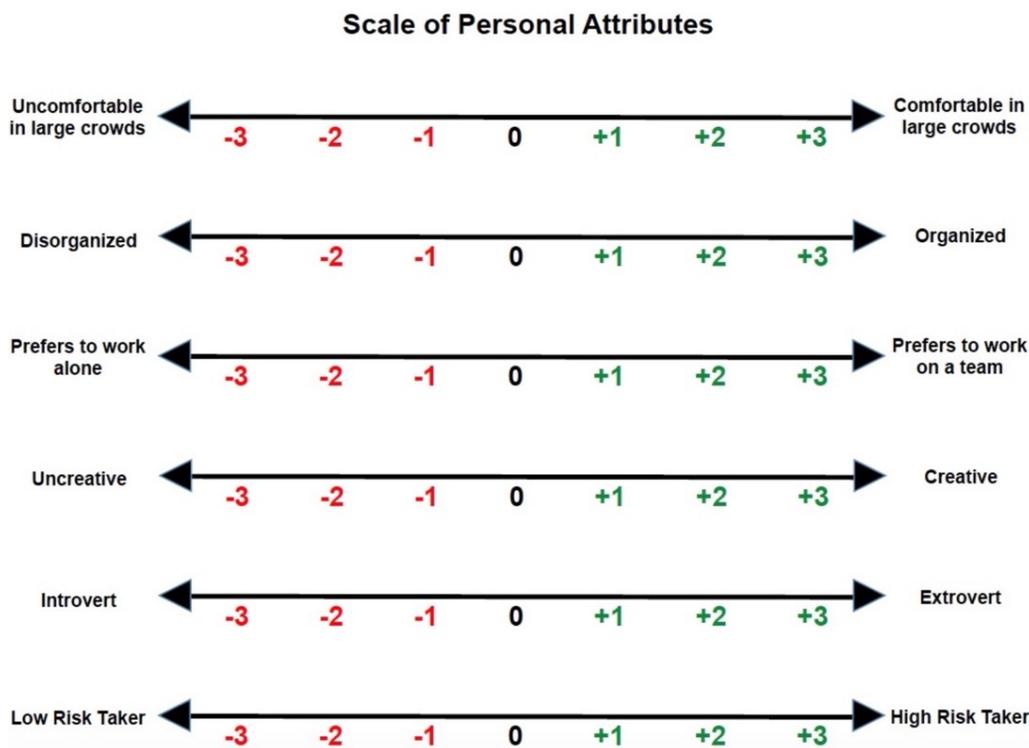
**Ron Ferguson**

## Step 112

### Do You Have Pancsofar Syndrome?

Labeling has a certain social context in which those in power choose to identify differences as “not normal” from the perceived attributes of the “normal” ones in that society. These attributes may include intelligence, physical features, manifested behaviors, outlooks on life, etc. In line with this thinking, I decided to develop an Attribute Scale using certain dimensions of how I define my own life as “normal” and assess how others compare to that sense of normalcy. Hence, the development of the Scale of Personal Attributes for Pancsofar Syndrome (SPAPS).

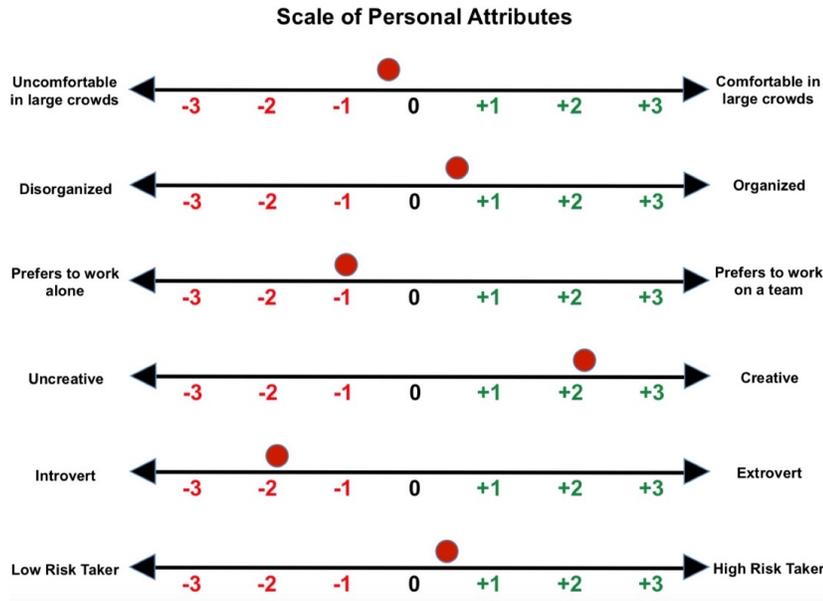
After countless research and hours of deliberation, I developed the following scale on which you can put your “x” depending on how you view your life along a continuum for each attribute. Knowing that these attributes change in various life experiences and circumstances, your summary is an overall impression. For example, for the first attribute, if you are extremely uncomfortable in large crowds, you might choose to place your “x” at the **-3** point on the line or between a **-2** and **-3**. If large crowds don’t bother you at all and, in fact, you crave being in a large crowd, your “x” might be placed at the **+3** point on the scale. Now it’s your turn to compare your mark on the Pancsofar Syndrome scales to see if you are within the established range of normalcy for each attribute.



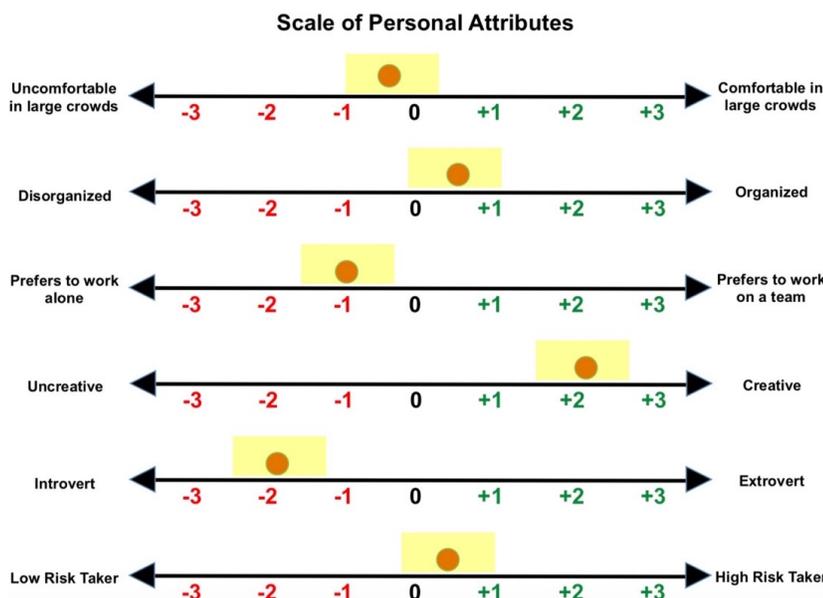
## Step 112

### Do You Have Pancsofar Syndrome? (continued)

Realizing that this assessment is time sensitive and skewed by the circumstances that are in your life right now, this attribute scale represents the fluid nature of being in and out of Pancsofar Syndrome throughout your lifetime. At the time I completed this assessment, I placed my mark at the following locations along the continuum of each attribute.



I then identified a suitable range surrounding each mark that might indicate a good fit if someone's mark was within that range for each attribute.



## Step 112

### Do You Have Pancsofar Syndrome? (continued)

#### The results:

# of marks within normal range	Conclusion
06	You are Me!
05	Extremely High Likelihood
04	Elevated Likelihood
03	Maybe
02	Decreased Likelihood
01	Extremely Low Likelihood
00	Definitely Not

In 1972, there was a change in the definition of who qualified to be labeled as intellectually disable (the term mental retardation was the official label used at that time, but today is deemed unacceptable). Prior to 1972, individuals could acquire this label of intellectual disability if their IQ score was 1 standard deviation below the mean (IQ of 85) or lower and also have an impairment in adaptive behavior. Members of the professional association for individuals with intellectual disabilities felt that too many people were being identified as intellectually disabled. So, in 1972, this group changed the definition to 2 standard deviations below the mean (IQ of 70) or lower to receive such a label. This change had dramatic effects for who would be eligible for funds for supports and services in 1975, when the precursor to the law today known as IDEA was first passed.

