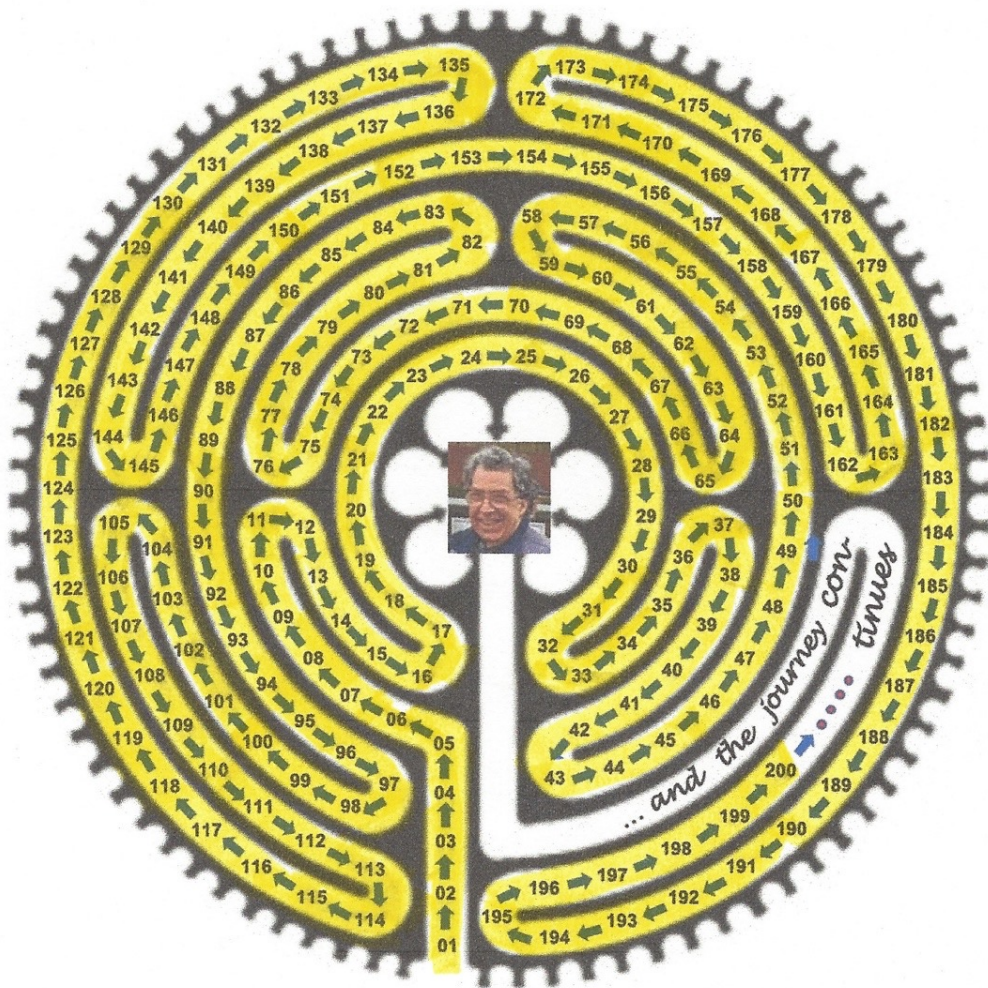


# On the Path of the Perfecting Teacher

Walking the Labyrinth  
Steps 001 - 250

Current Update: 04/27/26

Ernest L. Pancsofar



# Walking the Labyrinth

## Steps 001 - 250

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** Seek **R** of Evidence-Based Practices  
**S**elf Re **F** lective  
**E** ngaging  
**C** reative  
**T** houghtful  
**E**mploys **I** nclusive Practices  
**Ki N** d  
**Encoura G** ing  
  
**Cul T** urally Responsive  
**Values** **Formativ 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

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

**Henry David Thoreau**

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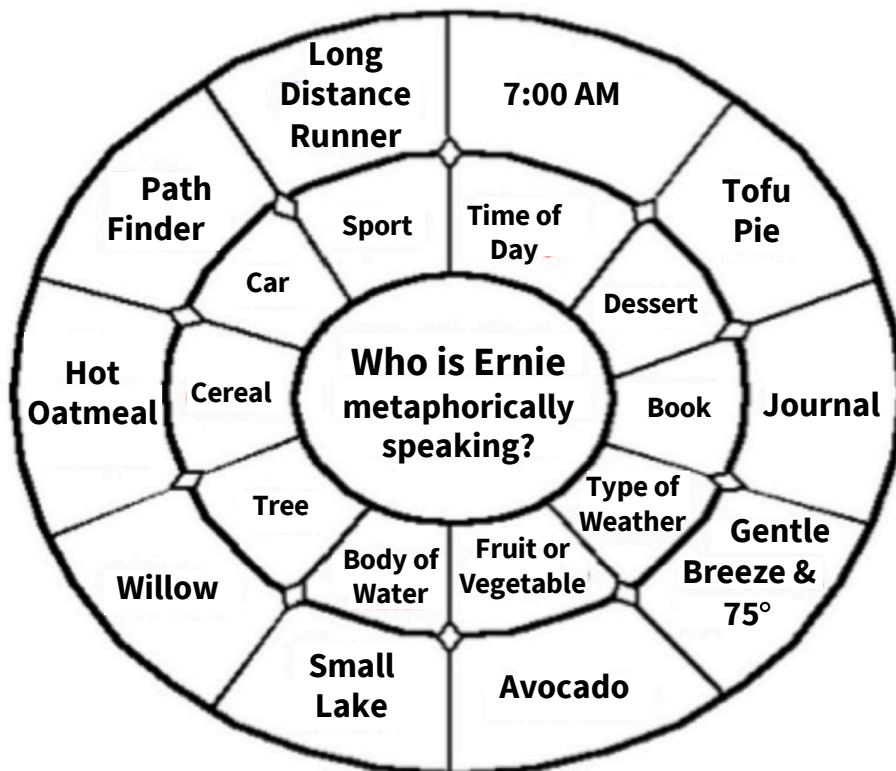
## Step 001

