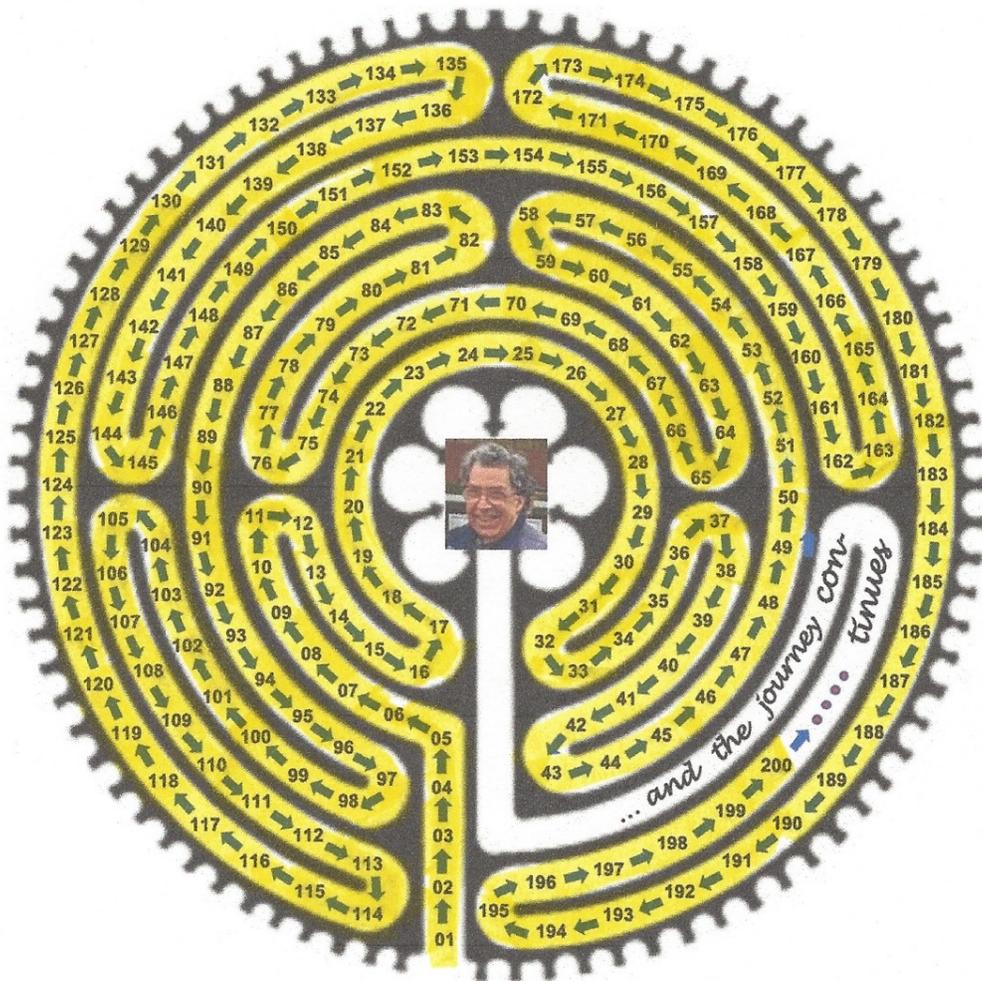


On the Path of the Perfecting Teacher

Walking the Labyrinth
Steps 151 - 200

Current Update: 02/07/26

Ernest L. Pancsofar



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 Seeker **R** of Evidence-Based Practices
Self Re **F** lective
E ngaging
C reative
T houghtful
Employs **I** nclusive Practices
Ki N d
Encoura **G** ing

Cul T urally Responsive
Values Formative **E** Assessment
P A rent Friendly
C ollaborates With Peers
Lives A **H** ealthy Lifestyle
Asks Good Qu **E** stions
Neve **R** Satisfied With What Is

On The Path To Becoming a “Perfecting” Teacher

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On The Path To Becoming a “Perfecting” Teacher

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Step 151

Who Am I?

During a course I taught one summer, I used an acrostic organizer as a way for students to identify something about themselves. During the first meeting, I asked students to write something about themselves that connected to one of the letters and/or numbers. If you were assigned the letter "C", for example, your statement must contain that letter. Then, I took the statements and developed a master set of all statements without anyone's name attached. People then had to guess which statement belonged to one of their peers. This was a fun, lighthearted way to get to know each other. My letter was "S" and I identified as a Red Sox fan.

Welcome to Session 6 – What Do We Share in common?

Loves **C**ruises
New a**U**nt
First yea**R** Spanish teacher
Chee**R**leading coach
Enjoys **R**E laxing at beach
Has been to southern, norther**N** and eastern most points in US
Loves **T**o travel
Teacher of inner city kids
Enj**O**ys Tech.
Long walks in **P**ark
Yoga **I**s essential
I love chocolate **C**hips cookies
Red **S**ox Fan!
Sw **I**ms laps
Training for a triathlo**N**
Knows **S**ign language
Plays adult league soccer
Excited to b**E** working on my Master's at CCSU
Loves **D**ogs!
Class **5** white water rapids rider!
3 more classes until graduation
2 energetic sons (10 & 6)

Step 152

Building Up or Taking Away

As I was commenting on a student's documentation of engagement reflections one morning, I emphasized the motivating effects of seeing one's points increase based on demonstrated competence versus seeing points being taken away from a mythical 100% and noting a decline in earned points. I say mythical 100%, because no one knows 100% of a content area. And, the assessments that are used often don't represent what a student has learned; rather, it measures what the student doesn't know or fails to memorize. This is not what the learning process should be. The teacher's role is to present strategies to struggling learners that facilitate that student's understanding of a concept/area of focus. The student should see the progress toward accomplishing a prescribed objective even though it may take longer to get there. I wish that there were not established standards to which each student must attain but an individualized sense of what goals best fit into a personalized learning plan for each student and one student's sense of success did not have to be another person's final outcome. Remember, when running the marathon, some runners consider it a failure not to be in the Top 10 while other runners consider it a victory just to finish the race!

Step 153

Mr. Rogers Quote

As I add this entry, I am reminded that Tom Hanks is starring as Mister Rogers in a movie that is currently in the theaters: *A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood*. I thought the following quote represents a point of view that fosters inclusive practices in our schools:

As different as we are from one another, as unique as each one of us is, we are much more the same than we are different.

Mr. Rogers

Step 154

Two Points For You

One day during class I bought a lotto ticket for each student and gave a reason why each person would receive two bonus points because they won the lotto because of the unique distribution of their numbers. Four of the samples are included below:

CONGRATULATIONS

ASHLEY: 12 13 19 36 37 42

2 POINTS FOR YOU

You are the only person with a difference of 6 points between the 4th and 6th numbers.

CONGRATULATIONS

JUSTIN: 03 11 12 29 31 34

2 POINTS FOR YOU

You have the only sequence of numbers in the pattern of **odd, odd, even, odd, odd, even**.

CONGRATULATIONS

Marie: 10 12 13 14 20 32

2 POINTS FOR YOU

You have the most numbers in the teens (counting 10 as a teen number).

CONGRATULATIONS

Melissa G: 09 32 33 34 36 41

2 POINTS FOR YOU

You have the largest gap between the first and second number in any of the number sequences.

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

Step 155

Crossword Puzzle Analogy

Analogies are a great way to connect what we know to an activity/concept we are studying. I like working on crossword puzzles and I use this analogy to spark interest in my students to think of their own analogies and connect it to their area of discipline:

Teaching Students with Disabilities is Like Working on Solving a Crossword Puzzle

- **It all looks so impossible at first glance. The problems seem insurmountable.**
- **One connection leads to another.**
- **Progress comes in fits and starts – not evenly.**
- **You need to take a break every so often to recharge your batteries.**
- **The answer may already be in your head – you may just need to look at the question differently.**
- **Sometimes, a problem is too big to handle.**
- **There is nothing wrong in admitting that you're no expert!**
- **It isn't cheating to ask for help.**
- **Sometimes, you can be amazed by all you don't know.**
- **Sometimes, you can be amazed by all you do know.**
- **You often have to go to other resources for help.**
- **One success invites another.**
- **The more puzzles you solve, the better you become at solving the next puzzle.**
- **Sometimes, the most obvious answer is the correct one.**
- **Sometimes, even when the puzzle is not 100% correct, you still did a good job and it can be worth the effort.**

Step 156

What Does Success Mean To You?