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***You try something, it doesn't work, and maybe people even criticize you. In a fixed mindset, you say, 'I tried this, it's over.' In a growth mindset, you look for what you've learned. Carol S. Dweck***

## Step 113

### A Letter to the Editor – *Hartford Courant*

The *Courant* is doing an admirable job at documenting the unjust side to student evaluations in our schools. The best analogy so far has been Elizabeth Natale's comment about blaming the dentist for the patient having a cavity. She seems to have her finger on the pulse of the multitude of variables that affect student learning – and the quality of the teacher's interactions is important, but not the ONLY critical ingredient in a child's learning. A "one size fits all" mentality is shockingly ineffective. Each student lives within his/her own ecology, which is continuously in flux. Therefore, the same assessment will not necessarily account for all the variables that are currently impacting that student's progress. Why has our current educational structure placed so much emphasis on the "bubble test" as the chief means of assessing students? Can you put the lyrics to a great song on a bubble sheet? Can an orator influence you to their point of view via a bubble sheet? Can the impact of a master's work of art be reduced to a multiple-choice test? I, and many of my colleagues in the teacher preparation field, are strongly in favor of formative assessment: how well a student is progressing by reviewing samples of assignments to inform the teacher about the value of current instructional strategies. If the student is not progressing, a decision is made on what changes to make to impact that student's individualized learning. Every student's learning profile is different. We are not working on machines. We are interacting with hearts, minds and emotions of each "individual" student.

---

*Keep on beginning and failing. Each time you fail, start all over again, and you will grow stronger until you have accomplished a purpose – not the one you began with perhaps, but one you'll be glad to remember.* Anne Sullivan

*Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, ambition inspired, and success achieved.* Helen Keller

## Step 114

### ENGAGEMENT

In some of my interactions with students, I distribute a blank acrostic of the word ENGAGEMENT. I ask the students to identify elements that contribute to an overall atmosphere of active engagement by students as a necessary condition to learning. Below is one version of this visual organizer.

**Out-of-Class Int E rests**

**In N ovation**

**G ames**

**A nalogies**

**Carin G**

**Conn E ctions**

**E M otions**

**Learn E r Styles**

**Fu N**

**Flexibili T y**

---

*We need to teach how doubt is not to be feared but welcomed. It's OK to say, "I don't know."*

- *Read everyday.*
- *Spend time with nature.*
- *Ask questions.*
- *Never stop learning.*
- *Don't pay attention to what others think of you.*
- *Do what interests you the most.*
- *Study hard.*
- *Teach others what you know.*
- *Make mistakes and learn.*
- *It's okay to not know things.*

Richard P. Feynman

## Step 115

### Burton, Gunnar and Bob

I wrote this poem to honor three pioneers in the field of special education/ disability studies. Burton Blatt, Gunnar Dybwad and Bob Perske were individuals whose paths I crossed and who left an indelible mark on my values and outlook toward supporting individuals with disabilities by their actions, deeds and writings.



Burton Blatt



Gunnar Dybwad



Bob Perske

Has anybody here, seen our good friend **Burton**?  
Can you tell me where he's gone?  
He helped us see a lot of people as our equals in this life.  
He went into institutions and told us of their strife.  
He saw people sitting naked living in great filth.  
Because of these situations, he said we share some guilt.  
So close down these awful places!  
Look for community spaces.  
He said we must expose this great mess;  
With photos and words went to the press  
About individuals who were living in purgatory;  
But each one had a story  
And their legacy  
Resulted in advocacy  
By many people who, like Burton, saw  
The need for their protection under the law.

Has anybody here, seen our good friend **Gunnar**?  
Can you tell me where he's gone?  
With Rosemary often by his side,  
He travelled locally and also worldwide  
To spread the news about the worth of us all;  
Especially those whose voices would call  
Out in frustration because of their label.  
To Gunnar everyone should be able  
To fight for their right to be free and be heard.  
Empowerment he thought should be a word  
That defined their ability to speak their mind.  
He was a giant of men, a one-of-a-kind.

## Step 115

### Burton, Gunnar and Bob

(continued)

Has anybody here, seen our good friend **Bob**?  
Can you tell me where he's gone?  
He was gentle in manner, but forceful with pen.  
He wrote about risk in the lives of women and men  
Who were protected some say for their very own good,  
But Bob saw it differently from the places where he stood  
And in order to live a life full of quality  
The community must be a sought for locality  
Where people experience both joys and strife  
In order to live a more meaningful life.  
Bob was a friend to many in need.  
In the jails and prisons, he would lead  
Circles of friends to fight for the rights  
Of people there whose trials and plights  
Might be forgotten in a faulty legal game  
To meet with others who felt the same  
And they never gave up - - - no matter how long -  
Bob is missed – but his legacy lives on.

Who will pick up the mantle?  
Who will fight the next battle?  
Their lives will not be in vain  
If each of us take up the rein  
From where we are right now  
To carry on their work somehow  
As we commit ourselves to the job  
Left to us by Burton, Gunnar and Bob.

## Step 116

### I'll Take Values for \$400, Alex

One evening, I was preparing to watch Jeopardy and decided to record what Alex Trebek said after a contestant answered a statement with a correct or incorrect question. I realized that if he did not vary both his words and inflection, Jeopardy would be quite a boring TV game show. However, Alex Trebek varies the way he chooses to provide feedback to the contestants and seldom does he repeat the same feedback twice in a row. Teachers could take a cue from Mr. Trebek!

That's it!	That's it!	Correct
Yes!	That good for \$ ____	(answer), Yes
Correct	Yes!	(____) Correct
Yes (____)	You got it!	Right for \$ ____
Right!	Yes (____)	Yes!
Correct	(____) that's (____)	Yes!
Correct	Right Again!	Yes!
Correct	That's Right	Yes!
Right again!	Right!	Good for \$ (____)
Right!	Yes!	Correct
Right!	That's it!	Yes!
Yes, well done.	Correct	Yes!
Correct	Right	Yes!
Yes, Select Again	Correct	(____) Right!
(answer), Yes!	Yes!	Correct
Yes (____)		

---

***There is no recipe to be a great teacher, that's what is unique about them.***

**Robert Sternberg**

## Step 117

### ***All Things Considered - Quotes***

The following quotes have stood the test of time and they originate from Noah Adams' book, *All Things Considered*. I refer to them throughout many of the courses I teach as they have universal applicability.

- *The problem, though, in daily journalism, is that every time you try to pattern hunt, a new day pops up and cracks your concentration.* (Susan Stamberg)
- *I'm working for the radio show I'd like to be listening to ... the sound was invitational rather than exclusionary.* (p. 14)
- *I've not met Jerome (John Jerome) – as they say back in Kentucky, we've howdied, but we haven't shook!* (p. 46)
- *In terms of what you need to know for All Things Considered, you'll only use one hundredth of a week's reading. But it's a crucial one hundredth, and you never know which one it's going to be.* (p. 61)
- *I have trouble with people who proclaim they have the answers for everyone else.* (p. 62)
- *But I got on a plane that went east instead of north; we make choices, and then spend years wondering.* (p. 69)
- *Stillness envelops us. It is the stillness of a moose intending to appear.* (quoted by John McPhee on p. 112)
- *But it was not the Highlander way to be experts, to tell people what to do. Horton and the staff believed that the people who have the problems are the ones who have the answers.* (p. 238)
- *I just let the people who are doing it talk for a while.* (p. 306)
- *I think there are certain moments that are all sad and there are certain moments that are all funny, but most of the time it's a mixture of the two.* (p. 309)
- *So I wouldn't try to build a Utopia based on what the ideal situation would be for people in their relationships. That wouldn't work because it all has to be within the framework of the physical resources and the realities, and those are changing.* (p. 326)

## Step 118

### BRUCE PERRY

Bruce Perry was the keynote speaker at a conference on social and emotional learning at CCSU in May 2019. I decided to capture key elements from his presentation in an acrostic organization to share with conference organizers and for students in my course.

The slide features a central logo for the Center for Excellence in Social & Emotional Learning, School of Education & Professional Studies, with the Central Connecticut State University seal above it. To the left is the text 'Acrostic Organizer' and to the right is 'Summary Statements from Keynote Speaker'. The acrostic text is arranged in a box with arrows pointing to the center logo. The acrostic reads: 'The capacity to love cannot be B uilt in isolation. R elationships Matter. The most powerf U l therapy is human love. History of C onnectedness. People, not programs, chang E people. Relational P overty / Wealth. R E gulate, Then R elate, Then R eason. Stress is Necessar Y'.

