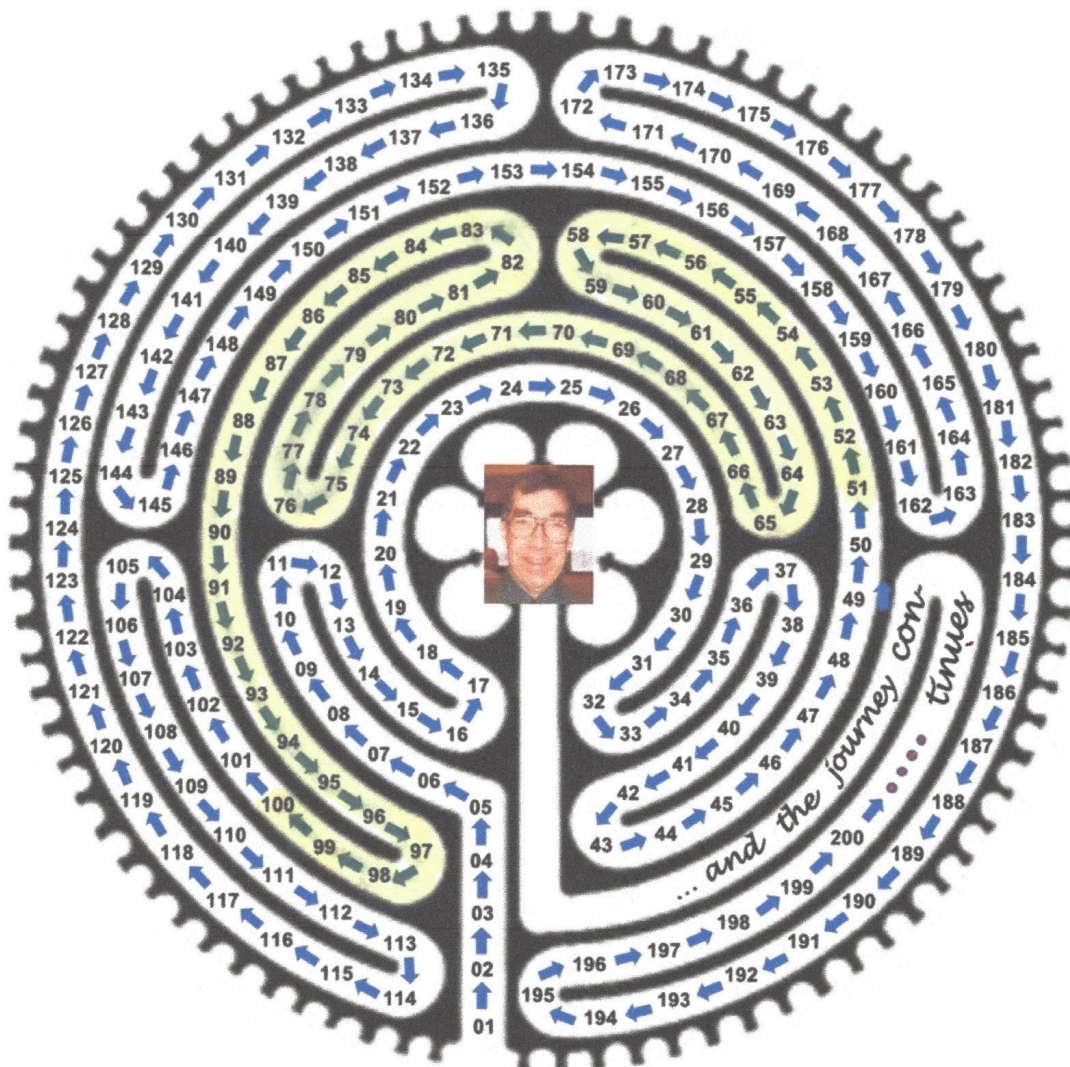


On the Path of the Perfecting Teacher

Walking the Labyrinth
Steps 001 - 050

Current Update: 04/22/26

Ernest L. Pancsofar



Walking the Labyrinth

Steps 001 - 050

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
Ask Good Qu **E** stions
Neve **R** Satisfied With What Is

*My desire is to know what I have lived,
that I may know how to live henceforth.*

Henry David Thoreau

On The Path To Becoming a “Perfecting” Teacher

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On The Path To Becoming a “Perfecting” Teacher

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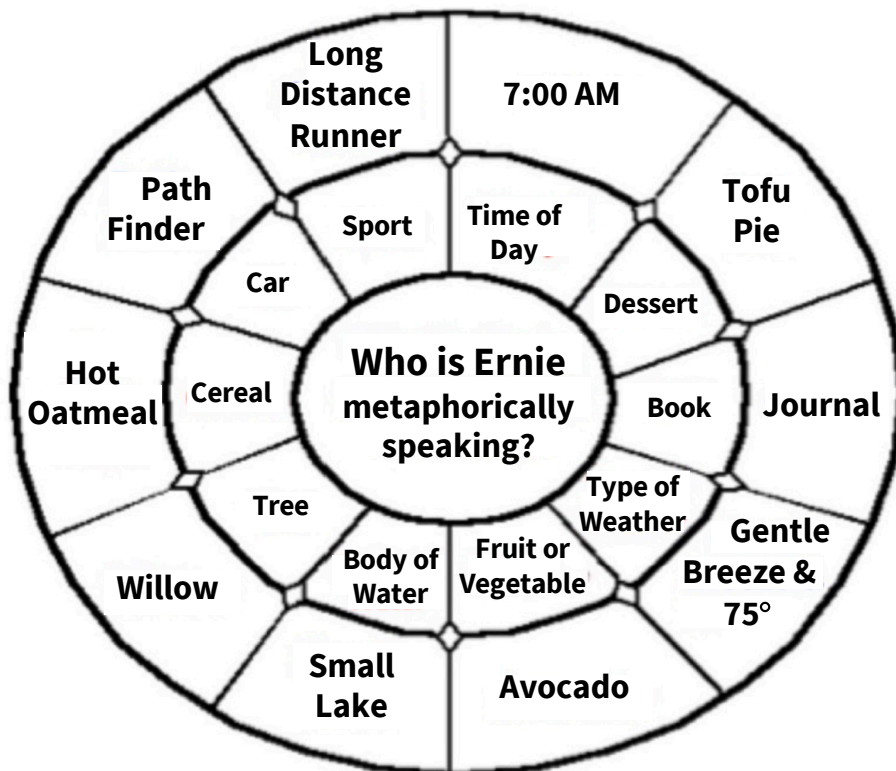
Step 001

Profile as Metaphor

In the context of this activity, a metaphor is a symbolic representation of an attribute of one's personal profile. One morning, I thought of my attributes in terms of metaphors and used the concentric circles visual to record the results of my investigation.

M any of us can choose to share our personal attributes to
E ach of our teammates, colleagues and the parents of
T he students with whom we interact.
A feature of this process is not to develop our
P rofile by identifying places/objects/things we like but to
H eed the sound of the inner voice we each have in
O ur head that reminds us to be authentic and
R eal to those around us. This exercise can help
S omeone share parts of themselves in an indirect manner.

If I could choose examples from the categories of the middle circle (time of day, dessert, etc.) that best represent who I am (or who I think I am), I would record the ingredients found in the outer circle.



Step 001

Profile as Metaphor (continued)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Step 002

Thank You Poem - 1

The semester is drawing to a close. Each semester I am fortunate to guide the learning of exceptional students. As part of the agenda for a final session, I shared this poem with my students .

Thank you for taking me along on the ride
As you complete this course with me as your guide.
The richness of your work inspires me to grow
And learn some more of what I know
On a path of discovery in this introductory course
As you share your findings from many a resource.
I enjoy the way you connect what I share
As together we all become much more aware
Of how to work with students in our class.
We all grow more as we amass
Strategies, skills and creative ways to teach
For even the hardest of students to reach!

Step 003

Thank You Poem - 2

I often think about what a great job it is to work at a university and share my knowledge and skills with teacher candidates and other students preparing for their professional certificates (school counseling, marriage and family therapy, educational leadership, etc.). Students need to know what a privilege it is to guide their learning and to be the right person at the right time in the right place along each of their career paths.

Thank you for sharing your time with me today.
I put a lot of thought in what I have to say
And hopefully, because of your rapt attention,
You'll leave this class with a renewed intention
To try your best in everything you do.
You never know what challenges will brew
In the classroom of your future – the one in your dream
When some of your students border on the extreme
And start to get restless – something's up their sleeve.
You'll calmly regroup . . . and remember to breathe
Slowly on the inhale and slowly on the out
And use a calm voice, There's no need to rant and shout
For you have integrity, honesty and truth,
Wisdom and caring for the children and the youth.

Step 004

Creative Schools

The following two quotes originated from the book: *Creative Schools: The Grassroots Revolution That's Transforming Education* by Ken Robinson and Lou Aronica. I am using this book as a resource in an upcoming course I will be teaching during our winter session.

- *As I see it, the aims of education are to enable students to understand the world around them and the talents within them so that they can become fulfilled individuals and active, compassionate citizens.* [p. xxii]
- *In 2008, IBM published a survey of what organization leaders need most in their staff. They spoke with fifteen hundred leaders in eighty countries. The two priorities were adaptability to change and creativity in generating new ideas.* (pp. 18-19]

Step 005

Elements of a Successful Curriculum

As I mentioned in my entry of 004, I am using a book by Ken Robinson and Lou Aronica, *Creative Schools – The Grassroots Revolution That's Transforming Education*, in a winter session course. In chapter 6, Robinson outlines the ingredients that contribute to a successful curriculum and I transposed the titles of these elements into an acrostic style organizer. I had not yet read about his key components when I developed my own inclusion of ingredients for entry 006.

Sir Ken Robinson's Key Components to **A SUCCESSFUL** Curriculum

Cre **A** tivity

Compa **S** sion

Comm **U** nication

Criti **C** ism

C ollaboration

Composur **E**

Curio **S** ity

Citizen **S** hip

Step 006

Themes in My Courses

I have been a college instructor for over 25 years and, during that time, have developed a style and set of values that I bring to each course. I took time a couple of years ago to investigate what makes my courses different from the way others might teach an introductory course in special education and how I view myself as a SUCCESSFUL college instructor.

As I jotted down words about what unique features I offered in my courses, I realized that they all began with the letter “C.” I continued and the following ten words emerged:

Choices
Caution
Caring
Collaboration
Creativity
Connections
Consistency
Carefulness
Communication
Curiosity

Next, I noticed that the word “successful” contained the same number of letters as the number of words I had jotted down. Was there a way I could make an acrostic organizer of the words to capture the word “successful?” The results of my efforts are shown below and on the following pages.

choice **S**
ca **U** tion
C aring
C uriosity
cr **E** ativity
connection **S**
consi **S** tency
care **F** ulness
comm **U** nication
co **L** aboration

Step 006

Themes in My Courses

(continued)

CHOICES I believe that by offering choices in the way in which students complete assignments to earn points toward a final grade, I am mirroring this value for teacher candidates and other professionals to infuse in their work as well. I am reading more and more about the role of choice in decreasing behavioral disruptions in the classroom and helping students become more engaged in the learning process.

CAUTION There is also a caution throughout the course not to teach to a label or the diagnosis of a student, but to know each student as an individual with goals, competence, dreams, interests and other positive attributes. Don't be lulled into the stereotypes that may be applied to a student due to ineffective teaching in the past.