### 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.

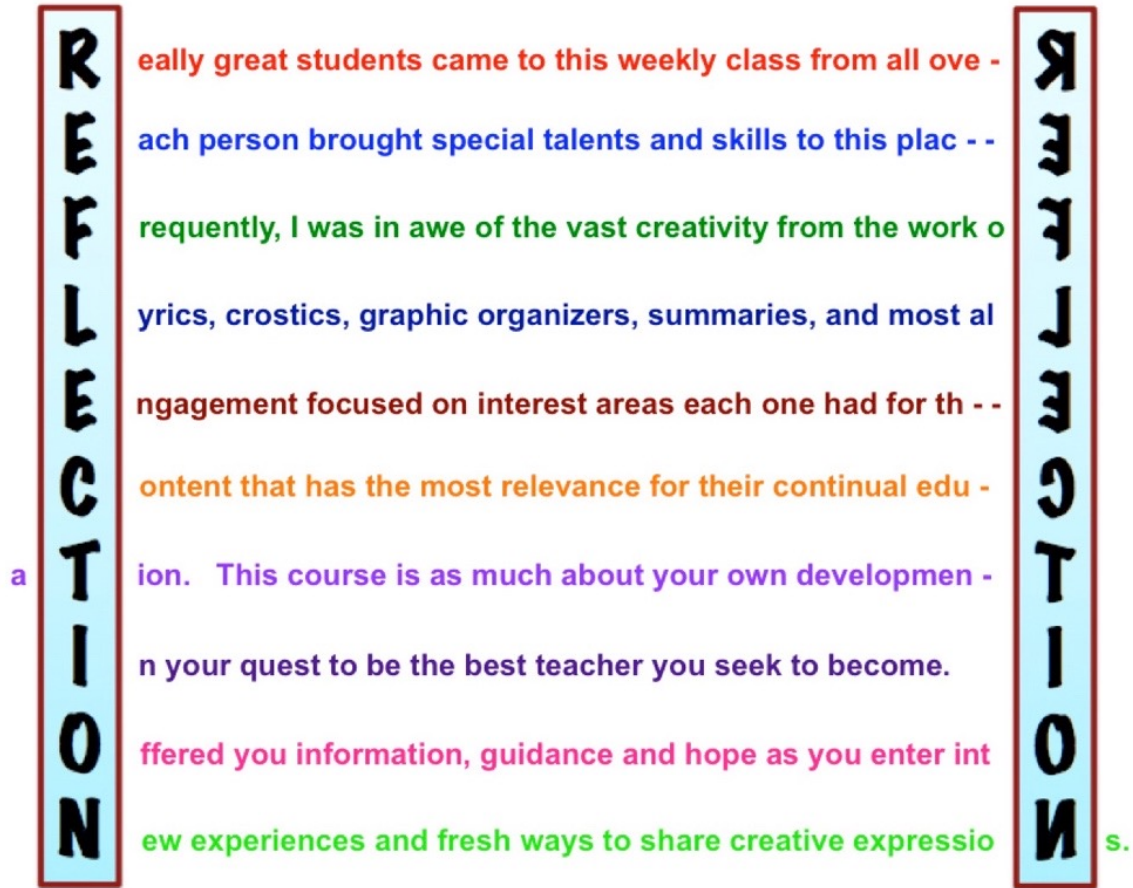
I know I may be naïve when urging students to devote two hours a week to the content area of special education. I specifically phrase the reading from the text as “read from Chapter 2” and not “read Chapter 2.” I want you to come to class with questions that I might not think of asking. I want you to 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.

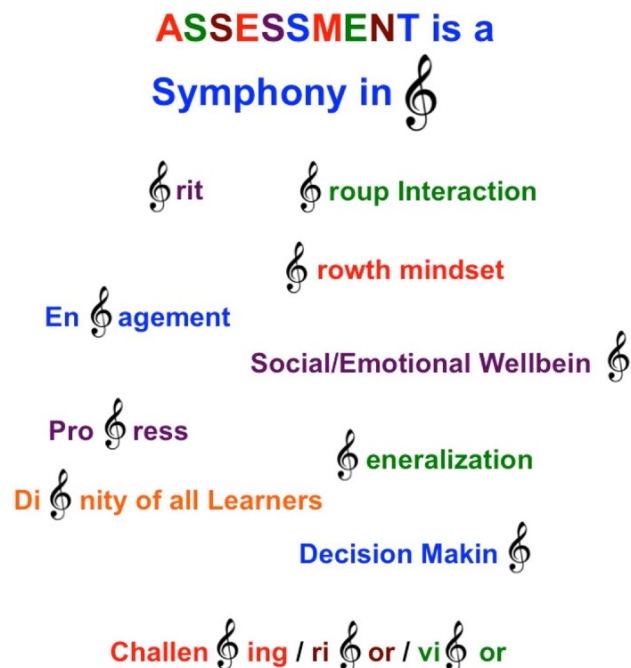
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=falFNkdq96U>

<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

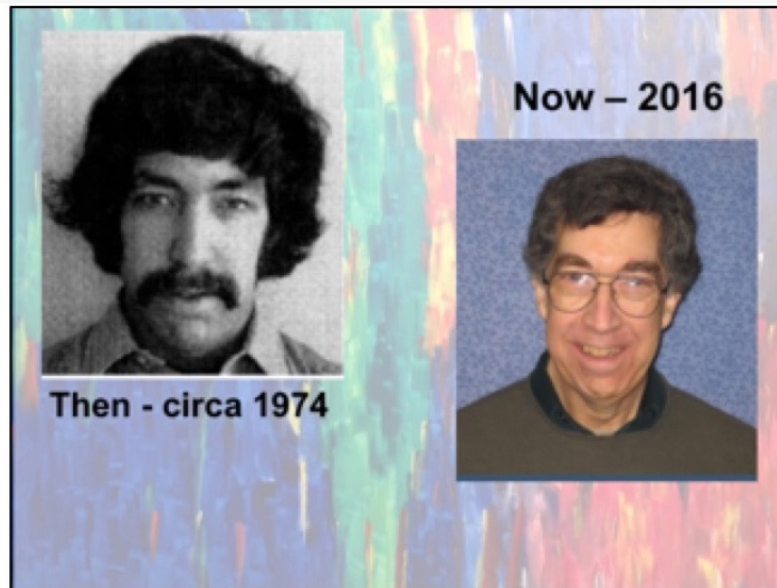
Each time I teach the introductory course in special education I review the truths and lessons from the previous week in a list of statements. I want students to know what I valued from the previous week and compare my notes to what they gained from the session. We can, and should, have different statements. 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 their 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:

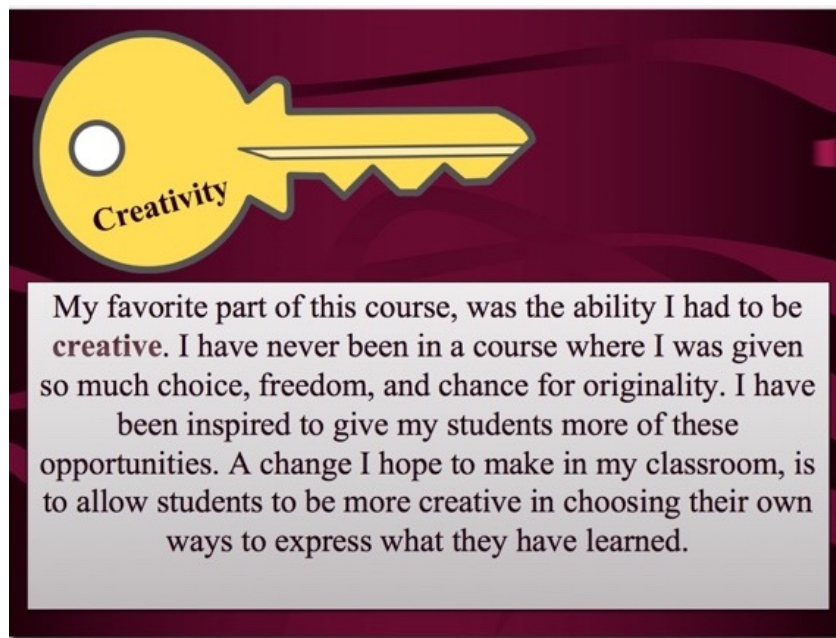
*“There is nothing more difficult for a truly creative painter than to paint a rose, because before he can do so he has first to forget all the roses that were ever painted.”* Henri Matisse

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.