## Step 119

### SPED 501 Acronym

I often receive feedback from students in my courses about how much their own attitudes have changed about working with students with disabilities. This slide greets the students as they arrive for our final in-class session.

The slide has a blue background with a yellow banner at the top that reads 'SPED 501: Session 13'. Below the banner, the word 'Resources' is written in large, bold, black letters. Underneath, there is a quote: '... where you learn more about yourself through the study of people who have disabilities (diff-abilities)'. At the bottom, it says 'Students who Produce Exciting Discoveries - 501 to be exact -'.

## Step 120

### What's Important Today?

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.

## Step 121

### The Value of Experiences

I'm reminded, as I work on my Acrostic puzzle, about an article in *TIME* magazine a while back. An investigator of an airplane crash was being interviewed. He was asked how he knew what to look for and how he could make sense out of all this mess. He said something like, "When I was new to this business and was at my 10<sup>th</sup> crash site, I was better at looking for clues because I had investigated 9 other crashes. After investigating 100 crash sites, I'm better because I have the benefit of the experiences of 99 previous crashes." Why am I so good at this current Acrostic puzzle? The answer is probably because I have already completed a couple hundred different ones before this one and I look for similar patterns. I think supporting students with disabilities is much the same. There are patterns to observe if you are astute enough to learn from all the prior students you also tried to support.

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*I like writing about big turning points, where professional and personal lives coalesce, where the boundaries are coming down, and you're faced with a set of choices which will change life forever.*

**Tana French**

## **Step 122**

### **A Simple Formula for Success**

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 that 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 .

## **Step 123**

### **Our Sphere of Influence**

In class, I show pictures of sand sculptures and chalk drawings on sidewalks and ask what the similarity is with these two art forms. I receive many comments and the one that I am seeking often comes up: they are both temporary products. The wind and rain can wash away the artist's efforts in both situations. Similarly, we don't/can't control many of the outside influences on the students in our classes. We can provide a safe, welcoming space in which to learn and be mindful of the presence of all learners and how important that realization is.

We don't control the results of much we do.  
It's the process we focus on – through and through.  
Be mindful of the way in which you interact  
With students in your class – Make it a fact  
That you honor the way in which you choose to teach  
Each and every student today that you will reach.

## Step 124

### My 31<sup>st</sup> Dylan Show

As I am renumbering my blog postings, I am thinking about naming this series of entries – *The First 250 Steps to Becoming a Perfecting Teacher*. Here is Step 124 to honor my 31<sup>st</sup> appearance at a Bob Dylan concert/show. The chronological order of my postings are from many different periods of time in my tenure here at CCSU. However, it is the cumulative entries and not their order of being originally written, that mean the most to me. Can you guess in what city Dylan played his 31<sup>st</sup> show?

**P**ainting masterpieces  
**R**ainy and drizzly outside / Thunder inside  
**O**rnamental surroundings  
**V**iolin virtuosos  
**I**ntroductions to applause  
**D**ylan delights  
**E**nigmatic energy  
**N**ew England in November  
**C**enter stage majesty  
**E**volving still

**R**eworked tempos  
**H**istory continues  
**O**ffering old and new  
**D**ylan delights once again  
**E**ntertained

**I**t's 9:30 PM - Encore awaits  
**S**eventy-Eight !!  
**L**ighting casts shadows  
**A**nother day/another city/another show  
**N**ever the same song twice  
**D**ylan delights a final time

How could students in your class take notes on a current topic using the first letters of each line as an acrostic that has relevance to the lesson under study?

## **Step 125**

### **INSPECTOR MORSE**

I enjoyed this series of mysteries on BritBox. I used an acrostic organizer to capture some significant dialogue throughout the various episodes of *Inspector Morse* and used this as a model for students to capture important dialogue in literature or other content areas such as a biography of speeches by key figures in our society; i.e., Martin Luther King, Jr.

## **Step 126**

### ***I Missed Class Tonight***

One of the students in a previous course made the following quote: “*I missed class tonight. Then I realized, I MISSED class tonight!*” This was, perhaps, one of the highest compliments I could receive from a student. I looked forward to sharing the great resources from the video collection in our department as well as information from Communitas, Inc. We looked at the gifts and talents of students first. Then, we investigated ways in which we could be more person-centered in our language and approaches to these students. We covered differences among students of diverse labels but chose not to focus on those differences, but to focus on what could be accomplished through instruction, technology, advocacy, attitudes, and inclusion in the day’s events and activities in which peers were also engaged.

## Step 127

### Next Door To Me

From 1976 – 1978 my wife and I lived in Eugene, Oregon. During that time, we worked in different group homes that provided supports and services for individuals with a widely diverse set of challenges and needs. This was a time when neighbors were concerned about what people with disabilities would do and many myths were thought to be true by citizens with limited exposure to adults with severe disabilities. When I returned to graduate school at Southern Illinois University in 1979, I wrote this poem .

At first, I thought it was some kind of joke.  
The neighbors you know, are different folk.  
I kept careful watch on them every day  
To make sure they didn't get in my way.

Scared, frightened, tense as could be,  
The nerve of them moving right next door to me.  
Nothing happened to me on that scary first day;  
Nothing to report – nothing to say.

Just in case, I built a fence all around my land  
So they couldn't see how my life's been so bland.  
But now, I'm sure – just wait and see  
Some weird things are bound to happen to me.

A year's gone by as I'm writing to you -  
Still nothing to say – to write – or to do.

## Step 128

### This Must Be the Place

During the opening session of one course, I placed the visual below on the door entering the classroom where the course was scheduled to meet. I thought it would provide a unique reminder of the learning environment that would be our “place” for the next 15 weeks



## Step 129

### A Response to an OP ED Teaching Teachers: There's A Lot to Learn (08/02/2002)

As I was looking through some old files, I happened upon a letter to the editor I wrote that was published in the *Hartford Courant* on 08/02/2002, when I was chair of our department. I share it with you below:

I'll begin with the final sentence of this editorial: ... *the real test of public education is not how well teachers know their theory, it is how well students perform.* I had to stop and rethink what I had read in this Opinion Editorial. It appears the author(s) might be referring to a dog obedience school at which performance is the key outcome or maybe a circus in which animals perform for the audience. Ah – if it could be so simple as a choice of too much theory versus not enough subject matter content. It is tempting to view a lack of student achievement as an either-or-phenomena instead of the complexity that certainly envelopes it. How do the variables of poverty, transient families, stressful home lives, decreased parental assistance with homework, increased passivity of video entertainment, etc., contribute to the expected standards of students in our schools? The author(s) raise some key issues but perhaps raise the wrong question. I am reminded of a quote by Herbert Kohl in his recent book, *Discipline of Hope* in which he states, *At its core it (teaching) is not mechanical or technological. I have always thought of myself as a teacher the way other people think of themselves as gardeners, painters, composers, mathematicians, and potters. I am a crafts person of learning, working to refine what I do with young people to the points where it is both free and structured, spontaneous and disciplined, innovative and classical, fun and very difficult* (p. 10). I appreciate the opportunity of presenting my brief reaction to this editorial and will circulate it widely among the faculty with whom I work.

## Step 130

### Who is Likely to Be Taking This Course?

Recently, I have started using this set of statements and asking students to predict what the numbers might be for this current class and letting them know I will be forming my own prediction of how I think the numbers for this current course will be. Although humorous in nature, this format does enable me to establish some sense of predictability . . . within 10% margin of error, of course.

#### Blank Template

There are \_\_\_ people scheduled to be in this class this semester. Statistically speaking, you could be included in one, probably more, of the following statements:

- \_\_\_ want to be here to take this class.
- \_\_\_ have taken a class with me before.
- \_\_\_ can't help but text during class time, though this practice is irritating to me.
- \_\_\_ will have a family crisis while taking this course.
- \_\_\_ will be very confused when you read the syllabus about the requirements of the course.
- \_\_\_ will comment to me, once the course is over, that this has been the best graduate course they have ever taken.
- \_\_\_ will comment to me, once the course is over, that this has been the worst graduate course they have ever taken.
- \_\_\_ will have a personally transforming experience based on the discovery of their own talents and limitations as they pertain to individuals with disabilities.
- \_\_\_ are comfortable in this current learning environment.
- \_\_\_ have an equal possibility to be fantastic teachers who will have the potential to impact hundreds of lives.

The following page contains my projected entries for one course.