CARING Dr. Ron Ferguson comments how "caring" is one of the three legs of the tripod approach to teaching urban students. We must gain an appreciation of all the facts of our students' out-of-school lives that they bring to our classroom. We demonstrate our caring by our tone of voice, positioning, listening and empathic understanding of the day-to-day challenges many of our students face - - - just in surviving and thriving.

CURIOSITY This is an attribute that should follow each of us for the rest of our lives. We are better teachers when we demonstrate the same curiosity toward learning that we seek to instill in our students. What would happen if I tried this approach? Wonderment and curiosity go together like a hand and glove and bring excitement and adventure to what we do.

CREATIVITY Perhaps one of the most important attributes of the successful teacher is creativity. I may be biased but I think this is the key characteristic of the future that distinguishes great teachers from the rest of the field. I catch a glimpse of this talent by reviewing the way in which students complete their assignments in this course: disability path and accommodations theme requirements.

Step 006

Themes in My Courses

(continued)

CONNECTIONS Just as you learn better when you are able to make connections between the material of this course and your prior learning, so too do students in your future classroom. Also, when those students can make connections from the classroom to their life out-of-school, more engagement is apt to occur.

CONSISTENCY Structure and consistency provide a stable learning environment for many students who will be in your future classrooms. Predictable routines and schedules are often at the center of the planning for many students in their daily activities. Many students thrive in settings in which expectations are clear, concise and adhered to.

CAREFULNESS We need to be careful to identify instructional strategies that have been field tested by teachers and researchers and published in peer-reviewed journals and or texts. There are many unproven techniques that exist and that have a history of testimonials and loosely constructed research. There may be some elements of quality in some procedures, but be wary of the “polished, one-of-a-kind” success story.

COMMUNICATION Interactions and meetings among colleagues and peers are a must in special education. Also, respect the wealth of information and support parents can provide as they advocate for their sons/daughters in special education. I have learned a great deal by listening and incorporating parental input into my planning and assessment.

COLLABORATION This skill is a constant theme throughout the courses I teach and I strive to present tools for the general education teacher as each student’s team members work together toward a common vision and set of goals with an emphasis on inclusive practices to the maximum extent possible. Teamwork, as opposed to individual problem solving, is at the heart of collaboration.

Step 007

Do I Teach to the Label or to the Child Inside?

I responded to feedback from an anonymous student who said s/he expected to learn more about specific disabilities and not, necessarily, what I had presented as resources and content. I thought about what this student said and composed a brief essay that I now include during the first class of each semester when I teach the Introduction to Special Education course.

First, I presented a section from a set of lyrics that are set to the Billy Joel tune, *Piano Man*:

Lesson Plan Man

It's two o'clock on a Saturday;
My friends are nowhere in sight.
All of my lessons in front of me.
Oh, how they give me a fright.
This is the end of my journey;
I'll be a real teacher quite soon.
Just a few more weeks in front of me
As I add more words to my tune.

La la la, de de da
La la, de de da da da

(chorus)

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

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

(chorus)

Step 007

Do I Teach to the Label or to the Child Inside?

(continued)

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

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

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

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

Step 007

Do I Teach to the Label or to the Child Inside?

(continued)

- facts, facts, and more facts ...

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

My style of teaching correlates highly with my own way of learning. I like to make connections from what I am reading to another resource that helps to address a question I have going on in my head. The search for that answer leads me to additional resources and sources of information.

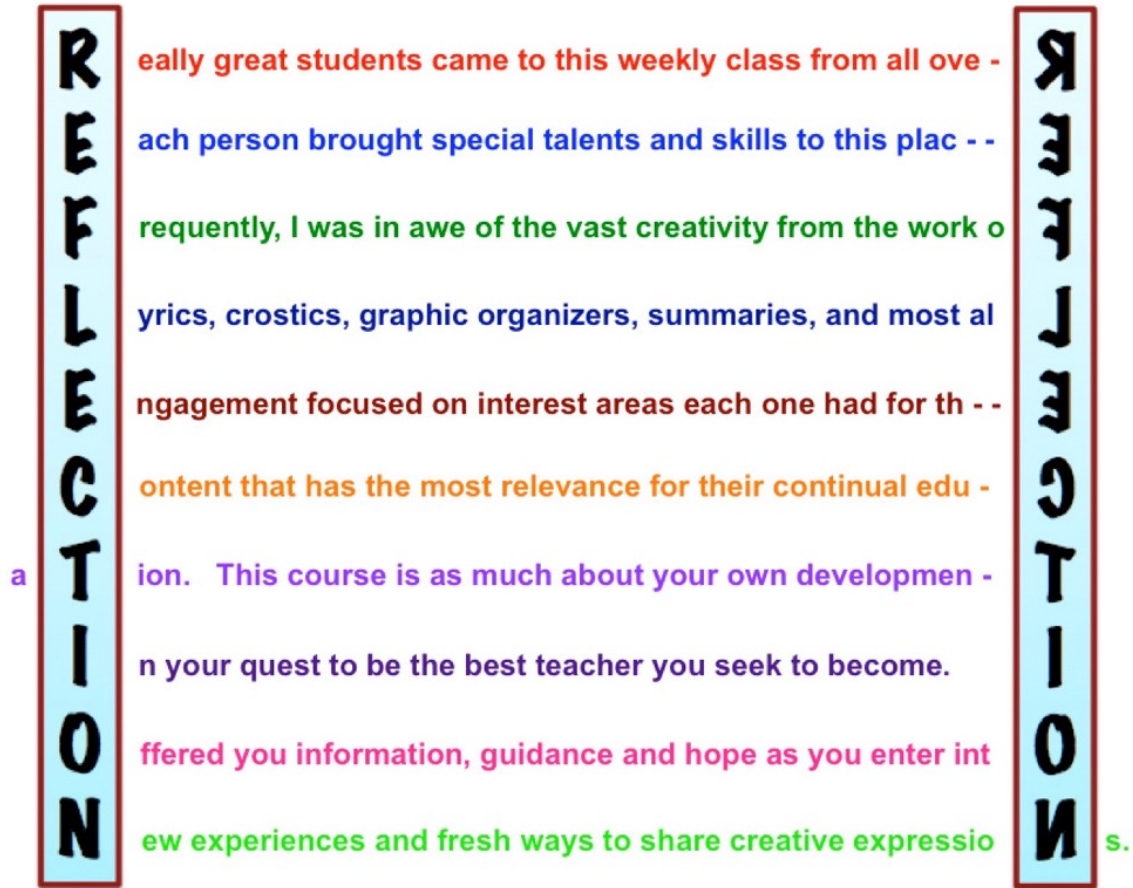
I know I may be naïve when urging students to devote two hours a week to the content area of special education. I specifically phrase the reading from the text as “read from Chapter 2” and not “read Chapter 2.” I want you to come to class with questions that I might not think of asking. I want you to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

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

Step 008

REFLECTIONS

One of my favorite ways to summarize an event/class/situation is to use an acrostic organizer - as you will see in several blog entries that will follow. One such summary about which I am quite proud originated at the conclusion of a course, yet I continue to post this summary at the end of several courses since that time.



Step 009

CREATIVITY AND ME

In 2015, I presented at a TEDx CCSU event on the theme Creativity and Me. I shared this brief clip with students in specific courses to let them know how important I think creativity is to be a successful teacher. I hope you take a few minutes to review this video and you will learn a little bit more about the person behind the blog:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l0QpXTPRCSE> .

Step 010

Universal Outcomes

There are the official objectives for a course and there are the unofficial, but equally important, objectives/outcomes for each course that I teach. I insert the following page in each course syllabus:

- To expand the boundaries beyond which we, as students, are fearful to tread;
- To become greater advocates for all students with whom we interact that they may obtain the necessary supports to maximize their learning;
- To critically look at the multiple sides of conflicts such as the widening achievement gap in the public schools, especially between white, middle-class and minority, urban students;
- To not run out of strategies to better respond to a difficult-to-reach student;
- To appreciate the struggles parents experience to obtain the services and supports for their children;
- To more creatively develop options using innovative brainstorming techniques;
- To model a caring atmosphere in all our interactions with students and colleagues, alike;
- To keep current on the people making headlines and news on the frontier of research in the field of special education;
- To connect our own interests, talents and gifts in our classrooms to build excitement into the curriculum; and
- To be a better person for having taken this course.

Step 011

Disability Simulation Guidelines

I am not a big fan of disability awareness simulations; i.e., walking around blindfolded to think you know what it's like to be blind or spending an hour or two in a wheelchair to better understand what it must be like to use a wheelchair for many hours of each day. I think that these simulations do a disservice to individuals with a disability, thinking we now know what it's like! I have come to this conclusion after reading multiple articles by self-advocates who caution that the emotions we may have following a simulation may, in fact, evoke more pity and a more patronizing approach than empathy. That being said, I share with my students that if they are on a school climate committee and the majority of peers are planning for a disability awareness set of activities, please insist that the following guidelines be established.

Simulation Activities Are:

- Respectful of individuals who live with that condition;
- Focus on accommodations/modifications and not helplessness;
- Educational and informative;
- Developed to evoke empathy and not sympathy;
- Contain debriefing sessions for discussion of experience with a person who has a disability leading the discussion.

Step 012

Taking Notes - Taking Note Of

I have a bias about note taking in my class – and in most classes in elementary thru college level learning. To me, taking notes should not be writing down what a teacher is saying. That information can be readily available in written form via technology either before, during or after a presentation. To me, it is “taking note of” what the teacher is saying by responding with thoughts, ideas, reactions, connections, questions, etc. We are beyond the need to copy down what is being said. In my opinion, this is an academic waste of time!

Step 013

Instructor Feedback

I wrote the following poem to students as an expression of my appreciation for the privilege of being their instructor.

Communicating My Satisfaction

It's the end of the term and finals week
And I'm reading your projects and continue to seek
Ways to improve this course that I teach
As soon, new students I'll begin to reach.

The bulletin board was a fantastic activity
As quotes and pictures promoted our community.
We gained insights from many of our peers
As each picture or quote each week appears.

Guest speakers were sought - some relatives and kin.
I expected to learn much as each class did begin.
Monday nights held a special time for me
As each class went by the "I" became "we."

The feedback responses on the satisfaction forms
Talked a lot about ability and talked about norms;
Talked about attitudes and how views have changed
As beliefs and values are now rearranged.

I trust in the talents - - - I trust in the art
Of what you each did with each of your parts
Of enhancing the quality of what we would cover
As each class I would lead was like no other.

Words don't express the way that I feel
At the end of this course that seems so real.
It's a privilege and honor and joy to say
What a wonderful class just ended today.

Step 014

Home Water Quotes

I like to draw analogies between my work as an educator and the world around me. Several years ago (decades ago) my friend and colleague, Dan Steere and I would go fishing. It was fun and we got the chance to commune with nature and swear a little bit in the great outdoors or at least in a small pond in eastern Connecticut. Dan introduced me to the book *Home Water – Near and Far: Fly Fisherman’s Explorations* by William Tapply. I am not the fly fisherman of the duo. Dan has that role and he has a book to prove it. I am struck by the similarities in the quotes I extracted from this book and my role in education as I help mold the future of the teacher candidates who have the occasion to cross my path in a course or two. Enjoy.