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)*

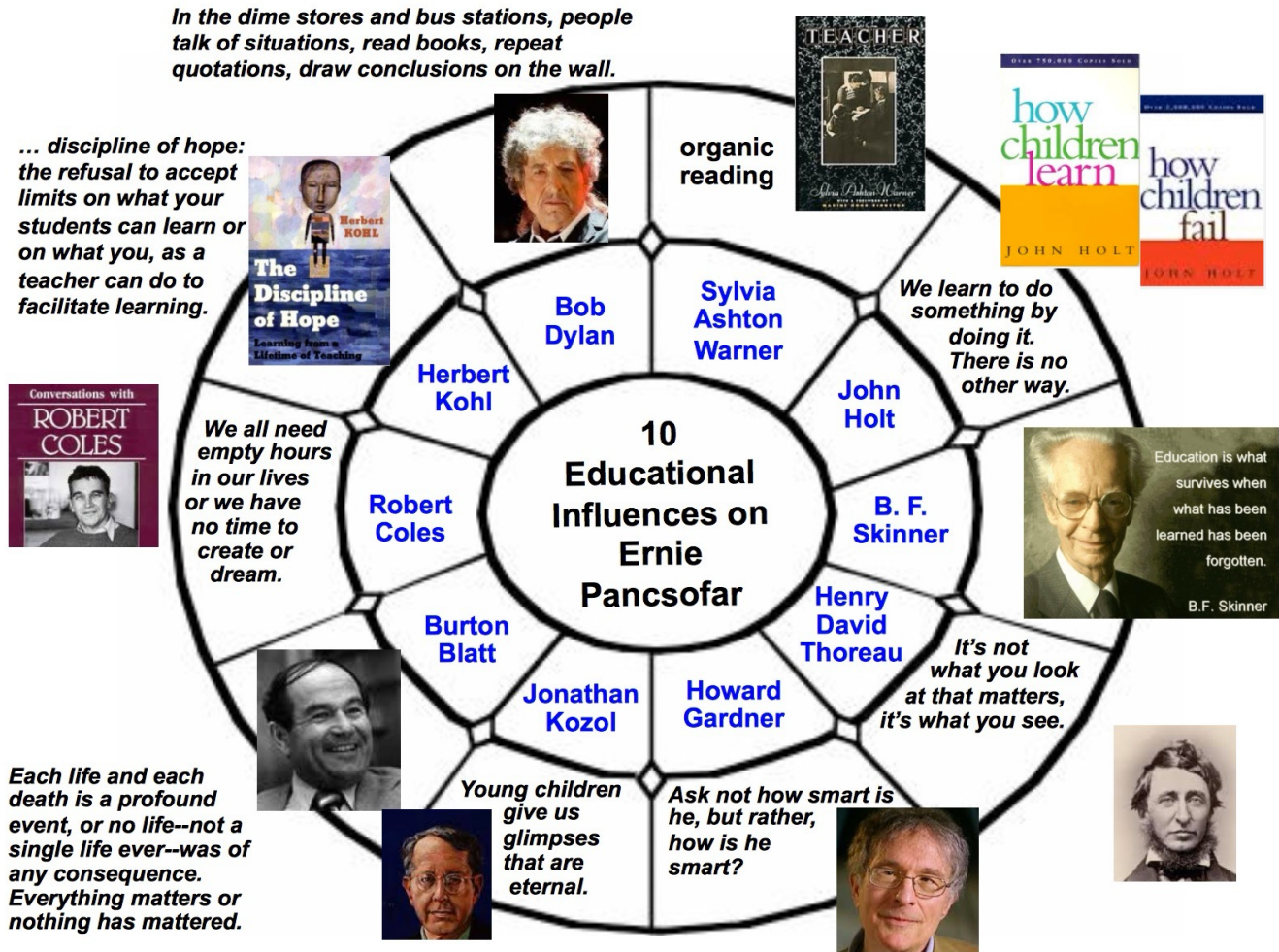
H Handi- capable	He Helpful- ness																					
Li Listen- ing	Ne Never Give Up	F Fidelity	O Oppor- tunities	N Needs	C Choices	B Blind- ness																
Na Natural Cues	Ar Articu- lation	Cl Class- room LRE	S Satis- faction	P Person First Labels	Si ASL Signing	Al Abilities																
K 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 Mnemom- 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	Er Ernie (see Pa)
		Es Embrace the Shake	Fm FM System	Ho Home- work	Fm FM System	Am Good Time of Day	Np No one's Perfect	U Univer- sal Design	Pa Pancso- far	Ho Home- work
		Yb Your Behavior	No Normal ???	Er Ernie (see Pa)	Am Good Time of Day	Pu Public Laws	Np No one's Perfect	U Univer- sal Design	Pa Pancso- far	Er Ernie (see Pa)