Here are some responses to a question I posed to some workshop participants during a session on assessment. I found the diversity of responses to be quite intriguing:

- **Accomplishment**
- **Achievement**
- **Adventure**
- **Challenges**
- **Choices**
- **Comfort**
- **Competence**
- **Completion**
- **Confidence**
- **Constant Change**
- **Cooperativeness**
- **Creativity**
- **Daring**
- **Death**
- **Depth**
- **Excitement**
- **Exercise**
- **Freedom**
- **Friendship**
- **Fun (and more fun)**
- **Goals**
- **Growing**
- **Happiness**
- **Health**
- **Individuality**
- **Laziness**
- **Leadership**
- **Participation**
- **Patience**
- **Power**
- **Pride**
- **Relaxation**
- **Relief**
- **Resources**
- **Solitude**
- **Spirit**
- **Spontaneity**
- **Teamwork**
- **Understanding**
- **Vitality**
- **Work**
-

Step 157

CONTENTNESS

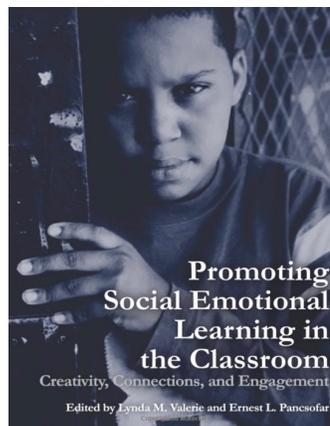
During a retreat for educators on the topic of mindfulness and when asked what our intentions for the day were, I created the acrostic summary below:

C reativity
H O nor
Mi N dfulness
T ensions
E cology
N etworking
T eaching
N ow
B E ing
S ociety
S uccess

Step 158

Promoting Social Emotional Learning in the Classroom Creativity, Connections, and Engagement

Consider this a selfish promotion to alert you to a book of which I was co-editor.



Step 159

TEACHER LOVE FEST

I was on the planning committee to honor teachers during Teacher Appreciation Week. My colleague, Jesse Turner, and I developed this poster for the event:



Take
Tim **E**
And
Come
Gat **H**er
Togeth **E**r
Fo **R**

Ce **L**ebrating
Our
De **V**otion To
Education

And **F**or
Rem **E**mbering
Students are More
Than a **T**est Score

What: A Time to Celebrate Teachers

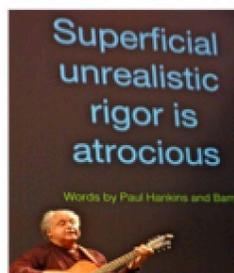
When: May 5th, 2015: 5:00 – 7:00 PM

Where: CCSU – Student Center

Cost: It's FREE, it's FUN, and leave with creative and innovative teaching ideas.

Why: Teacher Appreciation Week Festivities at CCSU

Speaker: Show your teacher love with Barry Lane



**Tribute To
Connecticut
Teachers**

Please RSVP at:
[www.ccsu.edu/
TeacherAppreciationW
eek](http://www.ccsu.edu/TeacherAppreciationWeek)

A good teacher can inspire hope, ignite the imagination, and instill a love of learning. Brad Henry

Step 160

An Ode to Student Teaching

(based on the tune – *For the Longest Time* – by Billy Joel)

I wrote these adapted lyrics for a student teaching celebration and the teacher candidates and I sang the song during the festivities. It was a good time had by all.

I've been here for just about four years.
Seen some laughter – I have seen some tears.
Some students come and go.
Some students help me grow.
Seems like I have been here
for the longest time.

Sitting here some hundred miles away.
Writing words to sing another day.
When celebration
Ends in jubilation,
Seems like I have been here
for the longest time.

Road's been rocky with some twists and turns.
I forgot some things - some others I did learn.
Spent some nights up till the break of dawn.
Felt I was a pawn;
Now I know it's been worth it!

What to do now? What will be in store?
What's behind the other open door?
Beginning or the end?
Is this what I expected when . . . ?
Seems like I have been here
for the longest time.

Step 160

An Ode to Student Teaching (continued)

Got out to a very frightening place.
Patience was my only saving grace.
Put to practice what I knew,
And the other stuff I threw . . .
Seems like I have been here
for the longest time.

Crossed my t's and dotted all my i's.
Ate my Big Mac burger and my Biggie Fries.
Watched no TV - stayed up way past ten.
Wrote my lesson plans –
No sleep since God knows when!

We all came here to learn and then to play.
Some gave up and went another way.
Others stayed right to today.
They are here to speak and say,
Seems like I have been here
for the longest time.

Not too long I'll be the leader of . . .
(Stop that pushing! Billy do not shove!)
... Children who look up to me.
I am "teacher" don't you see!
Seems like I have been here
for the longest time.

Step 161

Steady As She Goes

Our long-time, department secretary, Anne, retired in 2019. A colleague, John Foshay, played guitar and I sang the following lyrics at a department meeting to honor Anne, who really exemplifies the spirit and tone of these lyrics set to a Jack White tune, *Steady as She Goes*.

Anne's *Steady As She Goes*

When students come and they need advice.
Anne is very pleasant and she's always nice.
Steady as she goes. (Anne's steady as she goes.)
Steady as she goes. (Anne's steady as she goes.)
So steady as she goes.

Emergencies happen on the telephone.
Anne responds in a very steady tone.
Steady as she goes.
Steady as she goes.
Anne's steady as she goes.
So steady as she goes.

Chorus:

Well, here we go again.
We've found ourselves a friend that we know well.
But no matter what you do,
We'll always remember you and wish you well.
So steady as you go.

No matter where you go and what you do,
You were always there to help us through.
Steady as you go. (We will remember you!)
Steady as you go. (Don't you forget us, too.)
So steady as you go.

You've been here for twenty years or so.
Many chairs have come and then they go.
Steady as you go. (We will remember you!)
Steady as you go. (Don't you forget us, too.)
So steady as you go.

Chorus:

Step 162

Addition Problem Challenge

As part of an introductory questionnaire during an initial session of a course, I requested students to respond to the following: When is this addition problem correct as solved?

$$\begin{array}{r} 2.1 \\ + 3.2 \\ \hline 6.0 \end{array}$$

The majority of students don't see a rational for such a sum and I receive various responses that include rounding up or down, but that is not the "best" correct response.

In baseball, when a pitcher leaves the game, his innings pitched statistic is written as a full inning followed by a decimal point and the number 1 or 2. These numbers after the decimal point refer to how many outs of the following inning there were when he left the game. If the pitcher left when there was 1 out of the inning his statistic is written as .1, which refers to $1/3$ of an inning pitched. If the pitcher left when there were 2 outs in the inning, his statistic is written as .2, which refers to $2/3$ of an inning pitched.

In the example above, if a pitcher pitches 2 innings and 1 out of the next inning, that would equal $2 \frac{1}{3}$ innings, which would be written as **2.1**.

In another game, if that same pitcher pitches 3 innings and 2 outs of the next inning, it would be $3 \frac{2}{3}$ innings, which would be written as **3.2**.

$$2.1 \text{ (} 2 \frac{1}{3} \text{ innings)} \text{ plus } 3.2 \text{ (} 3 \frac{2}{3} \text{ innings)} = 6.0 \text{ innings.}$$

There may be other explanations as well, but knowledge of baseball as a prerequisite skill would allow a test taker to respond to this problem in a more efficient manner than a test taker without knowledge of baseball or to know that the problem was addressing a statistic common to baseball.

This connects to learning when a teacher probes for understanding of background/prerequisite skills for a new lesson or concept to see if a student has the necessary context to solve a problem under consideration.