“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,” and “It’s good to take fishing seriously. But you should never take yourself seriously.” (page 2) quoting his father H. G. Tapply

I learned these things the way I’m still learning – by watching, listening, trying and erring. It’s taken me a long time to learn the importance of erring. (page 6)

A good day of fishing is a day when I learn that something I had thought to be true isn’t. An even better day is when I can replace the old truth with a new one. (page 8)

A bad day of fishing is the day I don’t learn anything. I’ve had very few such days.

I know some things. They are, for the most part, personal truths, and although I’m willing to share them, I understand that they might not work for anyone else. (page 12)

The skills are still pretty crude. The values remain constant. The opinions and assumptions, by their very nature, continually change, which is what makes them all the more interesting and useful. (page 4)

Generalists, he (H. G. Tapply) insisted, cannot be experts, but they have more fun, which is the point of it all. Dad insisted that humility is of more value than expertise. It is, I think, the root of wisdom. (page 7)

They are opinions, nothing more. I’m positive they will hold up well for me – at least until I go fishing next time. (page 9)

Step 015

Contradictions

We live in a world of contradictions with various interests pulling at us from opposite poles of influence. Teachers must learn to exist and thrive in such a world. Decisions are often made not on what is best for learners, but on the below-the surface interests of others. There will never be a perfect work environment. There will be aspects of the job that are not as pleasant as why we chose this career path. However, when we know we are adhering to those values that brought us to where we are right now, some of the other “stuff” is more tolerable. When I have led a discussion among teachers and teacher candidates, here are some of the contradictions that were presented. Note that one side of the paired set of words is not always the preferred or recommended. Some of these contradictions will not be part of everyone’s experience. But - - - be prepared to encounter some perplexing decisions by others that may differ from your own point of view.

- Assertiveness - Aggressiveness**
- Assistance - Nagging**
- Caring - Scaring**
- Challenges - Barriers**
- Competencies - Deficiencies**
- Creating Something New - Working Within Current Structure**
- Criticize - Critique**
- Decision Making Process - Person in Power Decides**
- Either/Or - Some of Each**
- Emergencies - Emergences**
- Hail the Status Quo - Expose the Status Woes**
- Honesty - Hiding Behind Statistics**
- Incentives - Penalties**
- Independence - Interdependence**
- Least Restrictive Environment - Quality of Life**
- Looking Down On - Working Beside**
- Matching Process - Pre-requisite Skills Approach**
- Mistakes - Learning Opportunities**
- Orders - Requests**
- Problem to Solve - Relationships to Understand**
- Reinforcement - Bribery**
- Rights - Privileges**
- Simplify - Dilute**
- Spontaneous - Therapeutic**
- Vertical Management Structure - Chaordic Management**
- Sympathetic - Empathetic**
- Teacher Needs - Student Needs**
- Transitions - Stagnations**
- Universal Design for All - Accommodations for Just a Few**

Step 016

The High Stakes Tests Are Gonna Fall

Jesse Turner is a colleague who encouraged me to maintain a blog of insights/advice/comments about my work in teacher education. This means a lot to me since Jesse is a peer whose opinions I highly value and who has to be the most caring, compassionate person I know. He has walked to Washington DC from Connecticut on two occasions to protest the highly questionable and offensively harmful effects that high stakes assessments have on students in our schools. As a tribute to his dedication to social justice I used Bob Dylan's song – *A Hard Rain's A Gonna Fall* – added different lyrics, which resulted in – *The High Stakes Tests Are Gonna Fall*. Incidentally, the song – *A Hard Rain's A Gonna Fall* – was the choice by Dylan to be sung by Patti Smith at the ceremony in Stockholm, Sweden when he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

The High Stakes Tests are Gonna Fall

Oh, where have you been, my walking man?
Oh, where have you been, out walking the land?

I've walked in my home state – yes, from the Northeast;
10 miles at a time in the rain and the heat.
I've been in the country and I've been in many a town.
My steps take me up and they also bring me down.
I've stepped on the sidewalk and I've stepped in the street.
I've walked alone and with many people I meet.
Each day's a new dawn with the friends that I make.
Their spirit is with me every step that I take.

And I'll walk, yes I'll walk, yes I'll walk - - - for us all
For the High Stakes Tests - - - are Gonna Fall.

Oh, what did you see, my walking man?
Oh, what did you see, out walking the land?

I saw young and old and black and white.
I saw love and honor in the day and the night.
I saw signs and posters after walking many miles.
I saw hope on their faces and was met with huge smiles.
I saw defiance and grit and not backing down.
That's what I saw as I went town by town.

And I'll walk, yes I'll walk, yes I'll walk - - - for us all
For the High Stakes Tests - - - are Gonna Fall.

Step 016

The High Stakes Tests Are Gonna Fall

(continued)

Oh, what did you hear, my walking man?

Oh, what did you hear, out walking the land?

I heard teachers & students & parents all pleading,

Get rid of those TESTS – our hearts are a’bleeding!

I heard shouts of anguish and long drawn out sighing.

I heard heart-wrenching screams amid all the crying.

I heard laughter from the people who make all their money

Off the backs of the students who don’t think it’s that funny.

I heard critics who say we all can do better.

I heard from hundreds of parents who sent me their letters.

And I’ll walk, yes I’ll walk, yes I’ll walk - - - for us all

For the High Stakes Tests - - - are Gonna Fall.

Oh, who did you meet, my walking man?

Oh, who did you meet, out walking the land?

I met the eyes of the students in all types of schools.

I met our next senators – the future makers of new rules.

I met parents who just want what’s right and what’s just.

They all are behind me – Washington DC or bust!

I met people who offered me food and a drink.

I met people who wanted to hear what I think.

I met hard working people who will not give up hope.

I met love & faith – two great ways we can cope.

And I’ll walk, yes I’ll walk, yes I’ll walk - - - for us all

For the High Stakes Tests - - - are Gonna Fall.

Oh, what will you do now, my walking man?

Oh, what will you do now, out walking the land?

I’ll talk to all people who know things are not right.

I’ll share all the stories and help them shed some light.

I’ll work with our teachers for better ways to assess.

I’ll help make real plans to get us out of this mess.

I’ll dedicate my life to the students I meet

In the literacy center – when they come once a week.

I’ll never back down from the high stakes test lies

From the people who deceive and pull the wool over our eyes.

And I’ll walk, yes I’ll walk, yes I’ll walk - - - for us all

For the High Stakes Tests - - - are Gonna Fall.

Step 017

Transforming My Office Ceiling Stain

I was teaching a winter session course whose main theme was the integration of creativity in both the resources and style of instruction for diverse learners. I wanted students to practice “little acts of creativity” to know that they can do it. For example, there was a stain on one of my office ceiling tiles, which caused me to ponder about what I could/should do. Then, I knew what this image could be. I am quite proud of this discovery.



As I took a drink from my coffee cup,
I noticed a stain as I looked up.
I contacted maintenance and to my surprise,
After they looked at with with their very own eyes,
Declared that there was nothing more to do.
They had no explanation for why this stain grew.
They said not to worry, it was no big deal,
Even though I thought it took away from the appeal
Of working in my office – day in and day out.
It was soon forgotten – I had no more clout.
But it was embarrassing when a student would come in
And look at this sight with some chagrin.



One day a thought occurred to me
As *Beautiful Oops* was a book I did see
That talked about creativity and fun;
A book given to my own grandson.
Make something beautiful out of this mess.
Add some details – add some finesse
And lo and behold what sight did appear:
Mr. Potato Head looking for an ear?
I can build my very own versions
And creatively make my own conversions
Of a stain that evoked dirt and grime
Into a character to include in this rhyme.

Step 018

A Work in Progress

Jimmy Carter is a person for whom I have a great deal of respect and admiration. My esteem for Carter originates not as much from his former role as president as his moral commitments and high visibility of works that enhance the quality of the human race. I thought of him as I composed some comments to my students about the importance of the process of what we do rather than the products of one's achievements.

Everything I do is a work in progress.
Some might think that this adds to my stress
Of never completing projects to show
But everything can be improved some more, you know.

Each time I teach one of my courses
I'm likely to find some more resources
That add richness to what I have to say
When I teach that session on an upcoming day.

I would say I have twenty such projects on the shelf
And each one relates to my outer or inner self.
There's a series of activities to enhance creative lessons
And poems and essays for more personal reflections.

I don't really care if none of my projects get done
'Cause then I would be minus one activity that's fun.
Each one advances and becomes much more polished
Until I have to present it or maybe it gets published.

But, that doesn't mean that the project is through;
I just may think of adding something brand new.
So, I put it back in its own special file
And then take it out again after awhile.

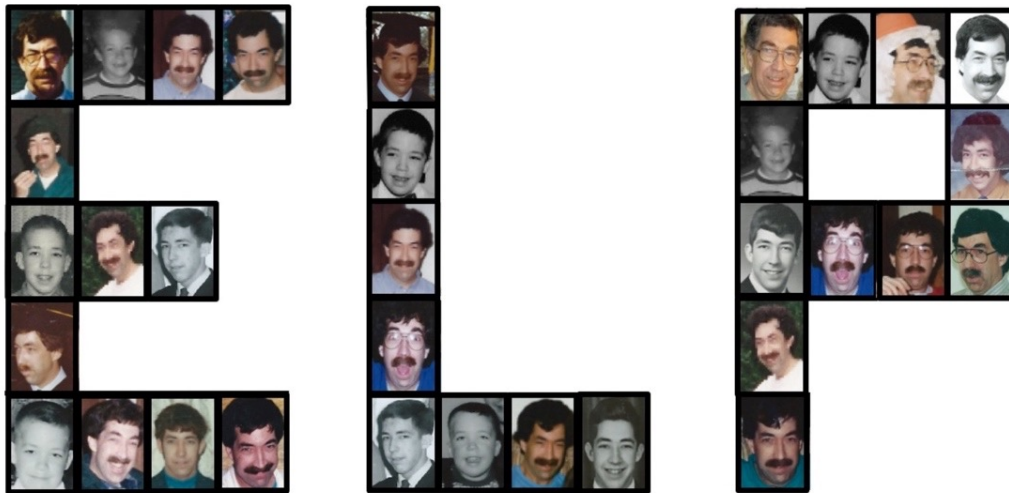
We are each works in progress as we go about each day.
We all have our challenges in our own unique way.
I heard Jimmy Carter talk of a cancer that grows
In his body from his liver to his brain and he knows
That he's lived a good life and his faith is quite strong;
His life has been full of righting what's wrong

We never know how much longer we will live
Or how much more to our projects we'll give.
It's not the completion of our work that gives meaning;
It's how that work changes our inner core feelings.
We are who we are - - - not what we have done -
It's back to a project to have some more fun!

Step 019

The Faces of Phases

Bob Dylan's *Tangled Up in Blue* is known for the kaleidoscopic manner in which the verses are presented – not in chronological time, but in a non-linear set of phases of a time period juxtaposed against another. I thought about this and developed a collage of pictures that originate from different phases of my life and sequenced them, intentionally, out of order with my initials of ELP. I like the effect and combined this visual with a verse that I have used on several occasions, most recently at the Teacher Education Division of CEC during a Pecha Kucha presentation.



My past is out of order
in a chronology of time.
The phases of these faces
lead to my current rhyme.
Dylan captured this paradox
in *Tangled up in Blue*.
I'm shaped by my impressions
of this personal picture stew.

My reflections of my twenties
are influenced by what I know
Of life when I was forty -
It's a blur as my age does grow.
Am I the sum of all my past?
Is now all there is for me?
I think I remembered – No, I just forgot
a part of what used to be.