## 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?

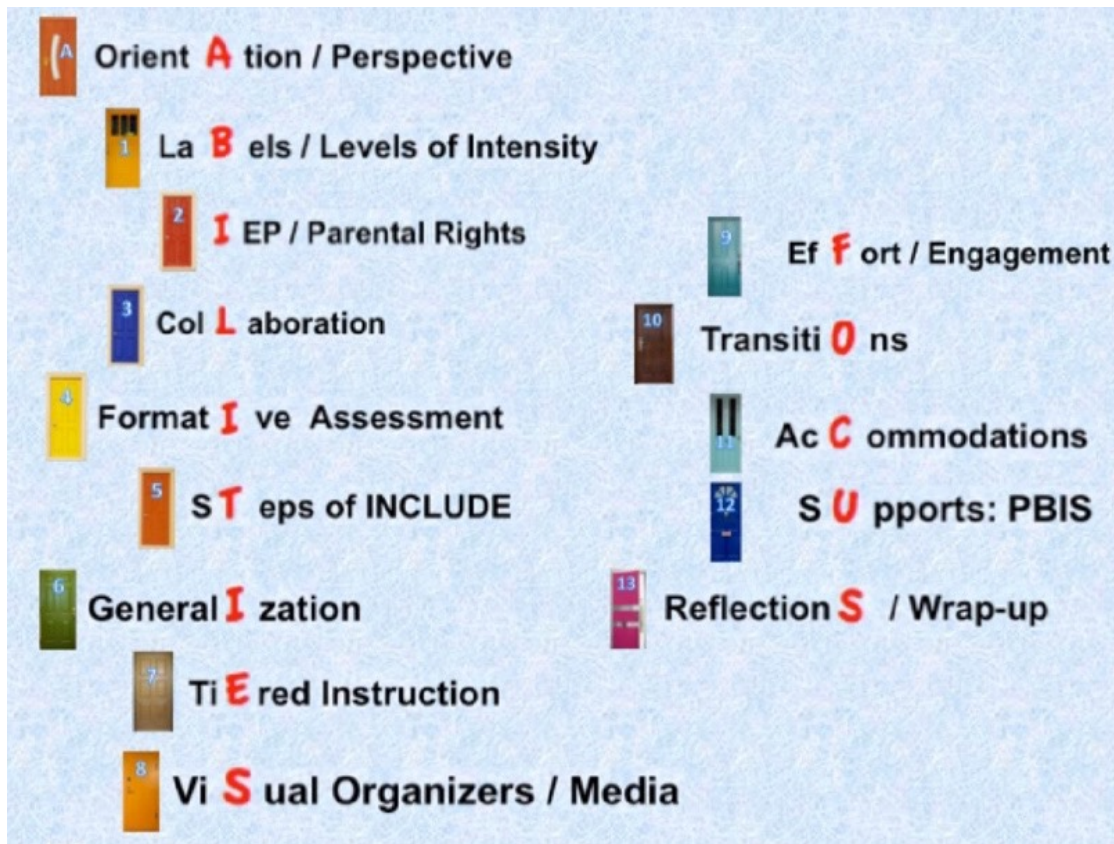
Luckily, this exact travel experience will not repeat itself, but I will have delays, cancellations, long, extended periods of time at airports, etc. I will remain calm and immediately begin to plot how to successfully remedy this new challenge as I hear irate passengers yelling at the ticket agents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

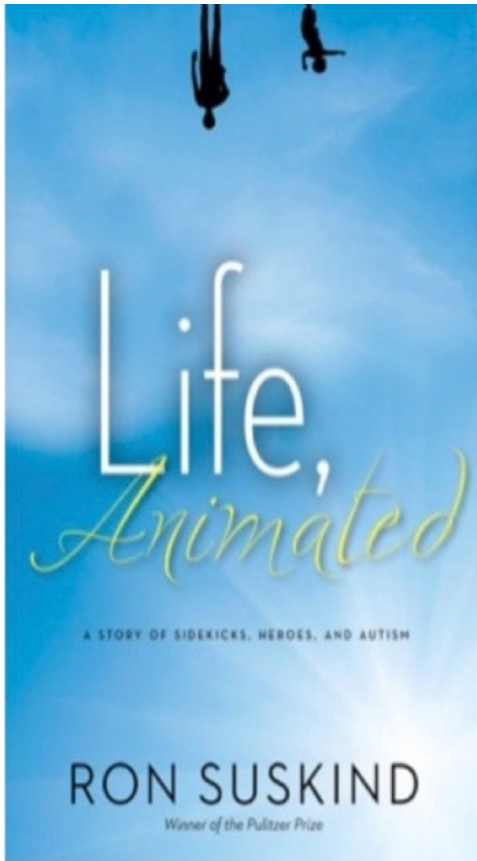
I attended a workshop about developing a narrative to a course that becomes the roadmap from which student's experience the resources and content. For my narrative, I chose opening new doors of understanding that evolve into an ABILITIES focus rather than one on DIS-abilities. I include this visual organizer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

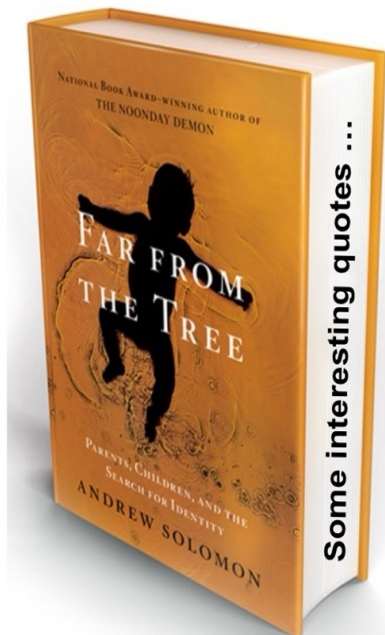
Thank you Ron, Cornelia and Walt  
And thank you Owen for being the star.  
We all have gifts and talents to explore  
That take us from here to places afar.

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](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 dream **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."

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.

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.

## 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 you'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.

**C**opper          **B**eech          **I**nstitute  
**O**pportunities for **T**alking & listening with a  
**U**nity of purpose f**O**r seeking tru**T**hs and focus on  
**Pa** **R**ker Palmer's **V**ision 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 Questions**

(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.

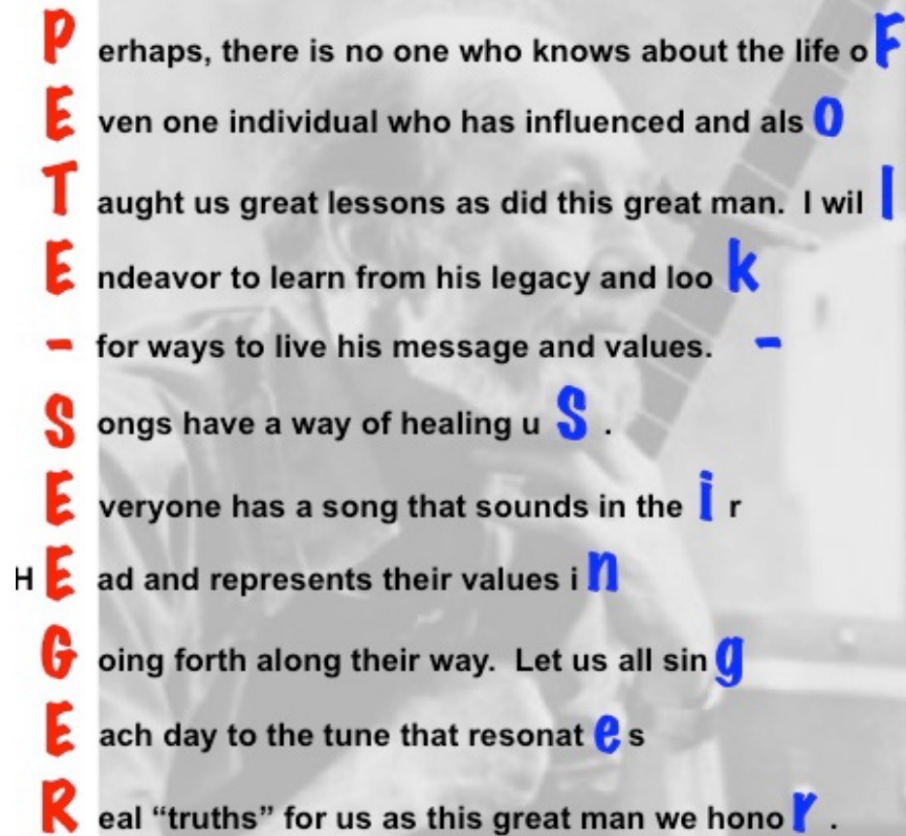
How many subjects must we lay by the side  
and only work on reading skills and math?  
Yes, and how many hours can our students explore  
all the skills to continue on life's path?  
How many voices must cry out in the dark  
that the tests fall far from the mark?