## **Step 130**

### **Who is Likely to Be Taking This Course?**

(continued)

There are **26** people scheduled to be in this class this semester. Statistically speaking, you could be included in one, probably more, of the following statements

- 10** want to be here to take this class.
- 01** have taken a class with me before.
- 05** can't help but text during class time, though this practice is irritating to me.
- 03** will have a family crisis while taking this course.
- 19** will be very confused upon reading the syllabus about the requirements of the course .
- 08** will comment to me, once the course is over, that this has been the best graduate course they have ever taken.
- 02** will comment to me, once the course is over, that this has been the worst graduate course they have ever taken.
- 07** will have a personally transforming experience based on the discovery of their own talents and limitations as they pertain to individuals with disabilities.
- 10** are comfortable in this current learning environment.
- 26** have an equal possibility to be fantastic teachers who will have the potential to impact hundreds of lives.

## Step 131

### BOSTON Marathon

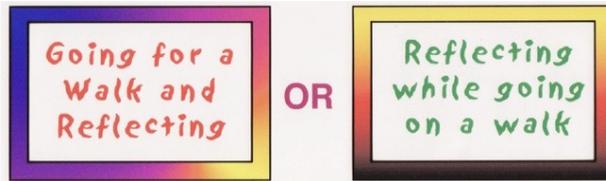
Following the Boston Marathon bombings of April 15, 2013, I constructed the Acrostic below to commemorate this event.

**B**oldly **B**elieving in **B**etter Days  
**O**rdinary **P**eople, extra **O**rdinary Ways  
**S**trong, Re**S**ilient - **S**tand as One  
**T**wen**T**y-six Miles - a Mara**T**hon Run  
**O**ne Nati**O**n - Hear **O**ur Might  
**N**ever Agai**N** - 'Cause We All **U****N**ite

## Step 132

### Developing a Mindful Perspective

Being mindful sometimes means looking at activities with a different perspective.

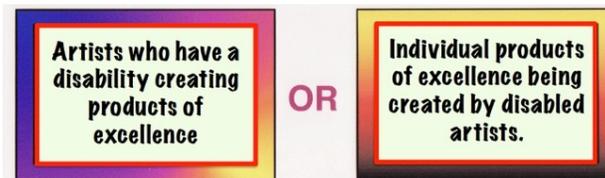


What becomes the primary activity and what becomes an accompanying activity? Is going for a walk the primary activity and using that time for reflection or is reflection the major activity being addressed while going out for a walk?



When I'm driving to work and listening to my favorite music on Pandora or Spotify, is it primarily a time to catch up on my Dylan music or is it primarily just getting to work and the music is a by-product of secondary importance?

Here are a few more pairings that intrigue me when looked at using a different perspective.



## Step 133

### Satisfaction from a Personal Perspective

As a frequent traveler during my consulting days, I was curious about the multitude of ways that different hotels requested feedback from guests. Was there a difference in the manner in which they solicited such information? A sample from one item on most surveys included the check-in service and this visual contains a summary of eight different hotels. The phrasing of the question/statement varies as well as the way of responding. When responding to these surveys, the guest is complying with the hotel management's concept of a quality stay. I wondered how differently a survey might look from the customer's perspective. That is, how do "I", as the customer, value specific services such as the fluffiness of the towels, feather-free pillows, an exhaust fan in the bathroom, a sufficient flow of water from the shower head, etc.

Front Desk Accuracy of reservation	Exceeds Expectations	Meets Expectations	Does Not Meet Expectations
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Front Desk Personnel	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Employee's Name _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

The Front Desk Personnel:	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor
	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Check-in/Check-out	Exceeded My Expectations	Met My Expectations	Below My Expectations
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Were you given a warm and sincere greeting when you arrived?	YES	NO
--	-----	----

How did you feel about the way your check-in was handled?	Dazzled	Pleased	Unhappy	Angry
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Friendliness of Service:	Great	Good	Fair	Poor
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

How would you rate the following?	Excellent	Good	Average	Fair	Poor
Check-in speed	<input type="checkbox"/>				

## Step 133

### Satisfaction from a Personal Perspective (continued)

I share a sample page from my own sense of hotel satisfaction, which you may view below. I thought a two-part scale was needed. The first scale would be my sense of satisfaction from -5 up to +5. The second scale would be the importance that item had on my current visit to the hotel. For example, I may have noted an iron in the room, but had no immediate need to use it. There may be a swimming pool, but I might not be in the mood to use it for the visit under consideration.

#### Ernie's Rating for Hotel Satisfaction

Hotel X				3/11/2025			
Hotel Being Assessed				Today's Date			
Primary Considerations				Rating X Importance = Score			
<b>Air Quality</b>				<b>Air Quality</b>			
Air conditioning/heater features	+ 5	x	5	=			
Nonsmoking room	+ 4	x	5	=			
Smell of the air in room	- 1	x	5	=			
Window opens for outside air	+ 0	x	0	=			
_____	_____	x	_____	=			
_____	_____	x	_____	=			
_____	_____	x	_____	=			
				<b>Sub Score</b>			
				<b>+ 40</b>			
<b>Appliances</b>				<b>Appliances</b>			
Coffee Maker	+ 0	x	0	=			
Hair dryer	+ 0	x	0	=			
Iron and ironing board	+ 0	x	0	=			
Microwave	+ 0	x	0	=			
Radio/clock alarm by bed	+ 4	x	4	=			
Refrigerator	+ 4	x	4	=			
_____	_____	x	_____	=			
_____	_____	x	_____	=			
_____	_____	x	_____	=			
				<b>Sub Score</b>			
				<b>+ 32</b>			
<b>Bathroom</b>				<b>Bathroom</b>			
Exhaust fan	+ 4	x	5	=			
Faucet handles	+ 4	x	4	=			
Flow of water in shower	+ 1	x	5	=			
Heat	+ 0	x	0	=			
Lighting	+ 2	x	3	=			
Method of hanging wet clothes	+ 0	x	0	=			
Mirrors	+ 4	x	5	=			
Shower head fixture	+ 1	x	5	=			
Support bars in tub	+ 0	x	0	=			
Telephone availability	+ 3	x	4	=			
Towel fluffiness	+ 5	x	5	=			
Tub drainage	+ 5	x	5	=			
Other:							
Sink drainage	- 1	x	3	=			
_____	_____	x	_____	=			
_____	_____	x	_____	=			
_____	_____	x	_____	=			
				<b>Sub Score</b>			
				<b>+ 131</b>			

Rating: (- 5) - (+ 5)  
Importance: 1 - 5

## Step 133

### Satisfaction from a Personal Perspective

(continued)

I completed this survey page from a recent stay at a hotel during a trip to visit relatives. This was a short stay and the rating for appliances was minimal because I didn't need access to anything but the refrigerator. However, the fluffy towels and exhaust fan in the bathroom were top picks, which contributed to a hefty rating for this category. The air quality could have received a higher rating if not for the pungent smell of lemon in the room to mask odors from a previous guest, perhaps.

## Step 134

### The Data Are Neutral

Here is an assignment I provide to students in one of my courses:

*During one team/group activity, I distribute some sample SCRABBLE scores with the statement: The Data are Neutral. It's what you do with the data that is determined by your values. Your team will be identified as Harry's advocate or Sally's advocate in determining who is the better SCRABBLE player. Interpret the data to emphasize that either Harry or Sally is the better player. Good luck!*

Try your hand at interpreting the data as stated in the previous paragraph. Then, look on the following page for some responses from teams who have done the same.

Sally – Harry	Sally – Harry
373 – 313	302 – 350
249 – 311	229 – 311
290 – 322	312 – 277
280 – 322	303 – 278
255 – 306	293 – 293
300 – 356	264 – 295
299 – 301	278 – 341
243 – 325	323 – 286
378 – 323	256 – 321
292 – 291	285 – 348
297 – 321	208 – 356
260 – 259	344 – 275
444 – 201	302 – 340

## Step 134

### The Data Are Neutral

(continued)

**Group 1:** Harry has 16 wins, 11 losses and 1 tie. Any way you cut it, he is the better SCRABBLE player since he has won the most games. Almost all sporting events are decided in this manner. It's not by how much you win, but it's that you win.

A graph of the first nine games clearly shows not only that Harry wins more games, but that he is more consistent in the range of scores. Sally, on the other hand, is all over the graph and her scores are quite inconsistent.

**Group 2:** Sally has the three highest scores among the 28 games played. Harry didn't even come close to those scores! In SCRABBLE, it's what you do with the tiles you are dealt. The more points you score, the more creative you are with your play. Sally is clearly the better SCRABBLE player since she demonstrated the ability to make the three highest scores overall.