Step 163

Dylan Concert #28

- My 28th Dylan Show did not disappoint.
- The highlight of the evening was a new rendition of *Summer Days* featuring Donnie Herron on violin.
- A sedate crowd with a median age of 50 would be my best guess.
- Very tight security as mentioned by Jimmy Fallon on his show a few nights ago from his trip to Port Chester.
- No intermission on this leg of the journey.
- Dylan plays a role as part Rudy Vallée and part Charlie Chaplin during his crooning-to-the-oldies tunes.
- He appears to be having fun!
- I wonder if I will have his energy at 76!
- He also managed his way through a couple of malfunctions: wobbly mic stand and faulty stool.
- Earlier this week I thought of an apt comparison on the Dylan I have come to know: Dr. Who.

Dr. Who has his T.A.R.D.I.S. and Dylan has his Cowboy Band to take us back and forth through time.

Dr. Who regenerates himself so that the 13th version is currently airing on BBC America. Dylan has gone through the regeneration process a variable number of times depending on the observer.

The scenes from his songs (*Desolation Row* & *Highway 61*) could take place in distant galaxies many light years away.

Dr. Who is “The Doctor” – Dylan is ... well, he is “Dylan.”

- In honor of Father’s Day, I thought it would be a great touch if Jakob Dylan had made an appearance. Perhaps he was there somewhere in the audience.
- It was 20 years ago (my 2nd Dylan Show) at this site that Rick Danko came on stage for a wonderful version of *This Wheel’s on Fire*.

Step 164

Quotes from Phyllis Zlotnick

For the final back cover of a memorial tribute honoring the legacy of Phyllis Zlotnick, I used the concentric circles organizer and inserted quotes from interviews by Phyllis that captured her wisdom.



Step 165

Person-Centered Planning

Prior to delivering a keynote address at an annual meeting of a local ARC, I read this poem that I stated could be placed as the front page of a person-centered planning notebook. I enjoyed working with the Independent Support Coordinators associated with this agency as we developed guidelines for the planning process that contained a focus on person centeredness.

You opened this book
To find a new way to look
At the people you support.

Open with care
And then you will dare
To make a difference in each person's life.

Thus begins the person-centered plan.
Thus begins the journey of "I Can"
With a team of people to pave the way.

A person can dream and hope
As we understand the ropes
And remove the obstacles that lie in their path.

Activities, outcomes, questions to ask;
It all appears to be an overwhelming task
And it will take time to do well.

It is said choices are more important than abilities
As we search for new opportunities
In the communities around our lives.

The spirit of support is easy to see
When we listen to each one's dreams that can be
Realized when we provide some help.

Enter on the journey and prepare to stay long.
There will be stories and there will be song.
You are an important part of the process.

Step 166

Reflections On Reaching 50

On my drive to the Great Northwest,
In search of quality of life, I guess,
I wonder what I'm going to say;
I wonder what's on my mind today.

What do I know about someone on your team
When I'm trying to figure out my very own dream?
Do I teach or preach - Do I rant and rave?
Do I have something important to say today?

My life's been a puzzle - I search now and then.
Am I close to the beginning or getting near the end?
What chapter am I on in my own book of life
Of pages gone by of joy and strife?

Do I have things to offer? Are my words worth giving?
What do I learn from the folks who are living
With challenges, obstacles, dead ends and defeats?
Who am I to know how to give some relief?

Well - I'll continue to learn, continue to try
As more of my life passes me by ----

In this case, the Great Northwest refers to Torrington, CT located in the northwest section of Connecticut. I had an opportunity to lead a discussion on ways to listen better to the dreams and aspirations of the individuals we support. I have no answers for this group of dedicated people, but I believe I can facilitate the discussion for mutual benefit for all.

Step 167

CHECKLIST

I explained to students in one course how having a checklist can facilitate the completion of a routine or enhance a student's memory. Here is an acrostic of the word – CHECKLIST – that contains reminders for me prior to leaving for work each day. It works for me if I post it at the bottom of my bulletin board right above my computer. When I introduce this organization strategy, some of my students develop their own CHECKLIST of reminders for their morning departure from their residence to school.

C ocoon sunglasses

H ₂O

E xcedrin

C ell phone

K eys

L eft back pocket - wallet

I glass case

S chedule

T wo USB drives

Step 168

To Sum Up My Experiences

For a summer course I taught during a particularly hot number of weeks, I captured my overall experiences in the following manner and sent a note to my students:

I did not enjoy the heat,
but **I did enjoy** the warmth of the students.

I did not enjoy the time [starting at 7:30 AM],
but **I did enjoy** the timing.

I did not enjoy the classroom,
but **I did enjoy** the room of class.

I did not enjoy the drive to work,
but **I did enjoy** the drive to work.

I did not enjoy the pages of reading,
but **I did enjoy** the reading of pages.

Step 169

Insights Into the Learning Process

Written in 1995, I think each element has withstood the test of time.

- You always learn more ... you don't learn less from either a positive or negative experience.
- Each setback and success places you at a new starting point for your next challenge.
- Commonsense is uncommonly followed.
- Something positive can evolve from most setbacks - not always immediately, but with time.
- Setbacks are stepping stones to success.
- The positivity of your own thinking and mood increases the possibilities of positive outcomes.
- There is seldom one "right" way, but many alternatives and options from which to select one that appears to fit the current set of circumstances.
- Biographies are power tools to learn how others have faced adversity and triumphed. We incorporate other people's best strategies into our own style of decision making.
- Looking at situations as a set of relationships to understand is more important than trying to immediately solve a problem.
- Keeping a journal is a powerful self-improvement activity to help clarify our thinking and advance our learning.

Step 170

My Own Point of View

Each time I teach the introductory course in special education, I have to remind myself that the ideas, values, beliefs and strategies for assisting students/adults with disabilities have evolved over time - - over 25 years in the making. I need to realize that this accumulation of knowledge is based on the unique path and set of experiences that have occurred on my journey toward my current position as instructor in this course. I must realize that students in the course are receiving my information, each from their own set of circumstances. Some of what I say may sound confusing and not easily understood while other information creates an immediate connection and bond with their beliefs and values. I do believe that working with children, with or without disabilities, is an evolving craft in which I continually refine the tools of my trade. Sometimes when I am presenting information, I am bringing to students my most recent reflections about an issue with which I am grappling. I have yet to form a firm belief but, in hearing myself explain my stance, it helps me to clarify my future belief on that topic. Students in my courses are my sounding board. I read how they respond to something I have presented and I see it from a new perspective. They cause me to investigate areas that I would not otherwise explore. The learning is a two-way process.

Step 171

SATISFACTION

After reviewing student feedback/opinion surveys from one semester, I was extremely pleased with the receptivity to my style of how I structured the course. I returned the results of the feedback to students and also shared their feedback with the students at the beginning of the next semester. I developed an acrostic in the form of SATISFACTION to express my appreciation for their kind words.

**When student S appreciate what I do
And give their feedback A ck for me to view,
Words cannot T express my appreciation
For the kind words of their iteration.
The hour S of work I devote to each class
Return F ive fold as the semesters pass.
You A re the future teachers
Who C ontrol many of the features
T hat students need
I n order to succeed.
Remember, Y O u are the only one
Who K N ows what must be done!**

Step 172

Emergency vs. Emergence

Let me provide a brief explanation about the difference between the words "emergence" and "emergency." An emergency is a crisis that occurs unexpectedly and for which you need to react, usually, on the spur of the moment. An emergence is an anticipated occurrence that you can predict will occur and for which you have developed a plan or way to deal with this event. An example of an emergency is when a "normally" functioning child contracts a medical trauma (like Reye's syndrome) and the family learns how to adjust to a new, unexpected situation. An emergence, from the teacher's perspective, is how to respond to parents in an active listening, empathic manner when interacting with them and discussing educational options for their child. Teachers should not be caught off guard that some parents may express anger at why this happened to them. This is a natural pattern of response - - - to be expected. Also, teachers should not be surprised that parents may feel intimidated by all the professionals at a planning meeting. School personnel should convene the meeting in such a way that the parents are welcomed as equal partners whose opinion is extremely valued. There are many other areas to which these two terms can be applied: emergence vs. emergency. An awareness of future possibilities and challenges in the lives of individuals with disabilities will help all members of a planning team be more proactive in developing strategies to respond to these occurrences; i.e., sexual expressions among teenagers, desire for greater independence from older teens, students in a school who may react inappropriately in a taunting way toward peers who function differently.