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.



**P**erhaps, there is no one who knows about the life o**F**  
**E**ven one individual who has influenced and als**O**  
**T**aught us great lessons as did this great man. I wil**L**  
**E**ndeavor to learn from his legacy and loo**k**  
**-** for ways to live his message and values. **-**  
**S**ongs have a way of healing u**S** .  
**E**veryone has a song that sounds in the **i** r  
**H** **E**ad and represents their values i**n**  
**G**oing forth along their way. Let us all sin**g**  
**E**ach day to the tune that resonat**e** s  
**R**eal “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.

## Step 051

### COMMUNITAS – 25<sup>th</sup> Year Celebration

During the 25<sup>th</sup> year celebration of Communitas, Inc., I developed this acrostic summary of the key elements from the day that held meaning for me. This has become a choice of summarizing an event or activity as you will find numerous examples among these steps.

**C**elebration

**O**ne Candle Power

**M**emories

Co **M**itments

**M** **U**sic

Pla **N**ts

**C** **I**rcles

**S** **T**ories

**A**lliances

**S**olidarity

Po **E** try

Hi **S** tory

**T**rust

## **Step 052**

### ***Beyond the Miracle Worker***

I read a biography of Anne Sullivan by Kim Nielsen. I am intrigued by Anne Sullivan's relationship with Helen Keller and I think she has been shortchanged and mythologized by snippets of information I know about her, but I have never gone any deeper in understanding their relationship. This book accomplished this investigation. One quote exemplifies the author's perceptiveness as she states: *Her [Anne Sullivan] life story, particularly when placed alongside that of Keller, reminds us of the diversity of disability experiences historically and today – and of the multiple ways that we, as individuals, as institutions, and as a country, contribute to the disabled nature of physical and mental impairments.* (p. xi).

## **Step 053**

### **Smorgasbord**

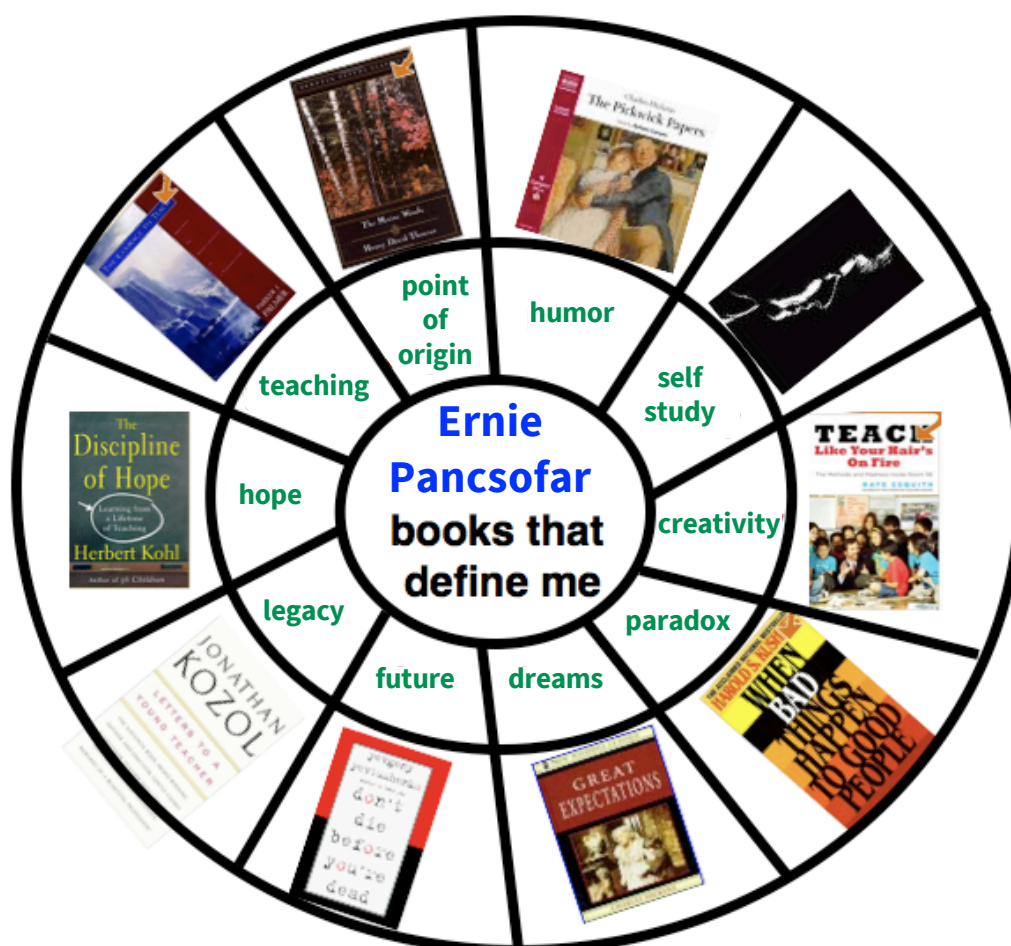
On my walk to class one day, an image came to me of how I arrange many of the resources in my courses. I offer a smorgasbord of resources to meet the current interests/needs of students who are entering the course with different degrees of experiences regarding the field of special education. For example, I may have read an article about inclusion from an engineering design point of view. This article may be of more interest to the technology and engineering education students. Or, a paraprofessional who currently works with a student on the autism spectrum may find an article more appealing on the evidence-based practices associated with the instruction for students identified on the autism spectrum.

***Welcome to the smorgasbord.  
Come and grab a plate  
'Cause what you take will help  
Decide your future professional fate.***

## Step 054

### Books That Help Define Who I Am

As I shared a concentric circles method of constructing a personal profile, a student in one of my courses used this type of visual organizer to develop a personalized profile using books she had read that helped define who she is. I took this lead and replicated her idea by including the following books (using the book jackets) as the visuals that connect to aspects of my own life.



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

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

**Dreams:** *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Step 055

### DISABILITIES / ABILITIES PLUS

I was asked to speak to a group of high school juniors who were interested in becoming teachers and my role was to speak to them about working with students who have disabilities. I began my presentation with the following acrostic visual of how many teachers view students by associating those students by their label.