Step 020

Caine's Arcade

Students hear the word "engagement" used often in my courses. Without engagement, many students tune out whatever lesson is scheduled for their participation. These students then get farther and farther behind and seemingly give up. One video clip was brought to my attention during an in-service training by the CT State Department of Education. It has left a huge impact on me with respect to the engagement of students in our classrooms. I hope you enjoy viewing this clip as much as I did. It has been one of the favorite resources in some of my courses.

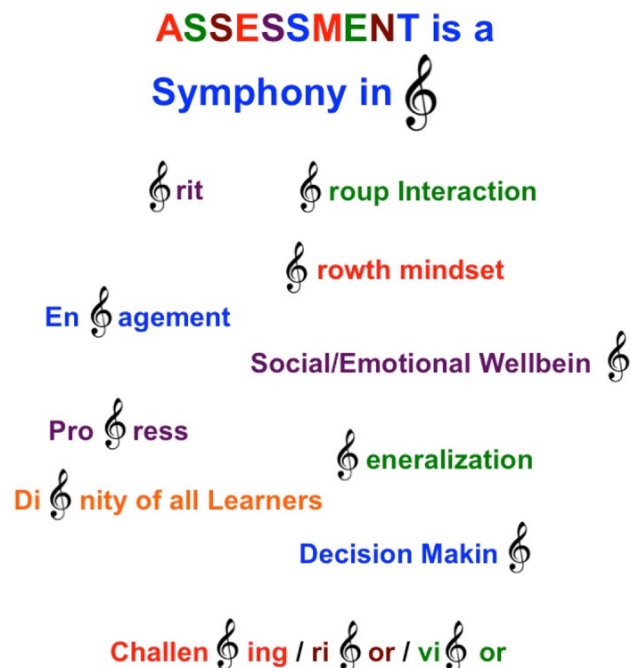
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=falFNkdq96U>

<http://cainesarcade.com>

Step 021

Assessment is a Symphony in G

Carol Tomlinson and Amy Germundson wrote an article in *Educational Leadership* – Teaching as Jazz (May 2007, Vol. 64, Issue 8) as they compared what a teacher does in the classroom with a jazz musician. *Like jazz musicians, great teachers blend sounds from different traditions, hear and echo students' rhythms, and improvise on a dime* (p. 27). This article left an impression on me and I developed a visual I share with students called – Assessment: A Symphony in G. Each of the terms/words on this visual become part of my opening presentation on this topic.



Step 022

Lessons and Truths from Session 1

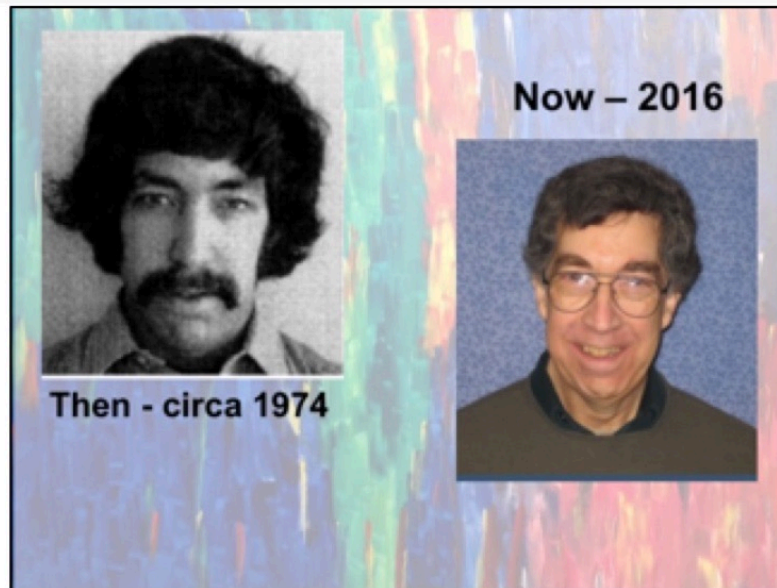
Each time I teach the introductory course in special education I review the truths and lessons from the previous week in a list of statements. I want students to know what I valued from the previous week and compare my notes to what they gained from the session. We can, and should, have different statements. My truths will not be the same as each student's truths as we are both at different points in our paths of understanding of the content. Here is a sample of what this review looks like:

1. The first method of diversifying our instruction is to have a levels of intensity sequence of assistance ready to use for each student and varying which type of assistance to provide based on each student's current responses.
2. When a student is first learning a skill/activity, allow for multiple ways to reinforce that student's efforts and engagement by giving credit in a manner that reinforces steps/sections of that larger activity.
3. Many parents have paved the way for current supports and services by their advocacy; most notably, the origins of the ARC, which held its first meeting in Minneapolis, MN in 1950.
4. We each need a mentor/guide to shine a light for us to better form our values and be an inspiration to our current work. Bob Blue and Parker Palmer serve as such guides for your instructor.
5. Teachers and other school professionals can vary the way in which they request students to become engaged with content in a similar style as you are exploring the key elements of our text and choosing the manner in which you provide feedback on the assignments and resources for each session of this course.
6. Personalizing connections between a student's out-of-school life is apt to enhance a more active engagement with the subject.
7. Developing a good question to explore is sometimes more beneficial than finding solutions to challenges that may only result in short-term changes.
8. We are all on our own Path of Investigation with respect to learning more about students with disabilities. Our paths can be distinctly different and, hopefully, will intersect often with others.
9. The students in my courses are incredibly creative!
10. Normal is often defined from each of our own personal perspectives and backgrounds.
11. You never know what is possible unless you ask!

Step 023

Looking Back

One afternoon, I happened to place two photographs side by side: one taken when I was 24 and the other more recently. I noticed that 40 years had elapsed between the ages of the two versions of who I am. I wondered what each person would have to say to the other. What advice would the older version give to his 24-year-old self? Where would the 24-year-old think he would be at 64? I think most people look back to explain instead of looking ahead and wonder. Looking ahead deals in probabilities. Looking back has the 100% guarantee – or your money back.



Who are these men
Who share the same name
Separated only by
40 years of experience?
Does the younger man know
What will be in store
Or is their meeting
Just some coincidence?
Looking back or looking ahead
In the end does it really matter?
You are who you are
And I am who I am
Whether I be the younger
Or the latter.

Step 024

A Note to My Students - 1

I have to realize that each semester I am guiding the learning of the students in a course I have taught almost 100 times. I learn something different every time I read their assignments and prepare for my different sessions. I look at the content with a different set of eyes and have to remember that I once sat in their seat as a first time learner of this content. I can't share everything I know about topics it has taken me decades to fully understand. So, I begin some semesters with a poem that expresses my thoughts about being a guide to their new learning this semester.

As you are at the beginning
And I am near the end
Of a career of being a teacher,
This message to you I send.

Welcome all the challenges
You'll meet with every day.
Welcome all the hearts and minds
The students bring your way.

Welcome all their struggles
And they joys and happiness.
Welcome all their questions
And their sadness and their bliss.

Welcome to the strengths
Each student brings to you.
Welcome to their challenges
And each weakness too.

Welcome to my classroom
Each and every one.
I'm pleased to by your learning guide.
Now, let's have some fun!

Step 025

What Do We Call You?

Those of you with difficult last names to pronounce will empathize with my response to students who want to know either how to pronounce my last name or ask what I prefer to be called. My response to their question resulted in a poem.

A dilemma I face this time of the year
Is a question from students that I often hear:

What do we call you?

I go by many names each day:
Ernie, Ernest or Poppy some say,
But . . . ***What do we call you?***

Hey you! is certainly out of the question,
but Dr. P or Dr. Ernie have received some mention,
But . . . ***What should we call you?***

I'm three times the age of most students I meet;
I call them by first names when I see them in their seat,
But . . . ***What would you like to be called?***

I don't have an answer for this difficult quandary.
A name is not like a label on some laundry,
But . . . ***What do you prefer to be called?***

Even my family has different ways to announce;
My last name is a difficult one to pronounce,
But . . . ***What can we call you?***

Panks-so-far - - - Pans-ca-far both seem right.
Change the "c" and the "s" in your line of sight,
But . . . ***What name are you most comfortable with?***

Find a name that feels right for you.
That's what I think you ought to do.

Step 026

Everyone Is Different

In my daily review of some blogs I follow, I wanted to share the following quote:

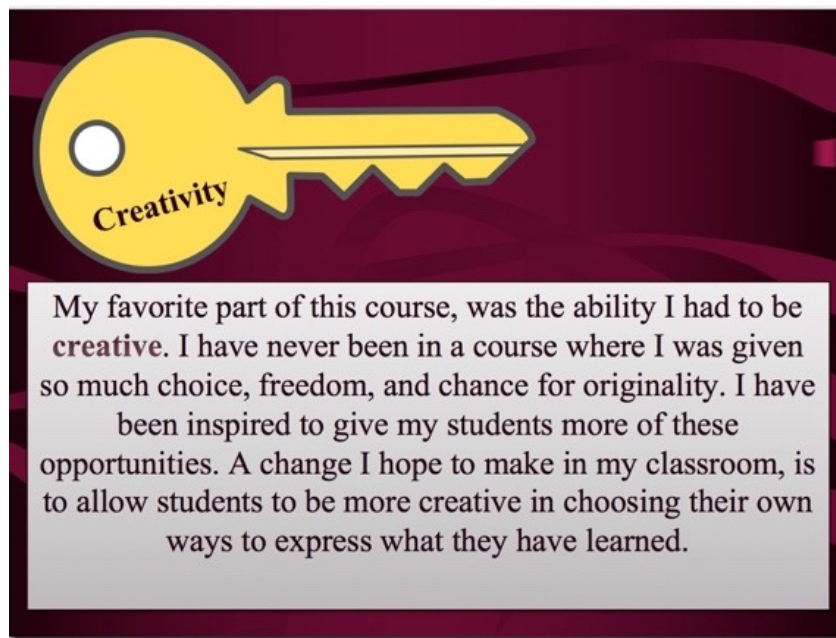
“There is nothing more difficult for a truly creative painter than to paint a rose, because before he can do so he has first to forget all the roses that were ever painted.” Henri Matisse

I thought of this quote in the context of working with a student with an identified disability like cerebral palsy. You have to first forget all you know about other students with cerebral palsy to be more effective with the person with whom you are working now. This doesn't mean that you don't learn anything about the condition called cerebral palsy. Rather, don't anticipate that the needs and supports of the current student will echo the same needs and supports of those students in your past with this same condition.

Step 027

Creativity is the Key

One of the features of this blog will be the inclusion of comments/visuals from students who appreciate the orientation I take in organizing the assignments and resources for my courses. One such student expressed her appreciation for a focus on creativity in an on-line version of the Introduction to Special Education course I offered this past fall semester.



Step 028

Purpose

This is a poem that is a fitting reminder of the important aspects of life on which to focus each day. It speaks of mindfulness, perseverance & contentment.

Blisters hurtin' - - Nothin's certain.
Life can bring a sigh or scream.
Blisters turn to callous soon
Learn from those who live their dream.

Everyone has many talents
To use - - not throw away
And we often have to answer to
Our conscious day-by-day.

No one can tell us exactly how long
The length of time is along the way
So live each day to the full extent
And at life's end you'll have lots to say

About inner feelings of what is right
And in what direction you did go
And how you used your talents and gifts
In a way that only you did know.