We believe that Sally let Harry win to soothe his ego. She just wanted his company and didn't care who won or lost. So, occasionally she would let Harry win to keep him coming back to play some more. That was very kind and considerate of her, especially since she is the better SCRABBLE player.

## Step 135

### Wisdom Interspersed in the Syllabus

During one semester, I included the following verses among the requirements in the syllabus for a course I was teaching.

*We are more alike than different from one another  
When we see the gifts we bring to each other.  
Students can shine in several different places  
As we look into the eyes of everyone's faces.*

*IEPs, PPTs and CEC  
Acronyms abound from A to Z.  
LD, CP and ID  
Behind these initials are students to see:  
John, Ernie, Mary and Sue  
Are the names to use for me and you.*

*Some students will yell and hit and scream.  
What can all this behavior mean?  
What do we do at the end of our rope?  
What will they do if we give up hope?  
What are our attitudes, beliefs, and fears  
As the midpoint of the semester nears?  
What have you learned? What do you know?  
How do you think? How did you grow?  
You will be a teacher based on the courses you will pass.  
You will be a leader at the head of your very own class.*

*Marc Gold once advised us to "Try Another Way"  
When a student gets stuck once again on this day.  
What do we do next? What new strategy do we try?  
How do we respond when the student asks why?  
Add more information to the natural cue  
To help the student know next what to do.*

*Quality of life is a standard for us all.  
Interdependence is part of that call  
To live among neighbors in our community  
To promote respect, harmony and dignity.  
The teacher's role in each student's plan  
Is to help each one say, "Yes I CAN!"*

## **Step 135**

### **Wisdom Interspersed in the Syllabus**

(continued)

*Every class brings new challenges my way  
From students who test all the rules that I say;  
Demanding and caring can go hand in hand  
As I make my lessons exciting - not bland.  
Everyone grows - both teacher and child  
Like a crisis - - - severe that turns to mild.*

*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.*

## Step 136

### Random Thoughts from Dylan's Lyrics

I selected a sample of my favorite lyrics from Bob Dylan and commented on why those verses resonate with my values both in my work and personal life.

#### 01. From One Too Many Mornings

*You're right from your side,  
I'm right from mine.*

It really depends on what side of the table you are on. You will look differently on the needs of the student depending on what position you are advocating from.

I also like the wisdom from Deborah Tannen from her book, *The Argument Culture*, in which she states that the answers to life's challenges rarely lie at the polar extremes. It's not either/or, but rather, both/and. The challenge must be approached from many sides similar to viewing a crystal with its multi-faceted sides.

Life is not a debate. I do not always have to be right. I can always learn to appreciate a challenge by perceiving it from the point of view of someone whose opinion differs from mine.

#### 02. From Positively 4<sup>th</sup> Street

*I wish that for just one time  
You could stand inside my shoes  
And just for that one moment  
I could be you.*

Mark O'Brien aptly states, "*We're all going to be handicapped . . . unless you die first!*" How would I want to be supported? What does respect and dignity have to do with assisting others? Do I imagine what life must be like for many of the individuals whose lives I have entered by virtue of their status as students in my class?

I want others to focus on my strengths, gifts, competencies and accomplishments and not on my weaknesses, setbacks, errors, and missed opportunities.

## Step 136

### Random Thoughts from Dylan's Lyrics (continued)

#### 03. From Love Minus Zero/No Limit

*In the dime stores and bus stations,  
People talk of situations,  
Read books, repeat quotations,  
Draw conclusions on the wall.  
Some speak of the future,  
My love she speaks softly,  
She knows there's no success like failure  
And that failure's no success at all.*

This is, perhaps, one of my favorite Dylan quotes. It relates to the issue of paradox and the seeming contradictions in a statement. To work with students, we need to help them experience “failure” as a natural progression along the path to success. But, merely failing is no success at all unless it leads you in the direction of success. We are unsuccessful far more frequently than we are successful when we embark on new endeavors. Many adults forget what it feels like to learn new skills or concepts. Children experience this every day, but adults tend to develop comfortable routines and patterns of living that rely on current skills and competencies rather than an exploration in new territories.

#### 04. From Don't Think Twice, It's All Right

*Don't Think Twice,  
It's All Right.*

I used this song to write a parody about the high-stakes assessments experienced by students in the public schools. My new title was: *Please Think Twice, It's Not Right*. One of the verses goes:

*There's got to be some other way of knowing  
The progress that they made.*

*There's got to be another way of showing  
How they're doing in their grade.*

*My big ideas don't fit in the bubbles on the sheet.  
When I finish the test, I feel I'm in defeat*

*These high stakes tests just make us want to cheat.  
So, please think twice. It's not right.*

## Step 136

### Random Thoughts from Dylan's Lyrics (continued)

#### 05. From A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall

*But I'll know my song well  
Before I start singin.*

Prepare – Prepare – Prepare! Much of the learning occurs in the preparation, which must also include debriefing/self-reflection of previous attempts to teach or learn a skill/concept/idea. There are too many people spouting off about the latest “fad” or “state-of-the-art” something who know nothing about which they speak. They are hired to sell a product and make a living. I need to be careful about what I relate from my “position of authority” or from the position of the teacher of the course. I am a searcher for the truths that lie at the heart of teaching and, every time I teach a topic, I peel back one more layer to add additional clarity to that which I seek to know.

#### 06. From Talkin' World War III Blues

*“I'll let you be in my dream if I can be in yours.”  
I said that.*

This relates directly to person-centered planning in which the vision of the future (the dreams of the person) is center stage for what follows. My role is to translate a path toward those dreams into educational language that fits in the IEP. The pathway toward one or more of the dreams may actually contribute to more quality in a student's life than the actual acquisition of the dream.

#### 07. From My Back Pages

*A self-ordained professor's tongue  
Too serious to fool  
Spouted out that liberty  
Is just equality in school.  
“Equality,” I spoke the word  
As if a wedding vow.  
Ah, but I was so much older then,  
I'm younger than that now.*

Being younger in mind and spirit, to me, means that I try to maintain a fresh take on things. I try not to think that I know the “ANSWER” but that I am experiencing many little “answers”. When I was older then, I was the expert and things were much simpler – I was right! But, as I age, I get younger in the feeling that there is still so much more to know - - - especially from the “professor's tongue.”

## Step 136

### Random Thoughts from Dylan's Lyrics (continued)

#### 08. From Sweetheart Like You

*Steal a little they throw you in jail.  
Steal a lot and they make you king.*

This quote reminds me of the double standard applied to the wealthy and poor. If you are rich you can steal from people in white-collar crime or in promoting a product to your own benefit and not to the benefit of those people for whom the product is targeted. I would put standardized tests in this category. Companies are stealing from the poor whose lives are judged by their inability to meet established standards. But as soon as a person designated as poor is caught in the act, they are severely chastised and judged; i.e., the looting in New Orleans that occurred during a recent hurricane.

#### 09. From Jacket notes from Another Side of Bob Dylan album

*... and I say that every question,  
if it's a truthful question,  
can be answered by askin' it.*

Asking good questions is better than seeking one good answer. This truth is apparent in the Quaker style clearness committee approach to approaching challenges. Members of a gathered group of caring peers ask clarifying questions of a person to help that person sort out the possible ways to respond to that challenge. No one offers a "correct" approach but, by asking insightful questions, provides the feedback necessary for the person to know what is right to do next.

Also, I have given credit to student for developing a good question from a chapter that might be a good quiz question. They receive the equivalent score on the quiz by developing the question as they might from a different chapter when they respond to questions I developed.

## Step 137

### Accuracy of Assessment Tools

During one of my in-service training sessions, I was discussing the assessment process relative to a concept like creativity. I brought up the example of a presentation in which I asked two people to leave the room and upon returning, I gave them an assignment. I told them that the rest of the group was going to rate their degree of creativity on their ability to make a table tent-based name plaque so that everyone could remember who they were.

One person eyed the table on which the vegetables and crackers had been placed for snacks. He went over to the table and removed some celery and carrots, went back to his desk, and spelled out his name in vegetables: BOB. As he was introducing himself, he ate his vegetables and said that he wanted others to remember that he is very ecologically minded and used the vegetables in a way that he developed a table tent and had his snack at the same time.