**Label D and set apart**

**D I srespected**

**S eparate from my peers**

**Limited A ccessibility**

**B ullied for being different**

**I can't do that!**

**L ow expectations**

**Def i ciencies emphasized**

**T old what is wrong with me**

**I solated in the community**

**R E garded as less capable than others**

**S elf-esteem is quite low**

## Step 055

### DISABILITIES / ABILITIES PLUS

(continued)

I then emphasized that our perception of each student can change significantly when we view students as individuals first who also live with a disability, but they share more in common with their peers than they do differences. I presented a different acrostic visual below:

There's **A**rt in each of us.

La **B**els of RESPECT

Focus on our **I**nterests

Emp **L**oyment niche

Recogn **I**tion

**T**alents highlighted

**I**t's a puzzle to me!

**E**ntire school effort

Mistake **S**are OK

It's all about **P**erspective.

**L**ocating our strengths

**O**ur passions and goals

Dream **S**

## Step 056

### In Search of Community

This is one of my favorite poems and an interesting story relates to its origin. I was at a conference in West Virginia when I asked if there was anyone in the audience of about 150 people who could draw an object on a transparency during the next five minutes. One woman raised her hand and I gave her some transparency markers and asked her to draw a wishing well. After a few minutes she drew a great wishing well and I read my poem after which I placed her drawing on the overhead projector. Her drawing had enriched my presentation. I built this lesson into my presentation.

*The community is composed of people with a great deal of talent who are ready to support us in our work, but we need to ask! Her skills as an artist were not made known to the entire community of conference participants until I made my request. She offered her gift willingly and also enriched my poem through the fruits of her talents*

**Where is community?** I asked.

Is it future? Is it past?

**Where is community?** came the reply –

It is ground. It is sky.

**What is community?** I then wondered.

Is it up? Is it under?

**What is community?** I heard it cry.

It is presence. It can never die.

**How is community?** I still proposed.

Is it poetry? Is it prose?

**How is community?** came back my quest.

It is here – a welcome guest.

**Why is community?** again, I sighed.

**Why is community?** it still replied.

The silence is broken by the sound of a bell.

Community echoes at the bottom of your well.



## Step 057

### Teaching and Learning

I felt a need to share with my students the contradictions that exist in the words used in education, from my personal point of view. A colleague and I read this poem at a Teacher Love Fest to honor teachers during the first week of May a few years ago.

Teaching is not about what is taught.  
Teaching is always about what is sought.  
Teaching is more about finding our path.  
Teaching is not only about reading and math.

Learning is not about what is learned.  
Learning is more about what is yearned.  
Learning is about understanding oneself.  
Learning is taking more books from the shelf.

Testing is not about what's on the test.  
Testing is not about knowing who's best.  
Testing just makes us compete for the prize.  
Testing just brings on a great, big demise.

Education is not about who is educated.  
Education is more about who is dedicated.  
Education is about building community.  
Education is about individuality.

Grades are not about what is graded.  
Grades are a curse that need to be faded.  
Grades cause harm and move us apart.  
Grades exist for only the smart.

Success is not about who can succeed.  
Success is for all of the students in need.  
Success is about finding our own abilities.  
Success is for ending all hostilities.

Achievement is not about who can achieve.  
Achievement brings promise and cannot deceive.  
Achievement occurs when all can advance.  
Achievement brings honor and joy to enhance.

Students are teachers and learners too.  
Their paths connect each day that they do  
Believe that creativity and learning can be fun  
After each school day's work is said to be done.

## **Step 058**

### **Some Truths I Think I Know About the Creative Process**

The following list of 10 “Truths” originated as I taught a summer course at CCSU that centered on enhancing the creativity of general educators to expand their instructional effectiveness with more challenging learners.

- 1) Creativity is not something you automatically get when you want it. Creativity must be learned and practiced and practiced some more.
- 2) Most of us have lost the ability to see alternative responses to a question. Many schools have a subtle way of suppressing the creative spirit of children.
- 3) Creativity is surrounded by the Six Ps: Personality, Perseverance, Persistence, Perspective, Purpose, Passion, and Paradox. (Oops! I guess there are now seven.)
- 4) The best time to change is when you don't have to; when there is no crisis. There is a lot of stress and negative energy when we deal with challenges in times of crisis.
- 5) There is always a unique “wisdom” in any gathering of people that cannot be duplicated in any other group. Each group will develop options unheard of by another group.
- 6) The process of decision-making is ultimately more important than getting the right answer. There is no right answer, just a best guess.
- 7) The more we get to know about our team and circle members and their likes and dislikes, talents, skills, and dreams, the better we are at working together through some tough decisions and circumstances.
- 8) The ultimate desire we have for the individuals we support is our commitment to assist each one toward an enhanced quality of life, as that person defines it.
- 9) Brainstorming is the key to generating novel and creative ideas. The facilitator's role is crucial in maintaining a positive atmosphere and nonjudgmental reaction to all suggestions and ideas. Remember, these ideas are not what the team will do, but a list from which team members can develop workable considerations.
- 10) There will always be a currently difficult challenge to address. The name just changes!

## Step 059

### Opening Comments

In one of my courses, this poem was part of the opening session to alert students to an overall sense of values that would permeate each session.

You will never learn all there is to know  
in this course you are about to enter - - -

You will learn some core values and truths  
that will surely help you center - - -

Yourself and hear that distant, inner voice  
To begin that journey and you have a choice - - -

To become fully engaged in the learning process,  
You have to allow yourself full access - - -

To the wisdom you hear, and see and think  
And take that glass – have a long drink - - -

Because it's never empty and it's never quite full;  
You just have to know the pull - - -

Of contradictions, paradox and metaphor learning  
That grip you hard and leave you yearning - - -

For self-exploration, mindfulness and fun;  
Your journey in this course has just begun - - -

To unfold into a path that knows no end,  
A labyrinth of sorts that is going to send - - -

You to depths unplanned and heights so high  
To answers to who, what, where, how and why.

## Step 060

### Perspective: 2015 Super Bowl

In the 2015 Super Bowl the New England Patriots beat the Seattle Sea Hawks 28 – 24. I composed the following visual organizer to capture the different perspectives fans from each team might display based on about 15 seconds that occurred during the end of the game.

<b>P</b> atriots		<b>P</b> erhaps the
win th <b>E</b>		<b>S</b> <b>E</b> a Hawk
<b>S</b> upe <b>R</b> Bowl		backe <b>R</b> s
with <b>S</b> econds remaining.		<b>S</b> earch for a
An interce <b>P</b> tion		<b>P</b> ossible
chang <b>E</b> d the	<b>VS.</b>	r <b>E</b> ason for the
<b>C</b> ourse of		<b>C</b> oach's call that
<b>T</b> he game		resul <b>T</b> ed in the
<b>I</b> n the final		<b>I</b> nterception with
dri <b>V</b> e.		just over fi <b>V</b> ve seconds
The Butl <b>E</b> r did it!		<b>I</b> <b>E</b> ft in the game!