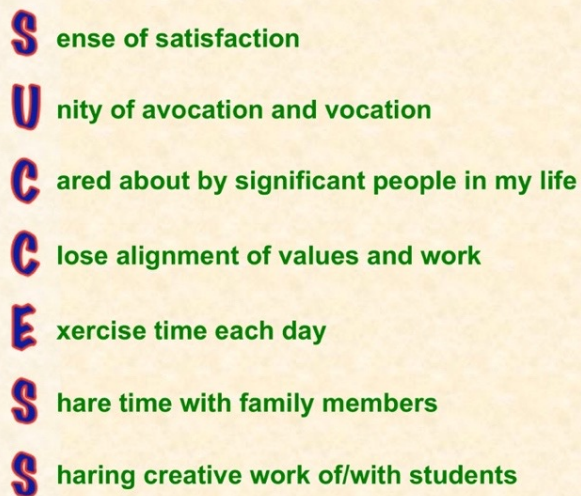
The road can be long - The path can be steep.
It's a journey of wonder and delight
And the strength you build along the way
Makes your goals turn out just right.

Wonder, awe, peace and love
Are the ultimate aspirations
Of a life well lived and a time well spent
In our final deliberations

Step 029

Success

I have taken many opportunities to dwell about what success means in my life. How does our response to this inquiry represent our life's path in both career and personal goals? When I share aspects of my career with students I often use the acrostic version of SUCCESS, but first I ask them to compose their own meaning of success by using these letters as a starting point. Also, since I enjoy writing verse, I conveyed my thoughts on this subject in this manner as well.



Sense of satisfaction
Unity of avocation and vocation
Cared about by significant people in my life
Close alignment of values and work
Exercise time each day
Share time with family members
Sharing creative work of/with students

Does success really have a key
That somehow has eluded?

Is it one Lotto ticket away?
You cannot win if you do not play!

Or, does it reside
Deep inside – and hide?

Or, does it surface many times a day
In the little things I do or say?

Success is an attitude.
It's not about plentitude.

It's a value of enough;
Not to accumulate more stuff.

Contentment, peace and harmony
Mean success in its finality

Step 030

Stuff

I tend to work among an assortment of piles of “stuff.” I feel comfortable and appear to be productive amid the chaos of the piles. Every once in a while I clean things up and uncover some interesting papers buried within a pile, but overall, I tend to know where to find resources that I need - - - amid the “stuff.”

There’s a path through my stuff
Of piles on the floor.
There’s stuff on the walls.
There’s stuff on the door.

I cleaned off a shelf
And got rid of the dust
Sorted through more stuff
And wiped off the rust.

There’s stuff in the air.
There’s stuff on the ground.
There’s stuff on the shelves.
There’s stuff all around.

Stuff comes in
But it doesn’t go out!
Stuff just accumulates
All about.

I’m not happy.
I’m not sad.
All this stuff
Doesn’t make me mad.

There’s stuff on my mind.
There’s stuff in the air.
There’s stuff in my past.
There’s stuff in my hair.

Some stuff is clutter.
Some stuff is junk.
Some stuff is garbage
And some stuff is bunk.

But my stuff has meaning.
My stuff has no measure.
My stuff is history.
My stuff is treasure.

There are pictures to see.
There are words to read.
There are things to remember.
There are actions and deeds.

Your life may be in order.
Your room may be neat.
But don’t touch my stuff
Or my wrath you will meet.

A crossword puzzle;
A name tag or two;
A poem and a picture;
A bottle of glue.

Don’t touch a thing.
You leave things alone.
Go back to your office
And answer the phone.

I’m comfortable here
In my room full of stuff.
You won’t understand
If you think it’s enough.

More stuff will come in.
I’ll make room for it all.
There’s more space on the floor -
There’s a place on the wall.

There are books and papers,
Resources and files
Arranged on the floor
In neat little piles.

So ... when you come into
My office today,
Leave things alone
And go on your way!

Step 031

This Much I Know

I read and listened to a book on tape: *This Much I Know Is True* by Wally Lamb. I thought the title would be a good addition to my introduction to new students during the upcoming semester. As I thought about this title, ten statements came to mind. There will always be a most challenging student in each of your future classes.

- The high-technology equipment is most likely to fail to operate correctly when planning a lesson when you don't have a suitable back-up plan prepared.
- You can always put off until tomorrow what needs to be done today, but the amount of difficulty to complete the tasks increases proportionally to the length of procrastination.
- When you are looking for something important and cannot find it, you can still find things that can be quite interesting.
- It's hard to let go of the "expert" role and, instead, be a facilitator of learning for all.
- There are just as many ways to assess one's competence in a content area as there are creative ways to teach competencies in that content area.
- When you set your phone alarm, it is best to remember to unmute the sound.
- You can always divide the last donut/cookie in half.
- There is more in my major field of expertise that I don't know than there is that I know.
- Life can be quite satisfying at the end of most days!

Several years ago, at a commencement address at a nearby Connecticut university, Wally Lamb stated: *Unqualified as I am to impart wisdom, I have only this advice to give you, graduates: immerse yourself in healthy, renewable relationships with people who love and respect you and whom you love and respect back. Know that your mission in life is the gift you give to the world and that your passion is the gift you give to yourself. Find and nurture both, and keep it all in balance.*

Step 032

Periodic Table of Elements for Introductory Course in Special Education

I am amazed at how many people have replicated the Periodic Table of Elements for their own content area, often times keeping the element symbols (letters) the same but changing what they represent in their specific discipline. You can view such diverse topics as wines, music, NASCAR, etc. and find a Periodic Table of Elements for that heading. I want to be the first instructor to complete a Periodic Table of Elements for an Introduction to Special Education Course. (Visual on the following page)

Step 033

Principles to Teach/Learn By

As part of most syllabi in my courses I insert a ½ page explanation of why I develop my assignments and assessments as presented in the current course.

After twenty years of assessing student knowledge on the content and scope of this course I have arrived at the following principles:

- 1) We are all life-long learners.
- 2) You will not be punished for what you do not know.
- 3) Knowing how to access information and resources is more important than memorizing facts.
- 4) Sharing what we are learning with others is extremely important.
- 5) Working together in teams mirrors experiences as they are most apt to occur in general education settings.
- 6) We all have different and unique skills, competencies, gifts and connections that are reflected in how we process information from the text and from other resources.



1997
Dr. Pancsofar's
first year at CCSU



2014
Beware – This is what
17 years of teaching
will do to you!

Therefore:

Students are expected to be engaged with the course content with an emphasis on the six principles stated above.

Periodic Table of the Elements

Introduction to Special Education
(jointly created by Ernie Pancsofar and students in his course)

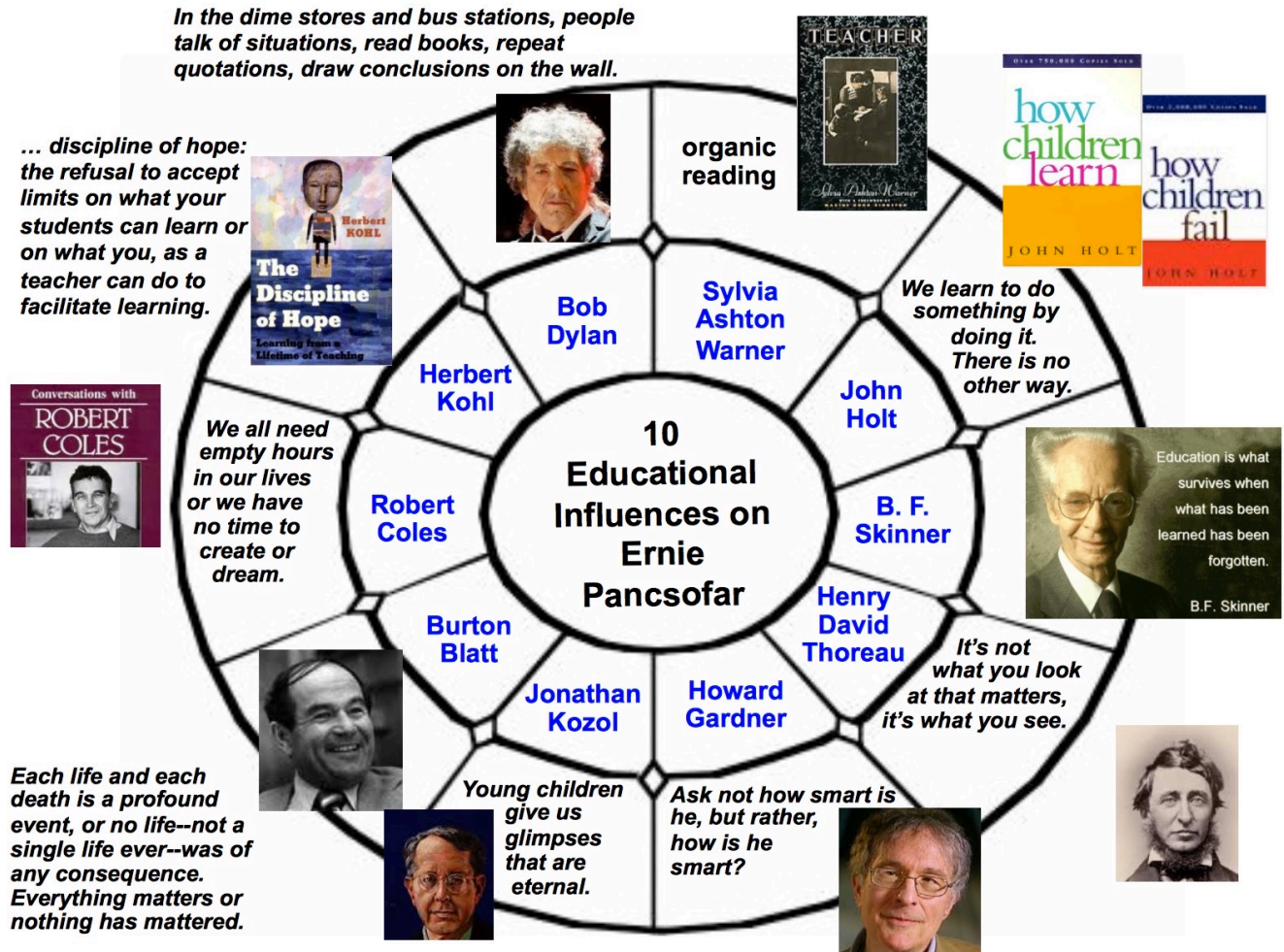
H Handi- capable	He Helpful- ness																					
Li Listen- ing	Ne Never Give Up	F Fidelity	O Oppor- tunities	N Needs	C Choices	B Blind- ness																
Na Natural Cues	Ar Articu- lation	Cl Class- room LRE	S Satis- faction	P Person First Labels	Si ASL Signing	Al Abilities																
K K-W-L graphic	Kr Know your Rights	Br Brain- storming	Se Section 504	AS Anne Sullivan	Ge General- ization	Ga Games engage- ment	Zn Zone of Proximal Dev.	Cu Curricu- lum	Ni Negative Inter- ventions	Co Collabor- ation	Fe Fetal Alcohol Synd.	Mn Mnemon- ics	Cr Creativ- ity	V Visuals	Ti Tiering	Sc Scaffold- ing	Ca Capa- bilities	Be Beliefs				
Rb Research Based	Xe Dyslexia	I Inclu- sion	Te Technol- ogy	Sb Smarter Balanced Assess.	Sn Special Needs	In Intensify Levels	Cd Creative Devel- opment	Ag Alter- native Grades	Pd Periodic Table Activity	Rh Raise Your Hand	Ru Rules in Class- room	Tc Think Tac Toe	Mo Modifi- cations	Nb Nobody left Behind	Zr Zero Reject	Y YES - I CAN!	Sr SRBI	Mg Mixing Students				
Cs Consen- sus	Rn Rein- force- ment	At Atti- tudes	Po Polar	Bi Bi -	Pb PBIS	T Teach for Leader- ship	Hg All Have Gifts	Au Autism	Pt Picto- grams	Ir IRIS Center	Os Organiz- Skills	Re Reflec- tions	W Web- sites	Ta Task Analysis	Hf High Func- tioning	La Laby- rinth	Ba Behavior Analysis					
Fr Frames of Mind									Mt Mis- Takes Are OK	Hs High Stakes	Bh Behav- ior Plan	Sg Study Guides	Ha Handi- cap	Rf Ron Fer- guson	Ac Accom- moda- tions	Ra Raise Your Hand						