The second person took some markers and wrote her name using a variety of colors and drawing some background figures. The audience of judges for her creativity did not give her as high a rating as they gave to Bob. One of the judges responded that she could have thought of that and she was using criteria that in order to gain a high score, the person had to come up with a way of making a table tent that the observer could not have thought of on her own. I then brought into the discussion the fact that perhaps I had not found the right vehicle for one of the individuals to demonstrate her creativity because I restricted the assessment to making table tents. For Bob, this appeared like a good match. Most of the observers agreed that he was highly creative. But even Bob did not know the criteria that was going to be used.

The assessment did not prove that one of the participants was not creative and the other one was. Rather, the assessment showed that on this particular activity, when neither participant knew the criteria for being highly creative, one person scored high and the other person scored low. I think this phenomenon happens in schools quite a bit. Students and parents are often not informed of the criteria for success being used by school personnel for their son/daughter to achieve success in certain skill areas. And, when the school makes a decision about someone's achievement, I am not sure they are also identifying the correct assessments for the student to best demonstrate his/her competence.

## Step 138

### The Paradox of Student Feedback

After I have completed a semester of teaching, I often eagerly look forward to reading the student feedback about what they thought about the course. I have learned, over the years, that my predictions about how I am perceived by students is not always on target. Under the cloak of anonymity, some students express their frustrations in a manner that takes me off guard. Here are two such contrasting points of view from the same course followed by my comments to each one. As an aside, I share everyone's feedback with students after the final grades are in, including their feedback and my comments.

Student C: This is the last class that I need to take for my school counseling certification. The statement "Save the Best for Last" certainly holds true! I can honestly say that this was the BEST class that I took during my academic career, and Dr. Pancsofar was the BEST instructor! CCSU is lucky to have him. Thank you!

My Remarks: Thanks. I needed this feedback! As you will note later, your enthusiasm and kind comments are not equally shared by some of your peers. I don't always know what agenda students have when they take this course. It appears you were open to new ideas, receptive to strategies that enhance inclusion for students of all abilities, and will take this attitude and set of values with you in your future work. I am honored to have been the instructor in this final leg of your journey.

Compared with the following feedback - - -

Student M: You are a very nice gentleman. I firmly disagree with your "methods" on account of effectiveness and palatability. You never once appropriately lectured on the material. At this level, what and how much one learns is, in fact, the most important thing. There is a practical and aesthetic overload that takes place amidst your barrage of random streams of consciousness. Just because you enjoy all of your thoughts and visual aids does not mean that you shouldn't tactfully censor yourself for the sake of effectiveness (aesthetic overload and staying on task in lecturing the material). Again, this is not meant to be personal.

My Remarks: Interesting comments - - - I tend to present in the style that I want students in the class to use in their respective disciplines. I don't "lecture" in the sense of commenting on what students have read from the text or from the resources I post on Blackboard. I tend to use these resources as foundation information on which I build with some ideas/concepts presented for each session. I must accept that not all students will adapt or welcome my style of presentation. Just

## Step 138

### The Paradox of Student Feedback

(continued)

My Remarks: as I could not tolerate or accept attending a presentation by a professor who lectures about what I have already read (If I did, indeed, read the requested content). I must acknowledge that some students find my “random streams of consciousness” to be unappealing. I am nearing the end of my teaching career and I have developed a style/method of instruction that best resonates with my personality and values. Over the years, the majority of students have reinforced this approach to such an extent that I may ignore the needs of more traditional learners. I am sorry not to have been the instructor you needed for this course. I hope your feedback and my reaction will alert future students that they may have options in switching sections of this course to one that may fit their learning style in a more congruent manner.

As I often do, I then composed the poem below and sent it to all students in the course from which this feedback from students C and M originated.

It's necessary to express myself  
To students who have just passed by.  
Some have praise – Some have disdain  
As I read their comments and sigh.  
Some want answers to unknown questions.  
Some want a promise of success.  
Some need a set of rules  
To help them to teach to the test.  
Some of you get it.  
Some of you don't.  
Some of you will.  
Some of you won't.  
We move on,  
Student and teacher,  
To future challenges,  
Finders and seekers.

## **Step 138**

### **The Paradox of Student Feedback**

(continued)

I had some resources and I had some ideas  
To help you in your future career,  
But you have to be the one to figure out  
How to get from there to here.

To be a teacher in these current times  
Requires some uncertainty on your part;  
Creativity, persistence and a love of your craft.  
Students are more than some dots on a chart.

I offered you some glimpses of the truth  
That you will find out in due time,  
As you try to make some sense  
Of my verses to this rhyme.

I glanced at feedback from students of my past:  
Some positive and some not so kind.  
I wish all of you could know what I see  
In the future of your students' hearts and minds.

## **Step 139**

### **Community Connections Mean ...**

As a square for a quilt designed by Communitas, Inc., I contributed this brief poem.

... different things to different people  
and never the same for everyone;  
the sharing of gifts, and skills and talents  
for the benefit of all under the sun.

... looking for the community in all  
while finding the uniqueness in Mary, Bill, Sharon and Paul.

... opportunities to live life to its fullest  
with supports from people who care  
about our dreams, hopes and visions  
of a future life we together can share.

## Step 140

### Tangled Up in Bellevue

Over thirty years ago, I found myself a patient in the emergency room of Bellevue Hospital in New York City. I was in NYC as a presenter for one of the school districts and, after a bout of dizziness upon leaving the train, found myself in a surreal set of circumstances that, upon reflection, reminded me of the different scenes from Dylan's *Tangled Up in Blue*. I wrote a rather lengthy essay with details of the events that seemed to change in their sequencing as I relived the ordeal. More recently, I composed a shorter form of my essay to the tune of *Tangled Up in Blue* to become the current *Tangled Up in Bellevue*.

The train pulled in and I got off  
Started my usual routine;  
Stopped on the stairs to make my escape  
Grew faint from my morning caffeine.

The ambulance sped on ahead  
With me in the back for a ride.  
I didn't know what would become of me.  
I guess it wasn't up to be to decide.

I had a job 12 blocks away  
From the hospital that I did enter.  
They expected me at 9:00;  
I was to be the main presenter . . .

Near Second Avenue  
But instead . . . I'm Tangled up in **Bellevue**.

Someone came over to the side of my bed,  
She said her name was Mrs. Paul.  
She asked who I was and where I was from  
And in her book my name she did scrawl.

Some were homeless and some were thieves.  
Some were just presenters by day.  
Some recovered in detox from drugs.  
Some had a lot to say.

I entertained myself as best I could;  
Peered through the bars of my bed.  
I don't belong here at all  
Wish I could leave now but instead . . .

I felt everyone knew - - -  
I was Tangled up in **Bellevue**.

## Step 140

### Tangled Up in Bellevue

(continued)

People came and people went.  
Misery could be heard in each voice.  
No one was here voluntarily.  
No one was here by choice.

What is normal is foreign to me.  
It seems like I'm in a dream.  
The plot doesn't seem to make any sense;  
I didn't get any ice cream.

A community of strangers stares back at me.  
What will be in store?  
When will I leave – Where will I go?  
I don't know if it's 1:00 or it's 4:00 ...

I wish that I knew,  
but I'm Tangled Up in Bellevue.

Twenty-one years have come and gone.  
I've moved on to other places.  
But I know I will never soon forget  
All the emergency room faces.

I didn't know if the sun came out  
Or whether it rained all day.  
All I know about that fact is  
Whether I would leave or stay.

The people there have gone back to their lives  
And I have done so too,  
But I realize that for all these years  
I still haven't got a clue

But I've paid my dues . . .  
Tangled up in Bellevue .

## Step 141

### Traits of a Creative Person

One of the elective courses I teach has a focus on helping teachers to be more creative in their lesson planning and decision making as they work toward providing optimum supports and services for ALL students in their classroom. As part of the conversation, I ask them to think of someone – living or dead – whom they regard as a highly creative person. Then, list four to five characteristics of that person that influences your decision to include them under the heading of a highly creative person.

#### Identifying the Traits of a Creative Person

\_\_\_\_\_   
 Your Creative Person's Name

#### Traits that This Person Has That Influences Your Nomination of This Person as a Creative Individual

<input type="checkbox"/>	_____ _____

#### Traits Identified by Your Peers

● _____	● _____	● _____
● _____	● _____	● _____
● _____	● _____	● _____
● _____	● _____	● _____
● _____	● _____	● _____
● _____	● _____	● _____

The purpose of this activity is to document that we each have quite different criteria for who we identify as being highly creative. For instance, my example, as their instructor, is included on the following page .