## Step 061

### ATTITUDE

This visual organizer combines the Scrabble letters, alliteration and the message that attitude contributes greatly to a teachers' beliefs that they are capable of supporting and interacting successfully with students who have disabilities. Sometimes, it's more a matter of unlearning the stereotypes that are associated with the labels that many students have.

A <sub>1</sub>	Always Aim to Achieve Additional Accomplishments.
T <sub>1</sub>	Take Time To Teach Tolerance by working in Teams Together.
T <sub>1</sub>	Teaching Takes Tact and Technique To Tackle your Truths.
I <sub>1</sub>	Initial Insights Involve an Investment toward Instilling Individuality.
T <sub>1</sub>	Triumph Toward Tackling Tough & Tenacious Teenagers.
U <sub>1</sub>	Understand Uniqueness Under Uncomfortable Uncertainties.
D <sub>2</sub>	Demand Diligence During Daily Deliberations.
E <sub>1</sub>	Encourage & Engage Everyone Equally.

## Step 062

### There's a Spirit in the Air

After one especially gratifying teaching experience, I wrote the following reflection to share with the students who just completed the course.

There's a spirit in the air  
Of warmth, fun and care  
Where students meet  
To come and greet  
At the start of day  
With lots and lots to say:  
**It warms my heart to see.**

There's a spirit in the air  
As each one takes a chair  
And sits upon the seat  
Eager to repeat  
A lesson from their notes,  
A song, a poem, some quotes  
**And share their time with me.**

There's a spirit in the air.  
Of this we are aware.  
It's in the food we bring.  
It's in the songs we sing.  
I feel it in the room.  
It lifts away the gloom.  
**A teacher we each will be.**

There's a spirit in the air.  
It hovers 'bout our hair.  
It smiles from up above.  
It showers us with love.  
I feel its glow  
Both high and low  
**In everyone I see.**

There's a spirit in the air.  
It feels ex-tra-or-di-naire.  
It brings us rays of HOPE  
Like strands of a fine rope.  
It brings us all together  
In sunny and stormy weather  
**To build com-mun-i-ty**

## Step 063

### PARTICIPATION IN SPORTS

If a teacher reads a good article and wants to share it with colleagues, I advise them not to just make a copy and put it in someone's mailbox. They won't read it! But, if you summarize the main points using an Acrostic Organizer, the reader can see, at a glance, the main elements from the article and talk with you about areas of mutual interest.

CLINICAL REPORT

#### Promoting the Participation of Children With Disabilities in Sports, Recreation, and Physical Activities

**S** P ecial Olympics Research  
**I** n **A** ctivity Consequences  
**T** he **R** moregulation  
"I Can Do **A** t **T** itude"  
**D** efining Participation  
**C** ost of Specialized Equipment  
**F** lex **I** bility  
**H** ealth **S** u **P** ervision Visits  
**A** ttitudinal Barriers  
**F** unc **T** ional Limitations  
**R** isk of Injury Probability  
Negative **S** o **C** ietal Stereotypes  
Misco **N** ceptions

**I** **D** EA  
Sectio **N** 504

**S** afety Precautions  
**P** ediatricians  
**A** dv **O** cacy  
**C** ollabo **R** ation  
Web si **T** es  
Reference **S**

## Step 064

### Being the Best

During one of my classes I decided to try my hand at a children's song inspired by the many songs developed by Bob Blue. I am still in search of a tune for these lyrics and, perhaps, a reader of this blog entry might have just the perfect tune in mind.

There will always be someone better than you.  
It doesn't mean not to try your best.  
There will always be someone better than you.  
You can be different than all the rest.

Champions will not be champions forever.  
A new one takes their place.  
Champions will not be champions forever.  
Savor the victory in your race.

Everyone makes mistakes each day.  
Pick yourself up each time you fall.  
Everyone makes mistakes each day.  
Sometimes even my verses don't rhyme.

Being different is really OK,  
Even when we want to be normal.  
Being different is really OK,  
Like a dog, a cat or even a gerbil.

No one looks the same as you.  
You're as different as different can be.  
No one looks the same as you.  
You are you - - - and I am me.

Be the best that you can be  
And things will turn out in the end.  
Be the best that you can be  
And sing this song once again.

## Step 065

### You Don't Have a Name Tag ...

I was facilitating a discussion among self-advocates in Illinois one afternoon, when a person from the back of the room shouted - - - -

***You don't have a name tag, but you still got a name!***



... so I started collecting name tags to see what I am called at different places and points in my life.



What's all this mean?  
I don't know.  
I'm just the messenger!

## Step 066

### I Lost My ATM and ID Cards

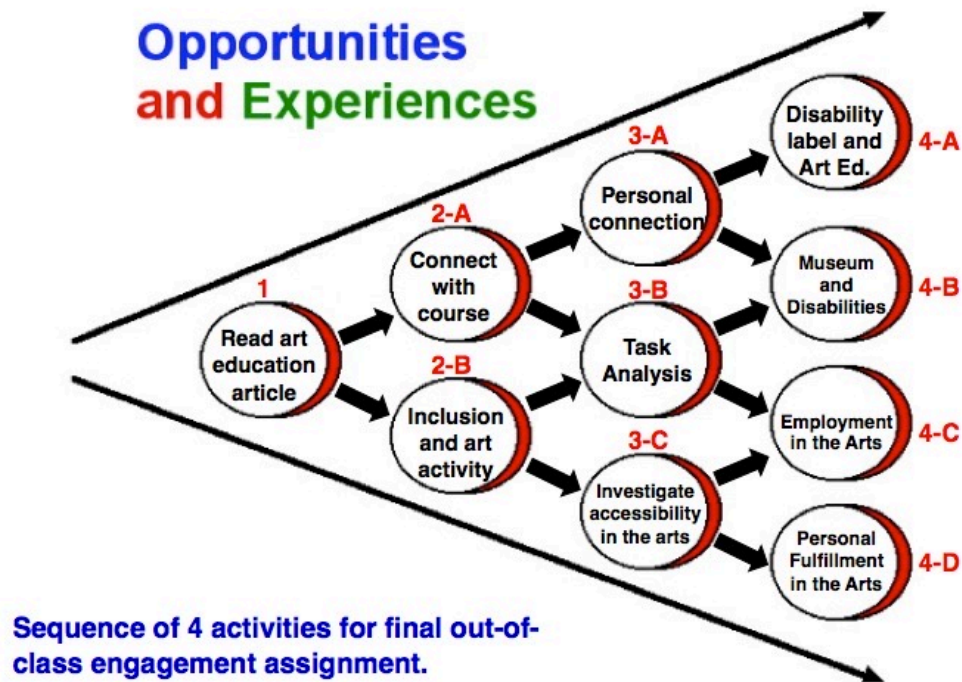
Have you ever lost your wallet or purse? After one such occasion, I wrote the following poem commenting on this occurrence.