Ce Person Centered	Lu Levels Use	Dy Mr. Bob Dylan	Tb Theme- Based Learning	Gd Guide Dogs	Eu Eureka!	Sm Sam Berns	Pm Practice Test Method	Nd Neuro- Diversity	Pr Parent Rights	Ce Person Centered
Th Think Tac Toe	Lr Learning	Cf Circle of Friends	Bk Black- board Learn	Cm Commit- ments	Am Good Time of Day	Pu Public Laws	Np No one's Perfect	U Univer- sal Design	Pa Pancso- far	Th Think Tac Toe
Yb Your Behavior	No Normal ???	Fm FM System	Es Embrace the Shake	Er Ernie (see Pa)	Ho Home- work	Am Good Time of Day	Np No one's Perfect	U Univer- sal Design	Pa Pancso- far	Th Think Tac Toe
Yb Your Behavior	No Normal ???	Fm FM System	Es Embrace the Shake	Er Ernie (see Pa)	Ho Home- work	Am Good Time of Day	Np No one's Perfect	U Univer- sal Design	Pa Pancso- far	Th Think Tac Toe

Step 034

Educational Influences

One time a student took a concentric circles organizer I presented in class and identified 10 influences on his current educational philosophy. I thought what he did was amazing and I replicated his activity, but with 10 Educational Influences on my current set of values. These are not the 10 most important influences, but 10 that I happened to put down on a particular day when I had first viewed his version.



Step 035

Transitions

One of the themes in my courses is the process of helping students make the transition from school to post school environments. As part of this discussion, I request each person to comment on any significant transitions they have made in their own lives from the “known” to the “unknown”. As we share experiences, I relate an experience I had when traveling to Lexington, KY several years ago. When I returned from this trip, I recorded statements of what I learned from this not-so-usual transition from home to a place of employment in Kentucky. The discussion from their own transitions leads to generic statements about transition supports in general that could also apply to students leaving school for post school options.

Debriefing A Transition Experience (A reflective experience by Ernie Pancsofar)

For several years during my career, I frequently traveled by plane throughout the United States and along with this mode of transportation are occasional delays and inconveniences. One such delay occurred early one evening in Hartford, CT, as I was heading to Lexington, KY. The plane that was scheduled to take me on the first part of the trip to Pittsburgh, PA, was delayed into Hartford due to fog at its point of origin.

As I awaited word of when my flight would leave, I overheard a conversation across the aisle. A gentleman was relating to a companion that if his plane was delayed out of Hartford, he was canceling his trip because he would miss his connection in Pittsburgh to travel to Detroit, MI. The delay did, in fact, occur and he left the airport. His friend knew her connection would be tight in Pittsburgh and she was heading to Columbus, OH, to deliver an important presentation to her supervisors at her place of employment. When I knew a delay was inevitable, I approached the airline representative and inquired whether he thought I would make my connection in Pittsburgh. "No," he replied. "You will definitely not make the connection." I decided to go to Pittsburgh just the same since it took me closer to my final destination of Lexington, KY.

While on the way to Pittsburgh I reviewed the general map of the United States and surveyed the major cities that were in the general proximity of Lexington, KY. I noted that Nashville, Cincinnati, Louisville, and Dayton were not too far away. I would inquire about any final flights leaving Pittsburgh to one of those destinations. As I pondered my predicament, I overheard a conversation behind me from two gentlemen who were

Step 035

Transitions

(continued)

heading for Louisville and who were just barely going to make their connecting flight. To our surprise, that flight was leaving from the gate right next to the one at which we were arriving. As the plane landed, we hurried toward the gate only to discover that it had just left about five minutes before.

I went to the passenger assistance desk for advice about what to do. One option was to remain in Pittsburgh that evening and take the first available flight the next morning to Lexington, but that would be too late for my presentation. The next best offer was to go standby to Dayton, OH, since that would be much closer to Lexington than where I was at the moment. While waiting at the assistance desk I overheard the passenger from Hartford who was heading for Columbus complain that she didn't want to take a commuter plane to Columbus. She had just missed her connection on a larger jet. The option being presented was unacceptable to her and she chose to miss her important meeting and experience the consequences.

I quickly headed to the commuter airline section, which was, of course, at the opposite end of the airport. I waited about 45 minutes only to learn that the plane was full and I would not be able to travel to Dayton. However, as I was walking back toward the desk, I overheard a final boarding call for Columbus, OH. Without hesitating, I went to the gate, waited on standby, gave up my Lexington ticket in exchange for a ticket to Columbus, OH, thinking that there would be another plane from there to take me closer to Lexington.

I arrived in Columbus at 9:30 PM to find that no flights leave the airport after that time. I was about 250 miles from Lexington. I began to check on rental cars available for out-of-state-travel to no avail until I inquired at the last desk, National Rental (The Green One!). They had a car heading for Memphis and would let me take it as far as Lexington. I got to my car only to discover that the battery was dead. Did I tell you it was about 20 degrees out? The people there were nice and quickly located another car not originally headed for Memphis and I was on my way. By this time, it was 11:30 PM and I was scheduled to meet my contact in Lexington at the Rental car desk at the airport at 8:30 AM. I had about five hours of driving ahead of me.

Step 035

Transitions

(continued)

After taking a few wrong turns, I headed to Cincinnati, OH. About 1:30 AM I began to feel the strain of the day and got extremely tired. I located a motel around 2:00 AM, checked in and requested a 4:40 AM wake up call. At 4:45 AM I awoke to find that the call from the front desk had not been made. I quickly showered, paid my bill, and was on my way. While at the desk the night attendant alerted me to go right through the city to avoid the bypass since that would put an extra 40 - 50 miles on the trip. I took his advice, drove the remaining distance to Lexington, without any idea of where the airport was. I saw signs that pointed me in the right direction, found the airport (The planes up above were a great natural cue!), dropped off the rental car and, just as I approached the desk, my contact person walked over and introduced himself saying, "*How was your trip?*"

Lessons from My Kentucky Trip

It was necessary to tell this entire story to relate the lessons I learned on this trip. By the way, my scheduled talk was on the transition process from school to work for students with severe disabilities. I had a great transition story to tell them ... along with the following lessons:

- 1) There are many supports available in the community ... if we search for them.
- 2) The attitude we each have about our ability to reach an established goal is only limited by our ability to keep searching for the right supports to get there.
- 3) At the first sign of inconvenience, some people opt to give up and go home. (Remember the traveler to Detroit.)
- 4) Other people have supports offered but they are not suitable to them and they are willing to experience the unpleasant consequences instead. (The traveler going to Columbus wasn't satisfied with the prospects of completing her journey on a small commuter airplane.)
- 5) Getting to your goal is not always pleasant, convenient and easy. (The cold, dead battery, wrong turns, strain, etc. were all unpleasant elements of my transition from the security of home to a sought for destination.)

Step 035

Transitions

(continued)

- 6) Often, I need to rely on other people who I did not know well to guide me closer to my goal.
- 7) Throughout this trip, I had no doubt whatsoever that I would make it to Lexington to meet my contact person at the pre-established time. I just didn't know at each juncture of the trip how I would do it.
- 8) At times, the supports that we put in place don't work. What are our backups? (I had expected the proper wake-up call but could have also packed my own portable alarm.)
- 9) Unexpected supports will come from unexpected sources. (The night attendant provided me with directions that allowed me to reach my final destination at the designated time.)
- 10) I was in pretty steady contact with my home base of support, my wife. Without her caring, concern and love, I would not have attempted this journey. Who provides the support for the people you assist? Where is their base of strength from which to venture forth to reach their established goals and dreams?

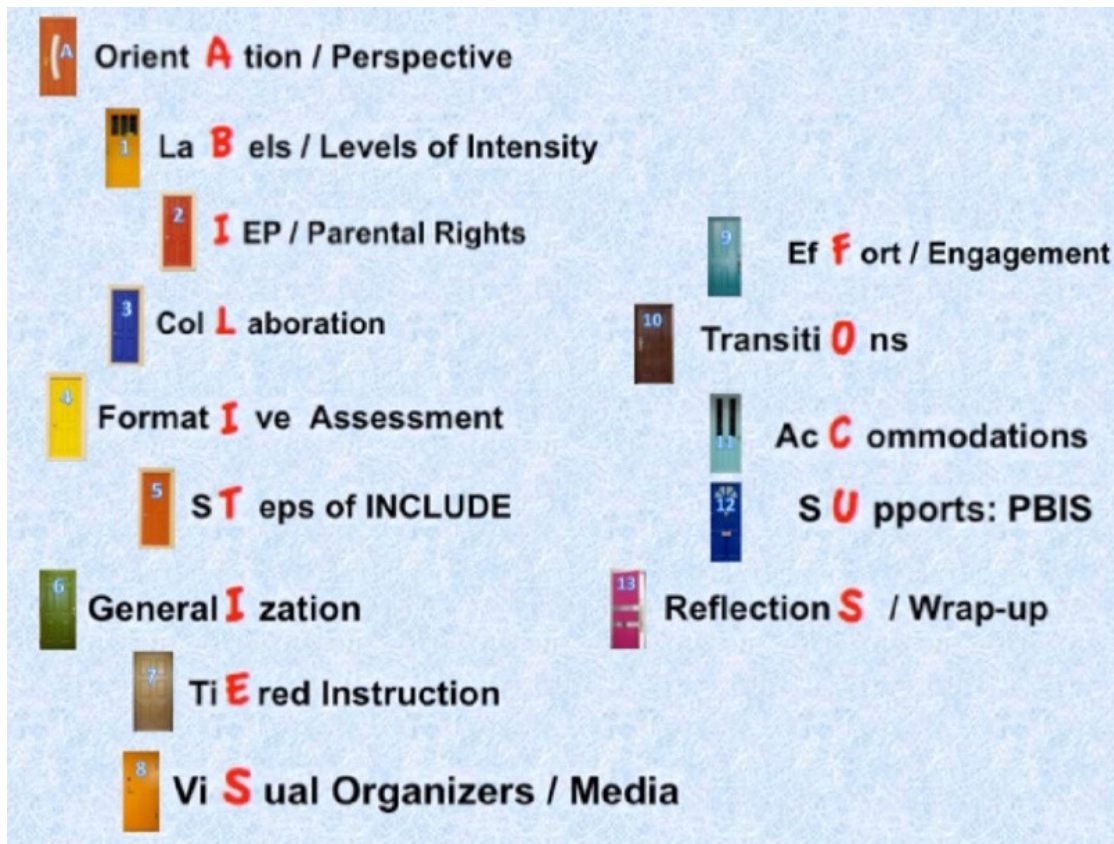
Luckily, this exact travel experience will not repeat itself, but I will have delays, cancellations, long, extended periods of time at airports, etc. I will remain calm and immediately begin to plot how to successfully remedy this new challenge as I hear irate passengers yelling at the ticket agents displacing their anger in an unproductive manner.