## Step 141

### Traits of a Creative Person (continued)

#### Identifying the Traits of a Creative Person

Bob Dylan

Your Creative Person's Name

#### Traits that This Person Has That Influences Your Nomination of This Person as a Creative Individual

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<u>Reinvents himself – not concerned with public perceptions</u>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<u>Disconnect between words/music at times – not trying to decipher meaning of every set of lyrics</u>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<u>Never seems to play the same song the same way in public performances</u>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<u>Inspires me to write lyrics to accompany some of his melodies</u>

#### Traits Identified by Your Peers

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Many setbacks – failures before success	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Serendipity	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unique way of looking at things
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Humor	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Many forms	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Experimental
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Whimsical	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Dedicated	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Empowered
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> “Flow”	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Risk Taker	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No fear of rejection
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Expressive	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Addictive	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not fearful of failure
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> _____	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> _____	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> _____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> _____	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> _____	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> _____

## Step 142

### Quotes of Note

Many teachers love to collect quotes that help to summarize their values and opinions. Here is a sampling of the quotes I like to share with my students.

- *Students should certainly think about what they read, but they should read something worth thinking about.* (p. 20) as quoted in The Death and Life of the Great American School System by Diane Ravitch
- *The essence of America lies not in the headlined heroes ... but in the everyday folks who live and die unknown, yet leave their dreams as legacies.* Alan Lomax as quoted in the preface of the book Listening is an Act of Love: A Celebration of American Life from the StoryCorps Project, 2007
- *Experts, he would say, are expected to know things. That's a big responsibility. About all I know is that things change, and in the meantime, it's fun to have opinions about them.* (p. 2) Home Water: Near and Far by William Tapply
- *If too few opportunities for curiosity are available, if too many obstacles are put in the way of risk and exploration, the motivation to engage in creative behavior is easily distinguished.* Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi
- *A local reporter approached me and asked me what makes a good teacher. I told him that passion, professionalism and perseverance are three main traits a good teacher must display in the classroom – and they are.*  
*The really good teachers are able to read a child's story and recognize the remarkable opportunity to help author that story. ... Really good teachers know they have the ability to make a child happy or sad, to make a child feel confident or unsure, to make a child feel wanted or discarded. And students know when we care.* Anthony Mullen – 2009 National Teacher of the Year – Greenwich, CT
- *There is as much difference between us and ourselves as between us and others.* Michel de Montaigne
- *I admit my style is unorthodox - - - but I feel students can look up any facts they want at any time they want outside of this course. However, I feel one of the purposes of this course is that I can influence how they use those facts.* Attributed to a wise instructor of SPED 501
- *When I first began this course, I felt a bit overwhelmed with concern that providing special services would take up too much classroom time, or involve tons of preparation to be able to assist all my students. Now, I realize that many of the adaptations can benefit all the students in the classroom so the time it takes is well invested to help all my students.* From a student in my course, Joe V.

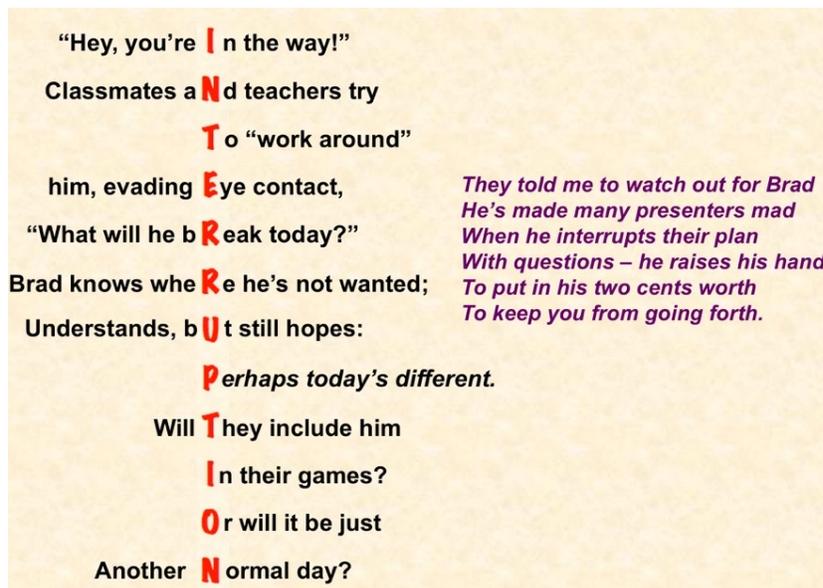
## Step 143

### Brad: INTERRUPTION or PARTICIPANT

I had been requested to deliver a two-hour presentation to a group of advocates and self-advocates in Farmington, CT. On the prior evening, I was invited to attend a dinner with the participants and become acquainted with some of the individuals who would be part of my audience the following morning. One organizer approached me to warn me about Brad. “*He will disrupt your presentation and dominate the conversation!*” I asked to meet Brad and considered what supports he would need not to negatively impact my talk.

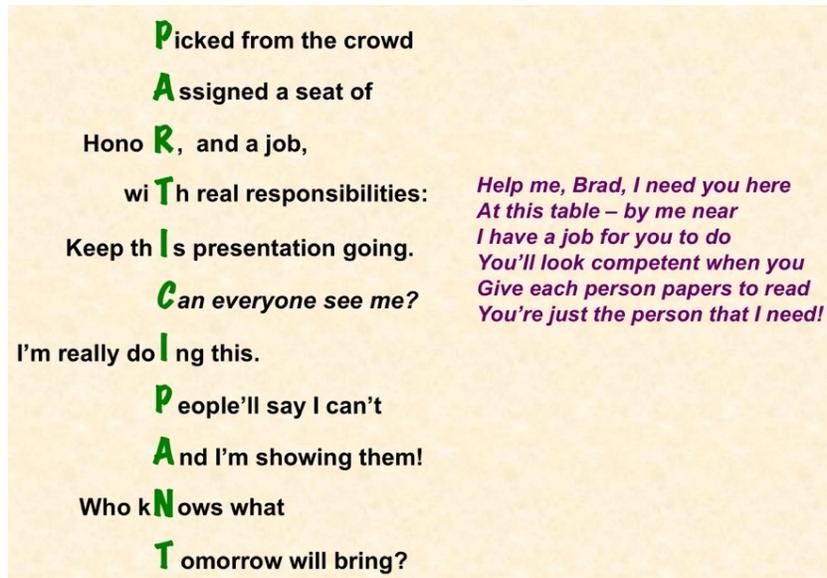
The next morning, I called Brad over just prior to my presentation. “*Could you please assist me this morning?*”, I asked. He looked eager and responded that he would, indeed, help me. I requested that he sit off to my side at the nearest table with a large pile of materials that I wanted distributed at various times throughout my talk. My cue was to nod over to him and he would distribute the top pile of materials. Then, he would go back to the table and await my next nod, which typically occurred about 10-15 minutes later. Brad was an exceptional assistant and, if anything, contributed in a positive way to the success of my presentation. I feel this is an example of providing supports that address the concerns of others and not allow a self-fulfilling prophecy to occur: *Brad will disrupt your talk, be prepared!* Brad taught me about trying another way!

When I told this story in class, Louisa D. developed an acrostic to which I added some verses.



## Step 143

### Brad: INTERRUPTION or PARTICIPANT (continued)



## Step 144

### PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT

During a panel presentation about parental engagement with schools, I summarized the conversation among panel members using an acrostic organizer. This summary was mailed to the event organizers as part of a thank you for enlightening our students with the activities of the parent engagement specialists hired by the schools.

Em Powerment	Comm ent Cards
It's A Matter of Trust	O N ly Positive Page
The Major ity Come From the Minority	G eocaching
Leave th E Jargon Out!	Boot Sw A p
Thi N k Creatively!	Droppin G Names
Paren T Camps	Self - D E termination
School Clim A te	M ental Health Challenges
L iteracy Parties	"B E With - Be Available
	Abse N t Role Models
	Beyond T he Bake Sale

## Step 145

### Palace Theater Review

A review of an evening listening to Bob Dylan on November 18, 2019.

My 30<sup>th</sup> concert – I'm older in age  
But 10 years younger than the sage  
Whose words reminded me of a quite familiar song  
As the music ripples over the concert throng.

*If my words did glow with the gold of sunshine  
And my tunes were played on the harp unstrung  
Would you hear my voice come through the music?  
Would you hold it near as it were your own?*

*Ripple – Grateful Dead*

Great similarities from two nights ago  
But a different seat in a mezzanine row  
Where I could see all the band in one view  
Within this majestic, fully restored venue.