Step 173

The Hardest Role to Play

Robin Williams was a person for whom I had a great deal of admiration regarding the versatility of his talents. I was surprised when word of his death occurred in 2014. As a result, I thought about many of his roles on TV and film and composed an acrostic summary with a message at the bottom of the visual.



Sometimes, the hardest role
in life to play is ... to be yourself!

Step 174

GRATITUDE

Following an especially productive beginning of the semester development of department and personal goals, I captured the spirit of a morning workshop of members of our department with names connected with the acrostic GRATITUDE followed by my summary of that spirit.

Me **G** an Mackey
E **R** nie Pancsofar
John Fosh **A** y
Alicia **S** **T** ewart
Joan **N** **I** coll-Senft
Na **T** suko Takemae
La **U** ra Jacobson
Sally **D** rew
Ann **E** Dubiel

Many traits appeared in our conversations today
as we talked about our strengths in a quite novel way.

Perhaps, gratitude stands out the most in the big picture
of working together in the many ways to capture

Our personal and departmental goals
as we try to discover just what type of roles

Each of us can play during this academic year
to support each other to kick it up a gear

And use our talents and strengths to share
our expertise and become much more aware

Of how to reach each of our dreams and vision
and help us when we make a decision

About how to spend our days and weeks
on meaningful activities in order to seek

To support each other along the way
with gratitude and friendship each and every day.

Step 175

Becoming a Learning Community

One semester, I added a feature in my syllabus with the heading - Becoming a Learning Community. Each group of students who enter my courses each semester represents a unique blend of experiences, talents, interests and ambitions. During the initial sessions, I strive to develop a community of learners that has never been assembled before under my guidance.

- What structures for in-class discussions make the most sense given what I know about these current students?
- Should in-class discussion groups remain constant or should students experience mixed participation across the semester?
- How much homework should I assign versus provide points for in-class participation based on reading resources outside of class?
- What responsibilities do we all have to make this a meaningful, educational experience?

I don't presuppose answers to these questions until I have met with each class at least twice and then determine what I think will work well based on my previous 20+ years of teaching the content from each course before.

Syllabus Entry

Becoming a Learning Community: I believe that a class such as ours becomes a learning community under the following conditions:

- Diversity of talents and skills among its members;
- Willingness to share our learning with each other;
- Respectful conversations while accepting each of our right to disagree;
- Independent pursuit and discovery of truths with a realization there is no single ANSWER to any challenge;
- Ecological interpretation and understanding of the interplay of critical factors involved in seeking strategies to current challenges;
- Shared responsibility for the enhanced atmosphere that is most conducive to each of us achieving our individual goals and pursuits.

Step 176

Dylan's Influence

The meaning of life is not found
Amid the lyrics or in the sound
Of Dylan's music or in his words
As I find myself drawn towards
Synchronicity.

He has his muse and I have mine
And once in awhile they intertwine
And meet together and share their mysteries
As they expand the boundaries
Of my **creativity.**

Bob has no answers, but he holds up a mirror
So we can see our reflection and perhaps a glimmer
Of what really matters, if truth be told
As we search within our very soul
For **Spirituality.**

On the second day in June
We go to *Desolation Row* or to a tune
Like *Highway 61*;
It's a journey that is never done
And we return time and time again
Just to look around the bend
To view **Simplicity.**

Why the fascination with this man's talent?
What draws me to his music sent
For all of us to listen in time
So we can each compose our rhyme
To express our **Individuality?**

Step 177

Exceptional

I wonder about the term "exceptional" when used in the same context as an intellectual/emotional/physical disability. What word would I wish was in its place? The first five that come to mind are challenged, neuro diverse, inconvenience, disruption, and unexpected. I don't necessarily like those terms upon second look, but the word exceptional doesn't sound right. It's as if there is a bar that you must live up to or you are not living the right way. It conveys an out-of-the-ordinary expectation. Language will always be limiting in what it cannot express. There is power in being in control of what words are currently used to define a "differentness." Perhaps, any attempt to label or classify anyone misses the mark of really who that person is. They are not their disability! We are all on a spectrum depending on who is in charge of identifying traits that matter and our status along the spectrum can change daily. We are dynamic individuals living within a complex network of environmental influences. We are not the same today as we were yesterday. This is why I fear that labels tend to imply a message that someone knows who you are because of a label that has been assigned to you. I sometimes ask my students, "What labels have been used to try to define who you are?" "What are your thoughts about what is implied by others who refer to you by that label?" Food for thought

-
- *When I lecture, under almost all circumstances, I write a new lecture for the occasion. It helps me think. It helps me make demands of myself that I would not otherwise make.*
 - *The great truth that is too often forgotten is that it is in the nature of people to do good to one another.*
 - *Memory can make a thing seem to have been much more than it was.*
 - *It all means more than I can tell you. So you must not judge what I know by what I find words for. Marilynne Robinson*

-
- *It makes me uncomfortable to talk about meanings and things. It's better not to know so much about what things mean. Because the meaning, it's a very personal thing, and the meaning for me is different than the meaning for somebody else. David Lynch*

Step 178

Introduction to a New Learning Community

Below are notes that I wrote for an incoming group of students:

This may not be the best course at CCSU that you have ever taken, but it will be the best course at CCSU that I have ever taught. Why can I say that? Because the last class I taught was the best course I ever taught at CCSU and I still learned some ways to make my instruction even better. Each new, unique community of learners encourages me to present what I know in a slightly different way. About 50% of what I say, I have said before. But, I listen for a different response from those who are hearing it for the first time. Am I presenting an idea or concept in a way that most, if not all, the students grasp its purpose within the general scope of the course? Special Education has an infinite amount of content to cover and I still only know a little about a lot and a lot about a little of this massive amount of information. You are taking this course in a condensed format during the summer when it is probably even more difficult to learn a great deal about a lot of information. I want this course to be one in which you can connect what you already know with the information in special education. This constructivist method of learning has been the most successful in the previous sections I have taught. An even better word than "taught" would be "facilitated." I will facilitate the advancement of your attitudes and skills toward including students of greater diversity in your classroom when you become teachers or other professionals working in today's schools.

I want to know about your skills, competencies, gifts and abilities and how you can include a wider range of learners in that same area of expertise. Accordingly, each of you will choose a theme that will be a touchstone throughout the course. That is, you will connect the strategies and techniques on which we focus to that theme. You may be a competent gardener, have a keen interest in gardening and/or just love gardening. When we discuss accommodations for students with physical disabilities, you will connect the ideas we cover to how gardening can be more accessible for students with physical disabilities. If you love winter sports or happen to be an avid skier, you will connect much of what we cover to adaptations and modifications for individuals who can participate more fully in winter sporting events.

I will not penalize you for what you do not know. When I don't know something, I go look it up. In fact, even when I think I know something, I still look it up to verify whether I am, indeed, right or not. Instead, I will assess your competence in the areas we cover by how well you complete activities from a matrix of possible choices. The exams I provide are better named exam-ination of content in which you demonstrate your knowledge in short, essay style responses to my writing prompts.

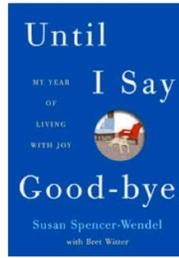
This can be an enjoyable learning experience for everyone. It will be a terrific learning experience for most of us.

Thank you for being a member of this learning community.

Step 179

Until I Say Goodbye

I read a book quite some time ago by Susan Spencer Wendel, *Until I Say Goodbye*. I summarized this book with two different visual organizers. First, I extracted key features from the book that resonated with me.