If we look hard enough, there are numerous experiences in our personal lives that provide insights into how we choose to support students with disabilities. These learning moments contain significant connections for each of us to share with one another.

Step 036

Opening New Doors

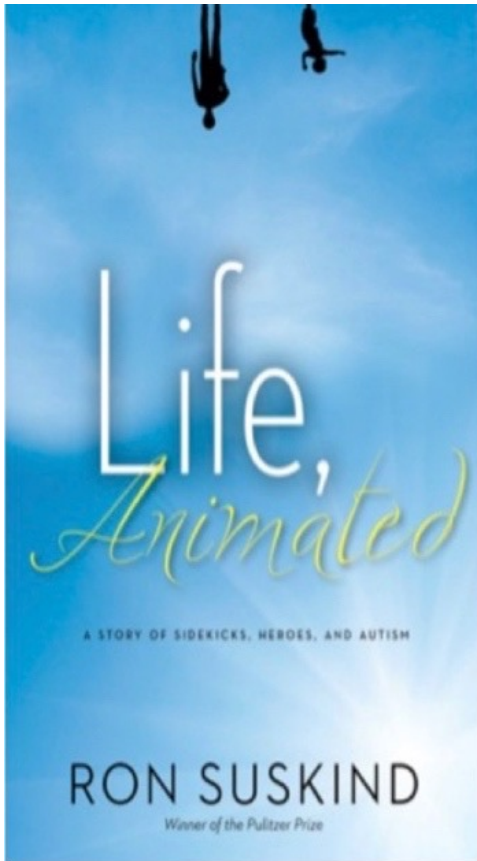
I attended a workshop about developing a narrative to a course that becomes the roadmap from which student's experience the resources and content. For my narrative, I chose opening new doors of understanding that evolve into an ABILITIES focus rather than one on DIS-abilities. I include this visual organizer as part of the opening session to one of my courses.



Step 037

Life Animated

On my drive to work one day, I was listening to NPR and the host was interviewing an author whose name I recognized: Ron Suskind. I was quite intrigued by the topic as Mr. Suskind related that the book was about his interactions with his son, Owen, who is on the autism spectrum and who has a fascination with Disney characters, especially sidekicks. Each hero has a sidekick who enhances the story and typically plays a key part. Owen was a huge fan of sidekicks. I read this book and found it fascinating and pulled out a few quotes and wrote a poem that I sent to Ron Suskind's website.



But we've come around on that - - - a gradual acceptance, across years, that Owen is different, not diminished, capped by the debates over nuanced issues of villainy and virtue with him and his Disney Club members. It has affirmed for me and Cornelia the conviction that Owen, and so many folks like him, are, in essence, exactly like the rest of us, only more so and less so.

... different yet the same. His differences are so striking, that when you hit that sameness - - - that we are all essentially identical in our urges and needs and joys - - - it's still a surprise.

How you feel ... is who you are. But how you behave ... gets you what you want. He's beginning to make choices. His own choices. Not ours.

I want to fix that, fix him, but lately Cornelia is saying, maybe we have to think more about just enjoying him for who he is and not trying to improve or repair him every minute of every day.

Step 037

Life Animated

(continued)

My Thoughts Upon Reading *Life Animated*

What lies within us?
What lies without?
Our sidekicks have voices
From inside they shout.

*Hey, we're more alike
Than we have differences.*

The hero lies within
For all future references.”

We all struggle with finding meaning
And what lies beyond each bend,
But we find the journey's the answer
Right up to the very end.

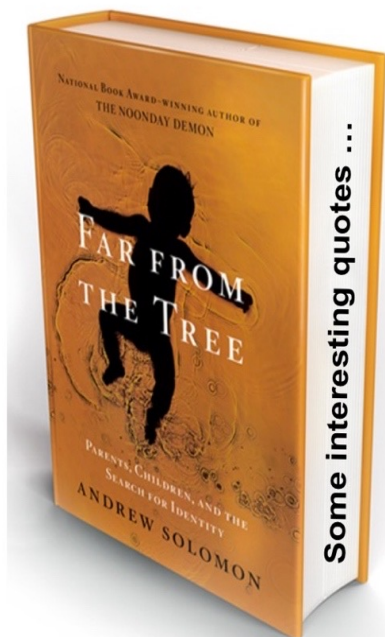
Thank you Ron, Cornelia and Walt
And thank you Owen for being the star.
We all have gifts and talents to explore
That take us from here to places afar.

Wisdom comes from our own reflection
As we hold up the mirror to the light.
Our paths have many twists and turns,
But - - - in the end, things turn out just right.

Step 038

Far From the Tree

While on the topic of good books, I must recommend one by Andrew Solomon. Once again, I heard him interviewed on NPR and was fascinated with his journalism skills and number of interviews that went into each chapter of his book. Basically, he took several categories/labels attached to people who share a general connection but who, most likely, did not inherit that condition from parents. He referred to these conditions as horizontal acquisitions; i.e., being on the autism spectrum, being a gay son, having Down syndrome, having committed a murder, living with schizophrenia, etc. I would put this book on my Top 10 of all time largely because of the way in which Andrew Solomon honors the voices of those whom he has interviewed. He makes no bold statements. Yet, he clearly articulates what life is like for a cross section of individuals who are represented by each specific label. Here are a few quotes that stood out for me.



Miguel de Unamuno wrote, "It is not usually our ideas that make us optimists or pessimists, but it is our optimism or pessimism that makes our ideas." (p. 24)

We need a vocabulary in which the two concepts are not opposites, but compatible aspects of a condition. . . . Ludwig Wittgenstein said, "All I know is what I have words for." (p. 5)

"You gotta take your mess and find yourself a message!" (p. 25)

The able-bodied can be generous narcissists: they eagerly bestow what they feel good about giving without considering how it will be received. (p. 32)

We are all differently abled from one another, and context - - - which is socially constructed - - - often decides what will be protected and indulged. (p. 33)

Recent academic work suggests that people who know their condition to be irreversible are happier than those who believe their condition may be ameliorated. In such cases, ironically, hope may be the cornerstone of misery. (p. 35)

Step 039

Inner Life of a Teacher

A student in my class located a video clip in response to one of the chapters of our text. I think you will gain an insight into the life of a teacher and how knowing about one's personal life can enrich the connection between teacher and student. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9bSu_Snlbsw

Step 040

MLK Tribute

I wanted to recognize Martin Luther King, Jr. in a novel and creative way. As I reread his famous "I Have A Dream" speech, I wondered how I could use this essay as a focus of a creative product. I noticed that when I investigated three sections of this speech, I could surround the letters of his name in an acrostic fashion. I was proud of this observation and created this tribute.

I have a drea **M** that one day this nation
will rise up **A** nd live out the

t **R** ue meaning of its creed:

"We hold **T** hese truths to be

self-ev **I** dent; that all

me **N** are created equal."

I have a dream ... that one day even
the state ... of Mississippi,

a state swe **L** tering with the

heat of inj **U** stice,

swel **T** ering with the

H eat of oppression,

will b **E** transformed into

an oasis of f **R** eedom and justice.

Let freedom ring
from the mighty mountains

of New Yor **K** . Let freedom

r **I** ng from the

heighte **N** ning

Alle **G** henies

of Pennsylvania.

Step 040

MLK Tribute

(continued)

As an expansion of the MLK tribute, I used my own name as the acrostic and mirrored the message I wanted to send to my students.

As I r **E** ad
Ma **R** tin Luther
Ki **N** g, Jr's famous
I have a dr **E** am speech
I **S** ense a need
T o

Ref **L** ect on the
Hop **E** I have
F **O** r the future.

I ho **P** e that
A ll students
ca **N** achieve within
their s **C** hools
S ocial
and em **O** tional growth
F or facing
The ch **A** llenges in their
futu **R** e.

Step 041

Commonsense Suggestions

When I meet with teachers in my courses or when I have conducted in-service training, I often ask them what strategies they use that would fall under the “commonsense” of maintaining a healthy classroom atmosphere. I share the current list of these suggestions with teacher candidates and other certification seeking students when discussing how to create a positive classroom atmosphere that leads to more productive learning by all students.

- **Analyze** possible causes for the interfering behavior.
- **Be aware** of the behavior: Is it really such a difficulty?
- **Body language** is of extreme importance.
- Remain **Calm**.
- **Choices:** There are several alternative strategies for what to do next.
- **Clear yourself** from negative preconceptions.
- Understand what disruptive students are trying to **communicate** through their misbehaviors.
- **Competencies:** Develop a list of what the person has the capability of doing well.
- **Consistency:** Even though strategies may be different, be consistent in following the values to guide your interactions with student.
- **Creativity** is needed to discover options that no one else has yet developed.
- **Define “success”** from the perspective of the student and not from your own point of view.
- **Develop** a trusting relationship.
- **Differences** do not always equate into problems.
- Treat all students with **dignity and respect**.
- **Ecological perspective** is needed at all times.
- **Effective instructional procedures** will help to avoid confusion by the student about what is expected.
- **Encourage the positive:** you will succeed.
- **Environmental modifications** may be necessary.
- **Expectations** should be clear to the student.
- **Form your own opinion.**

Step 041

Commonsense Suggestions

(continued)

- **Hasty decisions** should be avoided.
- **Honesty** is, indeed, the best policy.
- **Honeymoon phase** – the testing will begin.
- **Humor**, when used in a caring manner, is welcome .
- **Identify events** that occurred just before the incident of concern.
- **If you're not sure, ASK.**
- **Ignoring:** remember, the behavior will probably worsen before it gets better.
- **Individualize** your approach to each student.
- **Know** the student as well as possible.
- Learn from other people's **mistakes**.
- **Negative reputations** may be grossly exaggerated; form your own opinions after getting to know the student.
- **Neutral position:** don't overreact – remain calm.
- **Patience** is hard to maintain, but has its place.
- **Peer assistance** could be useful.
- Don't **play into the situation**.
- **Positive attitude** – Yes, I can!
- Avoid **power struggles**.
- **Praise** needs to be part of our everyday habits.
- **Protect** yourself from injury when an emergency situation occurs and get assistance immediately.
- **React** only after you have been given a reason. I know your're angry - - but I care.
- Maintain **realistic** expectations.
- **Redirect** the student to another activity.
- **Reduce the stress** in your own life and you will be better able to handle conflict in stressful situations.
- **Request** – don't order.
- Exercise **self-control**.

Step 041

Commonsense Suggestions (continued)

- **Reinforcement** can provide powerful results.
- **Significant Others** – Who are they?
- **Think before you speak.** Your words may come back to haunt you.
- **When in doubt,** take data!

Step 042

COURAGE TO TEACH

Early in my teaching career, I was introduced to the work of Parker Palmer and read his seminal book – *The Courage to Teach*. I had the good fortune to attend a three-day retreat on this topic and had time to reflect on the way Parker Palmer has influenced my values and, subsequently, my teaching. I summarized my thoughts/ feelings of this event by composing an Acrostic Visual using COURAGE TO TEACH as the central focus.