Most pronounced for me to comment upon  
Was a silhouetted figure who for every song  
Walked to and fro three rows in front of me  
Like Alfred Hitchcock who came back from the dead  
Just to see Bob before going to bed.

The seating in the balcony left little leg room  
And two people in front of me I presume  
Didn't have anywhere better to laugh and talk.  
Couldn't they have stayed in the bar down the block?

On with the show – one of the highs of the night  
Was the bow work on bass by Tony – what a delight  
In the joy he brings to this tightly knit group  
Whose talents seem to know just when to swoop  
In among Bob's lyrics – rephrased and refreshed  
To hear such magic, we are truly blessed.

## Step 145

### Palace Theater Review

(continued)

Donnie's versatility and Charlie's virtuosity  
[Don't miss him as Townes Van Zandt in all his grandiosity]  
Receli's superlative sticks once more  
When he lets loose on *Thunder*, you can hear it roar!  
Bob on the piano for *Don't Think Twice ...*  
Was the true highlight  
Of an evening of song that brought much delight.

If I had the chance to meet with this genius of a person  
Words would not express the impact his words have on  
Me, so a nod would have to do – and perhaps a simple nod back  
To acknowledge that he knows the way he can impact  
And inspire each of us to keep on living our dreams  
And be creative in our own ways, he seems  
To touch a chord that resonates with our inner core.  
I hope to be in his presence – a few concerts more.

## Step 146

### A New Year's Toast

Here's to the men  
Who meet now and again  
To raise up their glasses & toast.  
It's that time of year  
To bring on good cheer  
Just when we need it most.

To eat and to drink;  
To talk and to think  
Among most pleasant a friend.  
From hither and yon;  
From darkness toward dawn  
From now right up till the end.

We meet and greet;  
We eat our treats  
And look forward to the time  
As each of us reach  
For the Canadian screech  
As we look for the salt and the lime.

We do our part;  
We end and we start  
Each semester with each course.  
In each class  
With both lad and lass,  
To find wisdom at its source.

Here's to the men  
Who meet now and again  
To raise up their glasses & toast.  
It's that time of year  
To bring on good cheer  
Just when we need it most.

I wrote a toast to the New Year to share with some of my colleagues upon the occasion of our once-in-awhile card games. Verses are added each year as it seems fit.

## Step 147

### Welcome to the Best Course ...

I wrote the following letter to share with students at the beginning of a course that they were about to begin.

Good afternoon and welcome to the best course you will have attended so far along your career path to professional certification. I can say this with some confidence to all of you who are participating in your first course along your career path. And, I have received feedback from students who have been in previous sections of this course who have stated that it was the best course in which they have been a student so far in their graduate studies.

What will make this proclamation come true? I certainly have something to do with it by how I structure this course. You have something to do with it by the energy, commitment and creativity you bring with you throughout each session of the course. The content has something to do with it as we explore many diverse areas of new learning. The physical space in which we meet has something to do with it as well.

What if we magically transport ourselves to the final session of the course and I ask the question: Was this the best course in which you have been a student? Perhaps 5-6 of you will nod in agreement. Others, maybe 10-15, might say it ranks up in the top 5 or so. Others might indicate that it was average in comparison to the other terrific courses they have been in. That's OK. Often time, the results of my efforts fall short of my expectations. But what would happen if I lowered those expectations?

Right now, my attitude is that it will be the best course you will have taken so far. To me, it will have been the best course I have ever taught - - - because it is the most recent one I have taught. There will never be, nor has there ever been, the same mixture of talents, gifts, competencies and knowledge that exist in this course. I am responsible for bringing out those talents, gifts, competencies and knowledge - - - with your cooperation.

A few years ago I once read about a school in Mansfield, CT, the entrance of which had a sign over the archway: *Through These Doors Pass the Best Students in the World!* Is this true? Can we, as teachers, conduct ourselves as if it is true? Someone once described his wife as the most beautiful person in the world. Is it true? Is it factual? Or, does he lead his life within the context of that truth, as he perceives it to be.

## **Step 147**

### **Welcome to the Best Course ...**

(continued)

What I am getting at is “attitude.” This course has the potential to be “fantastic”, “terrific”, “wonderful” and “magnificent” only if we all continually remind ourselves that this goal is within reach. I am going to share with you the best of my resources. I am going to facilitate activities that request that you connect content that I deliver back to your own personal experiences, families and out-of-class situations. You will not need to memorize anything but where the restrooms are.

It is a privilege and honor to be your facilitator of learning. You help pay my bills. You help me engage in a career that I love. Anything less than my full commitment and attention while teaching this course is unacceptable. I hope you feel the same.

## Step 148

### Shush!

I was attending a Spring Concert in which one of my daughters was involved and it contained singing, a jazz band, and regular band performances. As the music progressed, I noted two women seated in a section behind me. I was in the last row of the first section of seats. Their whispering was quite loud. One woman seated close by me, also in the last row, turned around and in a loud whisper said “SSSHHHhhh!” This feedback worked for about three minutes, then the volume was just as high and annoying as before. About 15 minutes later the woman, who had whispered back for the two people to be quiet, poked her husband and I noticed he got up and went back and talked to the people who were whispering loudly. I couldn’t make out what he said to them, but he walked back to his seat. About five minutes later the whispering was as loud as ever. There are many alternatives for how one could react now. Prior to the band performance, two musicians were about to play a violin duet and just as they started playing the whispering again grew louder. I immediately got up, walked back to the two people and said quietly, “You probably don’t realize how loud you are talking. It is disturbing people.” and I sat down beside one of the women. One of them started whispering to the other and I immediately turned to her and put my finger up to my lips and said, “Please be quiet.” “I’m sorry,” she said. For the remainder of the piece they said nothing and I enjoyed the music. After the two musicians were through, I walked back to my original chair and turned around and said, “Thank you.” A few minutes later I heard some loud whispering, I looked over at the two people, and they immediately got up and left the auditorium and went in the hallway. I didn’t see them again that evening. They probably thought I would come back over and sit next to them again. After the concert, the woman who originally had asked them to quiet down sent her husband over to thank me for helping to maintain a quieter atmosphere during that solo piece. I tried to be respectful - perhaps the two individuals did not realize how loud they were whispering, perhaps one was hard of hearing or they could have just met after a long absence. They had a slight accent and it could be a custom in their native country to talk/whisper while music was playing. It was an interesting sequence of events and a prime example of the use of negative reinforcement. I don’t know if another strategy could have been as effective. Sometimes when we think on the spur of the moment, things turn out okay. I don’t know what I could have tried had this not worked.

## **Step 149**

### **Celebrate – Don't Replicate**

One of the principal statements of natural supports is to celebrate the accomplishments of others but not to try to replicate the way the event unfolded. One example was found in a newspaper account [several years ago] of an experience at a Dunkin' Donuts in Meriden, Connecticut. The article was about a group of individuals who met together to communicate using American Sign Language (ASL). This originated when one person noticed two other customers using sign language and asked to join their conversation. This continued to build until a small group of deaf individuals began to meet weekly. They taught the workers at the restaurant the different signs for sugar, coffee, more, etc. Also, they would buy their refreshments to celebrate birthdays and other celebrations at the Dunkin' Donuts. Students from the local American School for the Deaf would even send interpreters-in-training to the restaurant to practice their observation skills. This article traced the development of how a group of people who used sign language met to discuss the events of the day at a Dunkin' Donuts. It would not be effective to go to our local Dunkin' Donuts and create a similar experience to replicate the Meriden story. Instead, we need to recognize the occasions in our own life from which we can build based on the circumstances presented to us. The organic nature of the experience needs to be studied and celebrated - - - but not replicated from an artificial foundation.

## **Step 150**

### **Was That a Good Question?**

In one activity, I show a picture of the American flag on the screen for about 30 seconds and ask students what type of questions might be appropriate for a fifth grade group of students. I then turn off the slide and ask for their questions. Typically, the questions range from how many stars are there and what do they represent? To what do the stripes refer? What is the proper way to hang a flag? Then, I tell them that I will give them 30 seconds to draw the arrangement of the stars on a piece of paper. Although they know there are 50 stars, they typically do not identify this as one of the potential questions that may be on a quiz. Many students would not be able to answer this question correctly. I use this exercise as a way of letting them know that students are learning information for the first time and may not realize what the teacher thinks are the most important parts of what they are learning. A study guide or general areas of concentration is warranted that focuses the student's attention to the important dimensions of the content.