A L S - Lou Gehrig's Disease
Co U rt reporter by profession
S tephanie – strong support - sister
A sperger syndrome – Wesley - son
Mari N a – 14 year-old daughter

S trength of purpose – book for her children
Dr. P anos Kalalis – birth father
Aubr E y – 11 year-old son
Elle N - birth mother
C yprus – extended family
Graci E - family dog
Sc R apbooking – legacy for children

-
W elcoming by Greek family
Chick E e Hut
N ancy – lifelong friend
Husban D - John – rock of support
Z E N – attitude of letting go
Northern L ights

Next, I extracted some quotes of notes from the book using the same acrostic organizer of the author's name:

*It' S the journey, not the destination, true?
Oh, Mom. Yo U are so cute.
Per S pective. It's all perspective.
A nd life goes on.
No expectatio N s, I told myself.*

*I under S tood not a word. Yet could have listened forever.
It was P erfect. Levity and gravity, at the same time.
I had arrived a strang E r, but I was leaving with a new family.
Swiftly, surely, I am dyi N g. But I am alive today.
Don't C ry because it's over. Smile because it happened
It means s E arch your soul for strength.
Fea R less was in my genes.*

-
*You'll be W ith me like a handprint on my heart.
B E content with what you have.
Get your Ze N on, Susan.
A D ay begun in indignity had ended in the extraordinary.
One r E st at a time. One step at a time. One day at a time.
I have be L iefs. That God exists in each of us.*

Step 180

Please Fill in the Circle If ...

During one of the introductory sessions of my courses, I distribute the following survey and ask students to fill in the circles that best represent one of their traits / characteristics / likes, experiences, etc. Then I present a version with all of the circles filled in as a profile of their instructor.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="radio"/> You are a Bob Dylan fan. | <input type="radio"/> You own a car with over 80,000 miles on it. |
| <input type="radio"/> You think HOPE the Boston Red Sox will make it to the World Series this year. | <input type="radio"/> You have ever lived in Oregon. |
| <input type="radio"/> You are looking forward to the spring. | <input type="radio"/> You currently own no pets. |
| <input type="radio"/> You do not like to do yard work. | <input type="radio"/> You have been to both Alaska and Hawaii. |
| <input type="radio"/> You are vegetarian. | <input type="radio"/> You know who I am! |
| <input type="radio"/> You enjoy composing acrostics. | <input type="radio"/> You have ever been to Columbia, CT. |
| <input type="radio"/> You have relatives who live in North Carolina. | <input type="radio"/> You know someone smarter than yourself. |
| <input type="radio"/> You were born in Maine. | <input type="radio"/> You have read the book – <i>The Aosaawa Murders</i> . |
| <input type="radio"/> You like (try to) to complete the NYT Crossword Puzzle. | <input type="radio"/> You expect to benefit from taking this course !!! |
| <input type="radio"/> You watch Jeopardy on a regular basis. | <input type="radio"/> You binge watched at least 3 different series during this Pandemic. |

Step 181

What Are You Getting Into?

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

Step 182

You Got Me Thinking

You got me thinking about the work I do each day,
My role in teaching classes and what I'm about to say.
I love my work at Central - - - the flexibility of my time;
Even the self-expressions contained in my current rhyme.

My creative ability to speak my mind each day - a perk
And the colleagues in my department form my closest friends at work.
There're excellent fringe benefits for when I'm ill and cannot teach.
I influence my students, who soon one day will reach
Out to other learners in the cities and the towns
After crossing center stage in their graduation gowns.

But - - - my loyalty is not limited to the structure of this entity:
The buildings and the administration of this university.
Yes, I have my stage, a classroom - I'm the director of my show,
But I can quickly be replaced; this I surely know.

There are many reasons that people choose to work each day
Amid the chaotic nature of the external forces at play.
I may be short sighted and selfish in my rant
But survivors of certain illnesses have a reason to chant
Each day is a day and each moment is a moment;
My reasons to work here are a personal commitment.

Full-time, part-time doesn't really matter
Amid the e-mails and the daily chatter.
Some of us are starting - beginning our careers;
Some of us are in the final stages of our years
And hold many values and attitudes to be true,
Some of which may happen to also belong to you.
Ben and John hold a part of the truth
But so do Jane and Lois and if your name is Ruth,
Thank you, for reading the lines of my poem.
Share your gifts and live your life at both work and home.

Step 183

My DMV Experience

A few weeks ago, much to my dismay,
My driver's license renewal came my way.
I put it off until today
When at 9:15 AM I was off and away
To take a ticket [A040] at the door
Of the DMV Office - for what would be in store.

I forgot my reading glasses at home
So I listened to Dylan on my iPhone.
At 10:45 I looked up at the clock face
The numbers were changing at just a snail's pace,
So - I left and headed back to my house
To have some lunch and talk to my spouse.
I returned just about noon and immediately was dejected
My A040 had recently been selected,
So I had to wait for a new number to appear
A067 was the one I drew near.

I now had my e-book to read for pleasure
The Dire King - the last of the Jackaby treasure
Of stories that helped me pass the time
And contribute to more lines for this rhyme.
About 1:45 PM I heard my number with surprise
I felt like I had won a great big prize.

The exact renewal process took just a short while;
In five minutes I was through and just had to smile
About how long this whole process took
But I got to listen to Dylan and read from my book.

Always bring music and perhaps a good book to read
For appointments you may have when you find you may need
A way to occupy your time
And summarize your results in verses that rhyme.

Step 184

We Are All Life-Long Learners

There is no limit to what we can learn about any topic. For instance, a solar eclipse occurred earlier this week. Observers ranged from young children with modified viewers constructed from cereal boxes to astronomers using highly sophisticated telescopes. This reminds me of Bruner's "spiral curriculum" concept in which he asserted that any content can be accessed with different degrees of intensity and knowledge depending on the age level and experiences of the student. If we can all be life-long learners, our ability to grasp new knowledge on a topic like an eclipse is often based on the cumulative experiences of past engagement on that topic. As our interest in a topic is fueled by past experiences, we may choose to focus on the topic with more intensity, but everyone does not need to be interested in that same topic. For example, during the eclipse, I was at a Dunkin' Donuts eating a sandwich with a cup of coffee and barely noticed a change in sunlight at the appointed peak of this event. However, colleagues at my university travelled out to Indiana and Illinois to be in the "area of totality" to engage on a level of much greater intensity. One's interest or engagement is not better than another's. Everyone is not forced to be equally engaged at the same time and in the same way. Why can't school be more like this? Students can find their source of engagement that matches current interests and creative teachers can embed the required content to those interests.

Step 185

Thinking Back

Another semester has come to an end
And once more to you this message I send.
Did you get what you expected - or perhaps more?
I hope you learned and accepted what could become the core
Set of values you hold as you venture off to your next career.
I hope you remember what I shared with you this year.
It's not the specifics that I am most concerned about.
It's the overall set of values and do not doubt
That you can make a difference in each student you meet.
Don't let negativity take you down to defeat
By those individuals who have given up the fight -
Those who are lost and can't see the light.
Rise up and give it your best
For there are no answers to many of life's tests.
Be true to your values - let your conscious be your guide.
Honor your students and look forward to the ride
You have begun in the course that now is done.
Remember, it's not a sprint but a long-distance run.

Step 186

Opening Day

It's the first day of classes;
I need to get into a positive psych.
There is nervousness in the air
For students and teachers alike.

What will be expected?
How much will I have to do?
What will I learn
When this semester is through?

Learners appear in many guises
As they sit in their places in this room.
I will guide their work each and every week
So that to teachers they can bloom.

It's exciting to be in this position!
It's exciting to earn their trust!
It's exciting to share my experiences
It's exciting to be fair and just.

We work and study to become better people.
We share time together in meaningful ways.
We learn and strive to become great teachers
And to earn our future students' praise.

Step 187

Starting from Zero Points

One of the hallmarks of the courses that I teach is not to give multiple choice or True/False type of exams and assign grades based on how many statements were incorrect as if there is a 100% that someone could possibly know in the content under study. It is impossible to know 100% of anything so why take points away from this mythical number when subtracting points from quizzes and exams for a score like 93% correct or 85% correct. In addition, I typically see quite a few students nod their heads when I raise the following scenario.

How many of you crammed for a test and received an excellent grade? What if I gave you the exact same test three months later without you being aware that you would need to take it again. How well do you think you would do? Might you even drop 2 – 3 letter grades when trying to recall what information you crammed for to earn the initially high grade, which is recorded as your knowledge gained in that content? These scores are a myth!

Step 187

Starting from Zero Points

(continued)

A different mindset needs to occur about the grading process. First, is the belief that we are all at different stages of our learning on a content of focus at any one time. This learning could come from out-of-class interests, enriched home settings, etc. What I want to measure is progress toward a deeper understanding of that content by all students, but all students would not have to demonstrate the same amount of attained knowledge or skills in that area.