Copper **B**eech **I**nstitute
Opportunities for **T**alking & listening with a
Unity of purpose f**O**r seeking tru**T**hs and focus on
Pa **R**ker Palmer's Vision and t**E**achings in a
Retre **A**t of visionizing values, listening **A**nd wisdom with
A **G**athering of peers who meet and **C**are about
How th**E**y interact with others & listen to t**H**eir inner voices.

Step 043

Grading Practices

In one of my courses, I commented to the group that when assessing students and transposing that assessment to a letter grade, there needs to be a consensus among teachers and school administrators about what each grade represents. What is an "A"? In this course, an A equals the accumulation of points from assignments that I require to provide me with evidence of your engagement and competence with selected elements from the course. An "A" does not mean mastery of x% of the course. That would be impossible! An "A" does not equal acquiring minutia of information crammed for in a multiple choice, bubble sheet exam. I, as your instructor, am in charge of how each of you can earn an "A" in this course. My caution and advice when assigning grades in the general education classroom, in which there are students with varying intensities of disability, is to engage in this discussion. If an "A" means mastery of the content standard, are there multiple ways to acquire mastery? If students approximate the content standard, what grade could they earn through active participation, alignment of IEP goals and objectives with the content standard and/or completion of activities/projects within the topic/scope of the content standard? I pose this question as a worthwhile place to begin the conversation among members of grade-level teams.

Step 044

Asking the Right Questions

I heard the following story from Burton Blatt, a pioneer in special education and humanity in general. I was a doctoral student and found his lecture quite intriguing. Here is a section of his talk:

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

Step 044

Asking the Right Question

(continued)

Here is another perspective on the theme of asking the right question:

Teaching class one day, it was a spectacular spring day with the temperature up in the mid eighties for the first time of the year. I anticipated that a student might ask, “Can we meet outside today?” So, I decided to make this into a lesson about a truth in securing special education supports and services: sometimes, you only get what you ask for, not necessarily, what you need. There may be conflicting points of view about what the word “appropriate” means in one of the key tenets of the special education law: FAPE (Free Appropriate Public Education). At times, a school administrator may offer a specific support only to discover that a parent requests additional supports with a justification that the administrator had not previously considered; i.e., an evolving curriculum option that could be available via a local university at no-cost or little additional cost. Back to my classroom situation, I did hear the anticipated question and I responded with a “Yes, we can! I prepared a 45-minute, in-class explanation of five areas of content for today’s session and I expanded the typical 20 minute, in-class discussion period to an hour, which could be conducted outside in the spectacular, spring sunshine.” I had fully intended to conduct the class inside if I had not been asked the critical question. I am reminded of a sweltering summer day at the beginning of a course when I asked the person in charge of scheduling rooms, “Is there an air-conditioned room I could switch my class to?” She replied, “Yes, I can make that switch.” The room was wonderful! I told the students that I could have stayed where I had been scheduled and we would all be miserable. And, I wondered why the teachers who were still in the miseries of the sweltering building had not thought to ask for a change in venue. Again, if you don’t ask, you live with what has been offered. The worst that could happen would be a “no” to any such request

Step 045

Choice

I composed this poem in West Virginia during a delay in a luncheon presentation. I went back to my hotel room and wrote a first draft and then presented it as part of my talk on the values surrounding our work with individuals with disabilities.

Somebody asked me, "What do you choose?"
How can I answer: Will I win? Will I lose?

"What do you choose?" is loaded with meaning
Pepsi or Coke or to go out for this evening.

Are you talking about food or a new place to live?
Are you talking of my life or what you will give?

Are you listening to me tell my dreams that I wish
Or, are you fooling around with new words on a dish

That you offer to me? It sounds very good.
But, it's hard to believe you -- I wish that I could.

My dreams for the future are hard to express.
My dreams and my visions are right now a guess.

I need some more options to be in my life.
I need some one near me to hear of my strife.

Choices you offer may not be for me.
And choices I ask for, we all won't agree.

Let's talk about choice and see what it means
As you sit here and listen to each of my dreams.

Step 046

Commentary on Today's Educational System

A student in a course that recently concluded brought my attention to a 6-minute video clip [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dqTTojTija8>] that connects well with the text for that course: *Creative Schools* by Ken Robinson and Lou Aronica. One of the purposes of this blog is to share connections my students are making and how they provide me with resources I might not otherwise access.

Step 047

Dignity

I was struck by what a school counselor said on TV a few days ago when commenting on a leadership program among high school students who were pairing up with younger students as mentors. She said that these students already had many leadership skills, but they just needed a structure in which to demonstrate those leadership skills.

Quite a few years ago, I was presenting an in-service to a group of students and I asked one student to leave the room. While he was gone, I asked the remaining students to jot down a couple of words to describe their peer when he came back in the room. Then, outside in the hallway, I asked the student to enter the classroom, walk around and leave. He did as instructed and the students wrote down some words to describe his brief appearance. Then, I asked the person to go back into the room, but this time to walk with *dignity*. The students, once again, recorded some words to describe the person. During the debriefing session, I asked for a comparison in their choice of words to describe this same person for the two different appearances. One person summarized her list of words by stating that during his first appearance, the student had his eyes focused on the ground, did not give any eye contact, seemed rushed and left the room rather quickly. The second time through, he held his shoulders back, looked people in the eyes, smiled, and walked more slowly as he made his way around the room. My moral to the story: the student always had dignity. I just had to remind him of it as he walked into the classroom for the second time. I did not teach him about dignity nor have him practice it - - - he just walked with dignity the second time.

Step 048

Questions on My Mind

Using the well-known tune, *Blowin' in the Wind*, by Bob Dylan, I composed a set of lyrics that address a different set of questions directed at the misplaced emphasis on high-stakes assessments as the main source of information regarding a student's progress. I believe that the assessment process in schools ought to measure what has been learned in school and not what the student already brings to that learning setting due to outside-of-school privileges/opportunities/enrichments. Teachers should be accountable for using instructional strategies that are commonly referred to as evidence-based: sanctioned by verified entities, accepted by one's professional affiliations, to provide guidance to those teachers.

How many times will it take till we know
that all children don't learn all the same?
How many times will we not turn our head
and see the harm done in testing's good name?
Yes, and how many years will it take till we show
that it's not the children we should blame?

Please hear my words, my friend.
Don't lie to our children.
Make learning fun and meaningful for all.

How can we teach to a child who's not there;
a child in poverty and more?
How many times must we search for a cause
that's hidden by a single testing score?
Yes, and how many times will the children cry out,
"Get us out of this rotten testing game?"

Please hear my words, my teacher
And try real hard to reach her.
Make learning fun and meaningful for all.

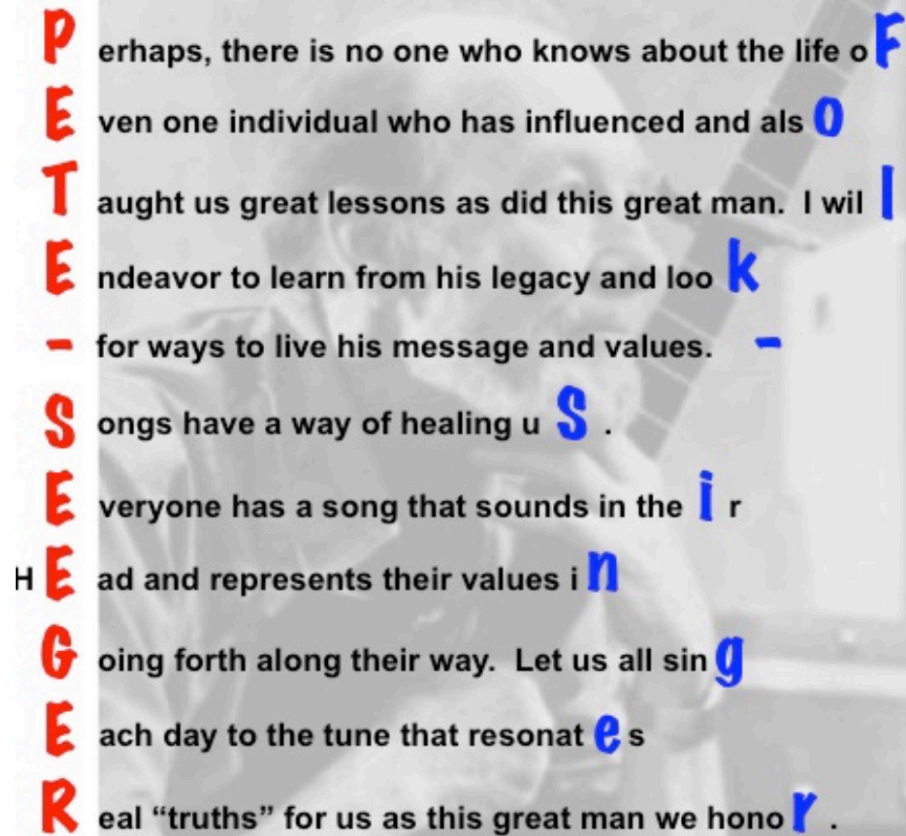
How many subjects must we lay by the side
and only work on reading skills and math?
Yes, and how many hours can our students explore
all the skills to continue on life's path?
How many voices must cry out in the dark
that the tests fall far from the mark?

Please hear my words, my friend.
We're hurting our children.
Make learning fun and meaningful for all.

Step 049

PETE SEEGER

When Pete Seeger passed away, I developed a double acrostic poem to honor his memory.



Perhaps, there is no one who knows about the life o**F**
Even one individual who has influenced and als**O**
Taught us great lessons as did this great man. I wil**L**
Endeavor to learn from his legacy and loo**K**
- for ways to live his message and values. **-**
Songs have a way of healing u**S** .
Everyone has a song that sounds in the **i** r
H **E**ad and represents their values i**n**
Going forth along their way. Let us all sin**g**
Each day to the tune that resonat**e** s
Real "truths" for us as this great man we hono**r** .

Step 050

Choice of Words in an Observation

I impress upon students in my courses that their choice of words when describing events in the classroom can set a tone for their actions. For example, using a phrase “Bob can’t concentrate” during independent work sets a different tone than “Bob doesn’t concentrate” during independent work. In the first instance, a suggestion may be to remove Bob from the classroom to a more isolated location to complete his work. After all, the teacher has determined he “can’t” concentrate. However, sound reducing earphones could also be an option to stay in the same room as his peers because the teacher takes on the challenge of figuring out what accommodations are necessary because he currently “doesn’t” concentrate well. I illustrated this difference in feedback I provided to a student during her field experience when taking notes on what she had been observing.

Choice of Words in an Observation

As I read the observation

Jerry is very antsy and unable to remain focused while the group activities were going on. A pair of students were doing a role-play situation and the rest of the students were supposed to watch and critique what the students were doing wrong. Jerry was unable to wait his turn to participate and became very disruptive to the activity. When Jerry was asked to participate, he was incapable of participating because of his inability to stay focused and remain settled in his seat.

Suggested changes

Jerry is very antsy and ~~unable to~~ **does not** remain focused while the group activities were going on. A pair of students were doing a role-play situation and the rest of the students were supposed to watch and critique what the students were doing wrong. Jerry was ~~unable to~~ **did not** wait his turn to participate and became very disruptive to the activity. When Jerry was asked to participate, he was ~~incapable of participating~~ **did not participate** because ~~of his inability to stay~~ **he did not remain focused** and remain settled in his seat.