- Consider the following scenario. You are the physical education teacher and you are teaching a unit on gymnastics. The school's lead gymnast is in your class. She has attained an extremely high degree of skill in the content that you are teaching. Does that student automatically receive an "A" for that unit? Or, as I would propose, is her grade contingent on effort and gains in an area of improvement from where she is right now?

Why can't we use the same rationale in some of the academic subject areas? Hurricane Harvey devastated the Gulf Coast. If this hurricane was the focus of a quiz in a Social Studies class and a student scored quite low on an assessment of factual knowledge about the hurricane, that could be the deciding factor in assigning a grade. What if this same student organized a fund raiser in his neighborhood and solicited donations of both money and goods in the thousands of dollars? Should this aspect of his learning about giving to victims of disasters take precedence over a lack of factual knowledge on a quiz developed by a teacher?

To make a long story short, in my courses all students begin with zero points. I offer ways of building points that include active presence and participation in class discussions / connecting the content of the course to their field experience / a self exploration of a disability of their choice / using their out-of-class interests in developing accommodations for their content area / connecting their current learning to their future content area. This makes a lot more sense to me! There are no exams in the traditional sense, but there are many exam_inations of content in multiple formats. It's more of a portfolio assessment of connections the students are making in advancing their level of knowledge and skills in my courses.

Step 188

Two Insights for Solving Challenges

I made an interesting observation several years ago to share with you today. I was working on an acrostic puzzle in which clues are provided that require a specific response to write in designated spaces on the puzzle. I was stumped. I decided to get some help from a website by searching with a key word and seeing if I could locate some information relative to one of the clues. The clue was "60's rockers of 'You Really Got Me' (2 words)" and it had to fit into eight spaces. I could hear parts of the song in my head and felt I could almost come up with the right response. Before my search kicked in, I suddenly realized the answer: "The Kinks." I verified my guess by putting in the title of the song and the first hit that came up mentioned The Kinks. Later on that evening, I was again stumped and didn't know the answers to any of the remaining clues. As I was about to look up some information my eyes scanned other clues and I saw "seed-bearing organ of a flower" for six letters. I suddenly thought of "pistil" and went to look it up in the dictionary, which verified my original guess was correct. After these two incidents, I arrived at the following conclusion: *Sometimes, when I am struggling with a response to given clues, and when I am closer to a solution from an authoritative source, I sometimes figure it out myself, just before needing the authority's advice.*

As part of a daylong in-service on working together as team members, I introduced a crossword puzzle to solve during one group activity. During the time that each group worked on solving the puzzle, I recorded notes on the different strategies team members employed to try to solve some of the clues. As they used different strategies, I wrote them down on a large wall chart paper as generic statements. For example, one of the team members recited one of the clues aloud - "Robert E. Lee's horse." Just about that time, a secretary was coming into the room for a cup of coffee and said, "Traveler." I then wrote down the following statement: *Sometimes, the answers to your challenges come from people you know who are not current members of your team*

Step 189

More Truths Reinforced on Monday

There was a lock-down on campus precipitated by a student dressed up in Ninja type garb and making threatening movements/gestures in one of the buildings on campus. I remained in my classroom with students in one of my courses and I provided them with the following summary at the beginning of our next session.

- 1) You never know when you start your day what unexpected challenges you might face.
- 2) Be careful what you write when you push the “send” button of an e-mail.
- 3) Social media, including twitter and texting, provide up-to-the-second information that may not be accurate - - - but is shared nonetheless.
- 4) I am incredibly proud of the way students in my class handled themselves and remained calm under such stressful circumstances.
- 5) Practice doesn’t make perfect - - - because perfect is a myth.
- 6) If media outlets don’t have the details of an event, they sometimes feel free to make them up.
- 7) Being a member of a community can be messy at times.
- 8) We live in a different time and age every day we age.
- 9) A good family can be perplexed by the actions of a son/daughter and we are not exempt from that predicament.
- 10) Reflection and mindfulness are two strategies of coping with events that were experienced earlier this week.

-
- *The most precious, important thing you have in your life is your energy. It is not your time that is limited, it is your energy.*
 - *Mental strength is not just hoping that nothing ever goes wrong. It is believing that we have the capacity to handle it if it does.*
 - *It’s not whether you “feel” like putting in the work, but whether or not you do it regardless.*
 - *Safety isn’t in certainty – but in the faith that you can simply keep going.*

Brianna Wiest

Step 190

A Thanksgiving Prayer

Thank you to my future.
Thank you for my past.
Thank you each and everyone
From the first right to the last.

Thank you for the wisdom.
Thank you for the ways
That only you could understand
As I counted out my days.

Thank you for the guidance.
You were with me every step.
Thank you for your patience
When I was quite inept.

Thank you for the many times
When I did not see you there.
Thank you for inviting me
To live this life and share

What I know with others
Who happen across my sight.
Thank you for the darkness.
Thank you for the light.

Gratitude and kindness
Are passwords to good health.
Friends and family and loved ones
Are the sure sign of great wealth.

Thank you for not abandoning me
In my hour of need.
Thank you for remembering me.
Thank you for this indeed -

For letting me know the value
Of a life well lived in time
And the honor of expressing
Myself in this Thanksgiving rhyme.

Step 191

Assessment Can Get in the Way

I am going to suggest a quite radical opinion about the role of assessment. First, formative assessment should be part of each day's normal practices by a teacher. However, the results of these assessments are not to assign a grade to the student but to inform the teacher about what strategies appear to be working as the students advance onward in their progress on specific content areas of focus. There is no predetermined place at which that student must be at any given time but decisions are made about what could/should be next in that student's individualized education plan. This process eliminates the competitive nature of grades as examples of distinctions among students and a sense of superiority over others. We are all on a path toward knowing more about that which we are interested in. At least that is how I, as an adult, view the learning process. But how would we know what grade level a student should be in? Grade levels are artificial designators of grouping students as if chronological age is the key factor in determining what a student should learn and when that student should learn it. What if we did the same with adults in what they could or could not explore and learn more about? I will never learn all there is to know about anything, but I enjoy the process of learning more about that which I am interested in. What if a student does not or cannot complete a book review as currently prescribed in the grade-level curriculum? How many book reviews does a person need to complete once they are out of high school? I had a stint as a book review editor for a journal for a five-year period of time and the reviews that I completed looked nothing like what I was taught to do in seventh grade! Schools tend to favor those students who have a predisposition to doing well in those subject areas deemed important to "cover" by those in power at the time. I think we are missing the boat on this one. Education should be a process of learning how to become a better functioning and life-fulfilling adult after this formal process is over - typically when a person leaves high school

-
- *These days I settle for feeling only 85 percent sure about most things most of the time. I believe this is keeping me sane, and I also believe that it's keeping me human. In fact, I'm 85 percent sure of it.*
 - *I don't think you can come into your wisdom until you have made mistakes on your own skin and felt them in reality of your own life.*
 - *Creativity itself doesn't care at all about results - the only thing it craves is the process. Learn to love the process and let whatever happens next happen, without fussing too much about it. Elizabeth Gilbert*

Step 192

Creating a Positive Tone Prior to, During and After Planning Meetings

The following ideas surfaced during several brainstorming sessions with teachers when I requested strategies for creating a positive tone prior to, during and/or after a meeting concerning a student with challenging behaviors:

- ❖ Person's **abilities** are highlighted using graphs.
- ❖ **Air freshener**
- ❖ **Announcements** that are sent out to alert members about the meeting could have some positive quotes and sayings on them as well as the agenda.
- ❖ There is an **atmosphere** of calmness, tenderness, caring and honesty; openness for discussion
- ❖ **Avoid using labels** when discussing a challenging situation. Labels about individuals tend to create more negative images among team members.
- ❖ **Brainstorming** approach can be used to develop options with an emphasis on the nonjudgmental reaction to responses.
- ❖ Focus initially on past **challenges** that the focal person has overcome. What talents does this person bring to the planning team's attention?
- ❖ Focus on the **communicative intent** of a challenging behavior. Develop best guesses for why team members think that behaviors are happening.
- ❖ **Dress informally**. Direct support persons and family members should not be intimidated by the more formal dress often worn by professionals.
- ❖ **Empathy**: put yourself in the shoes of the focus person and visualize how things are from that person's perspective.
- ❖ Always **end** on a positive note.
- ❖ **Environmental attractions**: fish tanks, pictures/posters on the wall, natural lighting, flowers and other decor that help to create a homey, comfortable environment in which to focus on a challenging situation.
- ❖ **Facilitator's enthusiasm**: leader of the group smiles and is generally in an upbeat mood. This tends to put others in an upbeat mood as well. The body language used by the facilitator has an impact on the participants.
- ❖ Be **flexible**. Don't be rigid.
- ❖ **Focus** on what will help the person, not on what will help you.
- ❖ Each member of the team can tell **good news stories** about the focus person.
- ❖ **Guests** should be able to bring friends for mutual support.

Step 192

Creating a Positive Tone Prior to, During and After Planning Meetings (continued)

- ❖ **Humor** helps to create a relaxed and accepting environment. Smiles can be catching.
- ❖ **Icebreaker activity** at very beginning: spend 2-3 minutes with an activity that promotes mutual respect and participation.
- ❖ **Lighting** could be dimmed or brightened as the occasion warranted.
- ❖ **Music** of an upbeat variety can be playing in the background as team members are assembling for the meeting.
- ❖ **Mutual interests:** team members list activities and interests that they have in common with the focus person.
- ❖ **Non-contingent Reinforcement:** everyone gets a special treat or reinforcement prior to the start of the meeting. Examples could include lottery tickets for a selected few, a standing ovation for one of the team members, freshly baked pastry for a snack prior to the meeting, etc.
- ❖ **Positive self-esteem** by team members will translate into positive energy for the challenge at hand.
- ❖ **Profile:** write a five to six sentence description of the focal person as if someone were describing you.
- ❖ There should be a **question** on which all team members are focusing. Any other concerns need to wait until another time. However, they are acknowledged on a poster paper labeled “Parking Lot.” Stick to the agenda at hand.
- ❖ **Realistic expectations** by team members.
- ❖ **Recognition** for team members who are going up and beyond expectations.
- ❖ **Redirection** of negative comments becomes one of the ground rules accepted by team members.
- ❖ **Refreshments** could include water with lemon/lime and small bowls with preferred snacks; coffee; bring out the “good stuff.”
- ❖ **Reminders** for people to arrive on time and to remember the time and date of the meeting – similar to how doctor’s offices call to remind us about our appointments.
- ❖ **Resources:** consider the depth and foundation of resources that are available on the team.
- ❖ **Scheduling** meeting in midweek as opposed to Mondays or Fridays and convenient time of the day.

Step 192

Creating a Positive Tone Prior to, During and After Planning Meetings

(continued)

- ❖ **Seating arrangements** can be organized to contribute to a meaningful dialogue and minimize personality conflicts.
- ❖ **Seating is comfortable** and there is room to spread out materials on a table.
- ❖ **Strengths** of the focal person need to be identified and brought to the surface. Begin a list of how the person is helpful to others.
- ❖ **Table Tents** with participant names and equal billing given to all; i.e., no initials after people's names.
- ❖ **Talk about something good** and positive about the person. Avoid negative talk as much as possible.
- ❖ **Temperature** is comfortable.
- ❖ **Timeline of prior successes** by both the focus person and members of the team. Even if negative experiences are mentioned, the facilitator can comment on a positive outcome that has evolved from this experience.

Step 193

Responding to Feedback

I thank all who have sent their comments to me
About what I have written and how I see
A better day for students in our schools
When teachers can teach without archaic rules
Tied to high-stakes assessments and rigidity.
Instead, we all need a dose of creativity.
Students need encouragement to find their gifts
That no one else can do that lifts
Them into the spotlight of competence and strengths:
Everyone can shine and advance to great lengths
When we focus on talents, energy and wit;
Engagement, connections, fun and grit.
Schools can be a place where everyone can learn
And teachers can plan, grow and yearn
To form relationships to build on and thrive
And make it possible for students to come alive;
Awakening each day to each new possibility
Of becoming aware of each one's individuality

Step 194

Big Ideas for Education

In no specific order of priority here are my **Big Ideas** for the future of education at all levels:

- **Few, if any timed tests:** Too often, the amount of time designated to complete a quiz or test is chosen in a quite arbitrary manner by the test giver. Many students struggle over determining the “one right” answer to a multiple-choice series of items when two of the items may have a very minimal distinction that may have more to do with how well the student memorizes a definition than knowing about the content under investigation. Also, some students – even those without an official diagnosis of a learning disability – need time to go back over their work to change any answers when, upon a second analysis, another answer now appears to be a better choice.
- **Paying for the bells and whistles:** Manufacturers of curricular materials are in the business to make money - - - lots of money. The way in which a product is packaged may have more to do with buyer incentives and surface quality than it has to do with the evidence-based strategies contained within the package, which mirrors the same strategies in hundreds of other curricular packages, perhaps marketed with not quite so much glitz. A biography of Anne Sullivan provided me with an extremely interesting account of a creative teacher who worked with perseverance and grit with Helen Keller. Teachers have lost one of their most treasured responsibilities in their craft: knowing what to do next when what is currently in place is not working.
- **Choices:** The foundation for engagement is offering choices for how students can demonstrate their competence in each of the curricular content areas. There is a sense of empowerment when students are in charge of how they use their strengths to express their progress toward the content standard presented by the teacher.
- **Formative Assessment Over Summative Assessment:** In my opinion, there is a misunderstanding about what summative assessment means. To me, a unit test or weekly quiz often reveals how well a student can memorize, cram for a one-time revelation of knowledge and does an injustice to students whose learning does not adhere to limited time frames for knowing enough about the subject at hand to do well on high-stakes assessments that often are meaningless 3-4 months later. Instead, formative assessment should be the norm when teachers and students both discover how successful current strategies are in understanding the information at hand. Daily decisions are then made for how to access the content in a more effective manner as the student builds on skills in an individualized manner.

Step 194

Big Ideas for Education

(continued)

- **More Maker Spaces:** I think that project-based learning is a great way to practice one's recent knowledge in a creative way. Working as a member of a team in a problem-solving activity results in a refinement in the type of skills that will be in much demand in this current century. There needs to be a greater connection between the creative energies of students and the needs of their greater community. Taxpayers need to see the benefits of their hard-earned dollars meeting community challenges, especially when those taxpayers do not currently have children/youth attending school in that community.
- **Individualized Student Plans:** In special education, each student has an Individualized Education Program. I would like to see this expanded to ALL students whose direction of study can be guided by a team of individuals (a circle of support) that could include family members, neighbors, interested citizens of the community, school personnel and students themselves.
- **Mindfulness:** Social and emotional learning is receiving its due consideration as schools recognize that the assets that each student brings to the learning environment contribute to overall success. A school that includes mindfulness practices provides opportunities for students to de stress and find ways to relax and regroup, often coming from stressful environments. Spaced throughout the day, such practices can be just the brain boost that students need to focus their energies on the activities at hand.
- **Learning About Life Through Course Content:** I once viewed a video clip about a high school physics teacher and read comments from his students. "He teaches us about life through our interactions with physics activities." The particular teacher happened to also have a daughter with quite severe physical and intellectual disabilities. The students all knew about her and the family's efforts to include her in as meaningful a way as possible in all of life's activities. How many students in that physics' course will remember the different formulas or content 3-5 years from now? However, they will remember their teacher and the values and attitude he brought to each lesson about how to be better individuals through the context of learning physics.

Step 194

Big Ideas for Education

(continued)

- **Inclusion of the Arts in all Curricular Activities:** I think STEM got it right when schools started calling it STEAM by including the arts as an integral component of the curriculum. I remember reading and viewing information about the Henderson School in Dorchester, MA and how the teachers use a multitude of art materials in the academic content areas as students paint, sing, act and dance their way into the content of the day/week. I believe this emphasis can breathe fresh air into the curriculum and engagement will flourish.
- **Mistakes Are Encouraged:** We need environments in which students feel comfortable making mistakes on their way to learning new skills/ activities. The foundation for great discoveries in any of the disciplines is perseverance through failure and setbacks. Teachers should encourage students to take risks when the students know they will not be penalized in the learning process but encouraged to rebound from a mistake and find ways to prevent that same mistake from occurring in the future. Also, students need to realize that their teachers have setbacks, as well, when they are learning new activities, especially with engaging in new technology that is second nature to many of their students.

Step 195

CREATIVITY

I used the acrostic CREATIVITY to identify words that reflect what creativity means in my current life. I then used each word in the order in which it appears in the acrostic to form successive lines of verse.

C onnections	
F R eedom	Making connections from a variety of resources
E xcitement	Means freedom to choose how to approach my courses.
P I A y	Excitement should be felt by one and all.
T ime	Play and work answer to the same call
I nitiative	When I use my time in chosen ways
G i V ing	And take initiative in all my days
R eflex I on	To be giving and caring with each one.
G row T h	My reflection reminds me that none
M Y stical	Of my growth can be of an measure -
	It's a mystical feeling – my very own treasure.

Step 196

CHOICES - Organizing a Session

I experimented with the following arrangement of session headings for organizing one of my courses, which I will refine for future considerations.

C ompass: Where are we heading?

Each session will contain a list of learning objectives and general outline of key elements for the identified topics of each week's lesson. In addition, a visual organizer will contain some of the key features upon which I, as the instructor, will focus.

H ow about this?

Elements from the key slides / resources from the session will be located in this section. In the past, this consisted mainly of the PowerPoint slides I had assembled for that session. Now, I am trying a slightly different approach. I will present access to key information through links and summaries of resources and students can access them as part of their out-of-class engagement activities.

O ut-of-class assignments

I will include reminders for the assignments that are due for that day and the immediate future.

I n-class activities

There will be several in-class activities/requests in this section each session. That way, after students leave class, they can access the examples I share in class to refresh their memory.

C ollaboration in our groups/teams

Throughout the semester, students will interact with selected peers in group/team assignments.

E nrichment

Many students may want to go above and beyond the resources I provide in class and choose to investigate some of the resources I place in this folder.

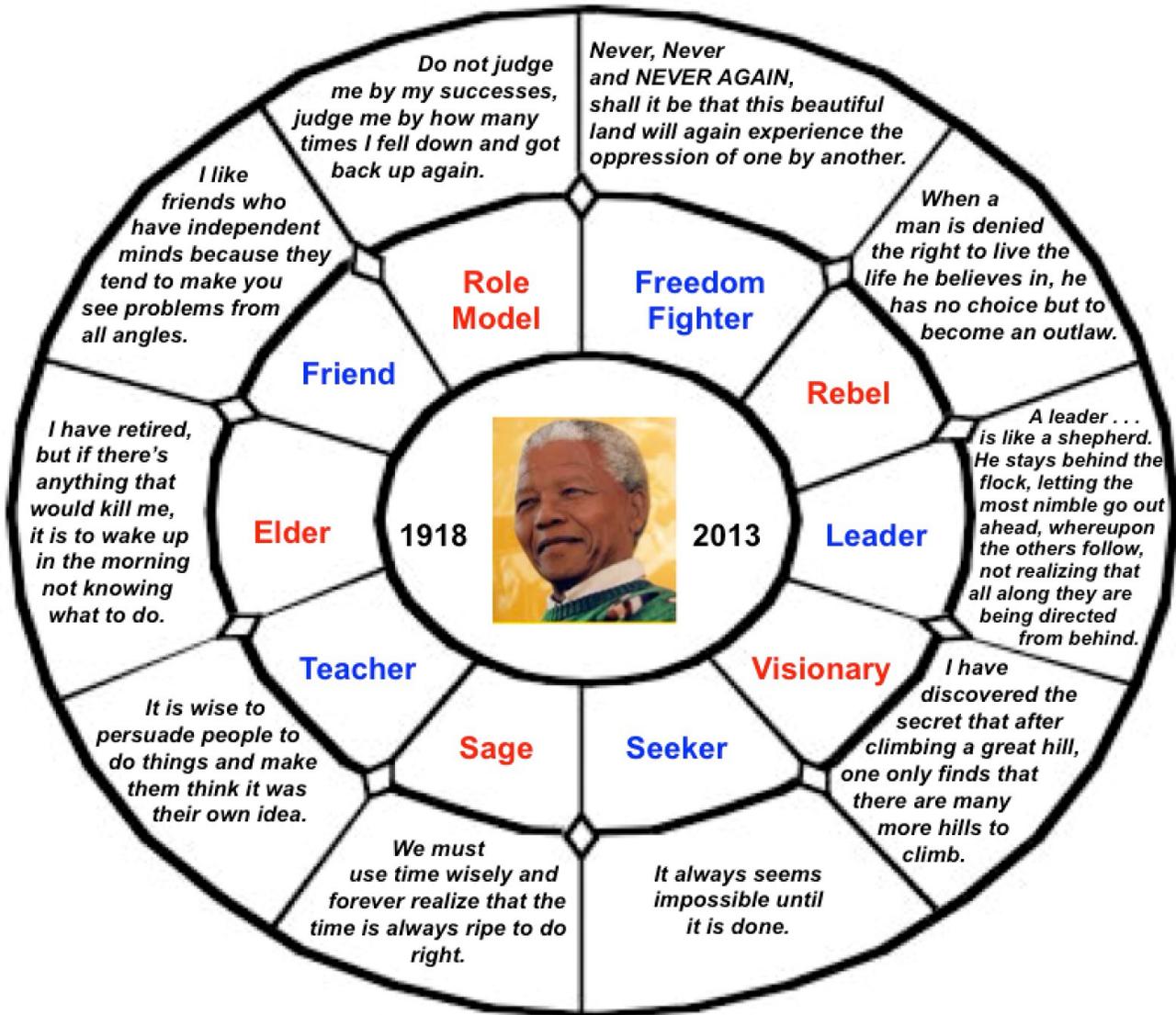
S ession web links

Many excellent web-based resources connect directly to the content of this course and students will benefit from the wisdom of others who address many of the same topics as I have chosen to share with them.

Step 197

Nelson Mandela Quotes

Upon the death of Nelson Mandela in 2013, I looked up some of his quotes and connected them to attributes I felt about this great human being. I shared this visual with my colleagues at CCSU and with students in my courses.



Step 198

What's It Take to be 98?

The following is a tribute I composed on my dad's 98th birthday.



What Does it Take to be 98?

- N**ice relatives who visit on occasion;
- I**ndividual genes and 1 Gene;
- N**ot too much sugar in your coffee;
- E**yes that see all that is good;
- T**ea and coffee breaks whenever Nanna says so;
- Y**oung people around;

- E**ars that hear the love that surrounds you;
- I**ce packs for the aches and pains;
- G**roup photos at family reunions;
- H**eating pad for the other aches and pains; and
- T**ime to think and wonder.

Step 199

Non-Verbal Communication

One of the first experiences with non-verbal communication occurred when I volunteered in a school in Eugene, Oregon, many decades ago. I helped students at lunch time and those students had significant physical disabilities and needed assistance. I noticed two clocks on the wall. One clock had the current time while the other clock just had a minute hand with a red and green light bulb right under the clock. If the lunchroom monitor thought that the noise level in the cafeteria was acceptable, the green light was on and the minute hand moved. When the noise level was unacceptable, the monitor pressed a remote button and the red light was on and the minute hand stopped. You could hear many students say “SSHH – SSHHhh” and the noise level would quickly subside. The green light went back on and the minute hand continued. If the minute hand got to a certain number of minutes each day, there was a special time on Friday afternoons when students were free to engage in recreational type of games / equipment after lunch that day. As far as I could see, this proved to be a quite successful use of “non-verbal communication” in the lunchroom. I have been in other schools when chaos reigns supreme with much hollering and high decibels of noise.

Step 200

A Final Reflection ... for Now

I picked up a book from off my shelf
to see what Parker Palmer had to say
About aging and being on the brink
of how to live out your best self today.

The world is full of questions, wonder and awe
as I pursue new goals and dreams.

I remember from my past of the lessons I learned
just like the river teeth of the streams.

Where to go? What to do?
What is next in store for me?

How many miles have I got left to go
to discover who I am meant to be?

The answer always lies in the process
of how you live out each day.

My journey continues on
in my own unique "Ernie" way.