It's been about a week or two  
This tale that I will tell to you.  
I lost my ATM and ID Cards  
To find them I did try real hard.  
I searched my car and nearby ground  
And waited for Monday to come around.  
It might have been just a quirk  
If I left them both at work.  
On Monday, I searched and searched some more  
But they weren't on my desk and they weren't on the floor.  
I called the Police Station and asked a man there  
If my cards were sent into their care.  
"No," he said. "They are not here today.  
We would have called you any way."  
I stayed calm, as best I could  
And looked at things from where I stood.  
I retraced my steps to where I'd been  
Searched more places all over again.  
My typical life went on day after day  
Until Dunkin' Donuts I stopped along the way  
To the counter for coffee to hear the worker I met say  
"Did you get your ID back?" she said in a quizzical way.  
"You left it in here just last week.  
My manager kept it, if that's what you seek!"  
They were not stolen or lost in a crack  
Of my sofa or in the chair in back.  
I had left them on the counter one day  
Having a snack as I was on my way.  
The lesson I learned to put in this rhyme  
Is to stay calm and collected – well most of the time.  
The moral of this story my friend  
Is things will turn out OK in the end.

## Step 067

### Choices: Opportunities and Experiences

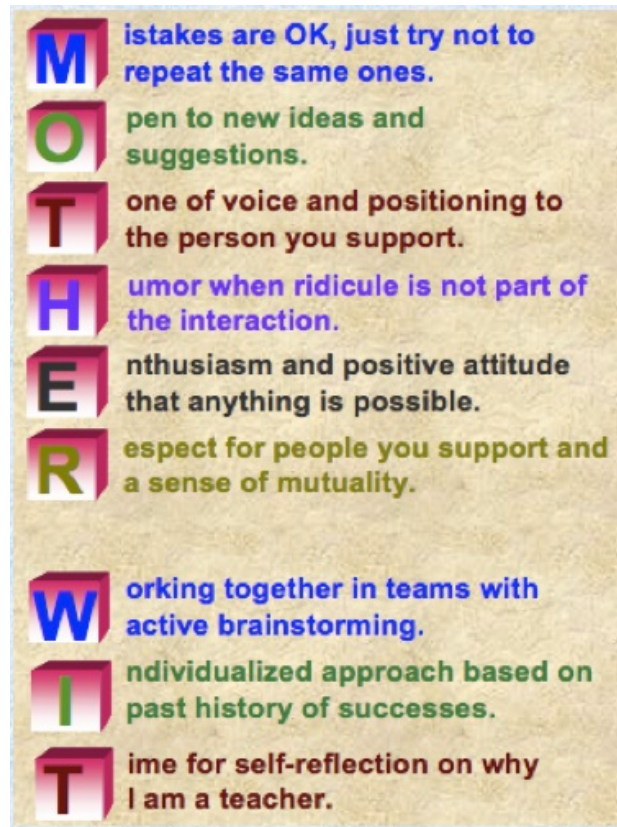
I am a firm believer in offering choices to students in my courses just as I want them to offer choices to their own students. Below is a diagram of several paths a student could take to complete the work from one session's assignments. Notice there are 9 overall choices, but each student must start with circle 1 and proceed down his/her own path toward the completion of four activities.



## Step 068

### MOTHER WIT

Sometimes, the informal way in which we interact with students has no official name or title but is just the mother/father wit or uncle/aunt wit that we bring to our work based on our values and personality.



#### **An Example of Mother Wit Provided to Me at an In-Service Training**

I am continually impressed with the expertise from unique sources when I am discussing creative strategies to current challenges. On one such occasion I asked participants if they had used some strategies in their out-of-work life based on their own ideas. In response to this request, Rosita related that she became upset upon constantly reminding her son not to leave his leather bomber jacket in the middle of the living room floor. She felt she was nagging him without getting any results. Finally, one day she asked her son to look through the clothes on the couch because she was going to Goodwill to donate a bunch of clothes that day. He went through the pile and found his bomber jacket. “Mom, you almost took my bomber jacket to Good Will!” His mom pleaded ignorance and said she wouldn't do it again. He felt he couldn't trust his mom not to make the mistake again and he didn't leave his jacket in the middle of the floor any more

## Step 069

### Moving On

I shared this poem with students in my class to let them know how pleased I was to be their guide in learning the content of this course. My work with them brought out the creativity in me just as I wanted them to be creative in how they approached their future work as teachers.

Before I teach this course again  
I like to look at where I've just been.  
Overall, I'm quite satisfied and clear  
About what I included in this course last year.  
However, there is always that nagging doubt  
That hides in the background and lurks about.  
Is "quite satisfied" what I want to feel  
Or is there another way that would be more real?  
What pleases one student another finds fault;  
One student likes pepper the other more salt.  
What I come to realize each semester is this:  
The changes I make are both a hit and a miss.  
But change I must for my own piece of mind.  
Every semester is one of a kind!  
The class is my outlet for creativity and more.  
I wonder next week what there will be in store  
And the feedback I receive keeps me honest and true;  
I'm on the right track - this class is for you!

## Step 070

### A Community of Learners

At times, I have sensed that a bond has formed among students in the class and on one such occasion, I brought this feeling to my students' attention in the following manner:

Thirty people were enrolled  
in this winter session;  
Most were strangers  
to special education.  
Thirty friends leave  
on Wednesday night  
With friends on the left  
and friends on the right.

You are the exceptional ones  
each night they were told.  
Teach to be ethical  
and teach to be bold.  
Teach to be creative,  
passionate and true.  
Teach like our mentor  
whose name is Bob Blue.

Five hours a night  
can be a very long time,  
But we got into some rhythm  
and even some rhyme.  
We listened to music  
and looked at some slides  
And always had food  
to fill up our insides.

John and Ernie  
facilitated the learning  
But the real work happened  
from each person's yearning  
To discover some strategies -  
perhaps a teaching tip  
To make it worthwhile  
to endure such a long trip.

Once John made a comment  
about a class to a friend  
About how much talent  
was in the course that did end.  
*Every group has talent  
if you know where to look,*  
Said Pat as he glanced up  
from reading his book.

I guess our job is to  
create such a stage  
Upon which gifts are shared  
as we engage  
In meaningful searches  
for small and large truths  
In our reading and projects  
and meetings in groups

And so - - attitudes need  
latitude which bring gratitude  
And education takes  
dedication toward integration.  
Labels can be fables  
that don't really enable  
Learners to find their gifts to share  
with everyone who is there.

## Step 071

### PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION CONFERENCE

After attending the New England Philosophy of Education Conference in 2014, I summarized my learning/insights with this acrostic organizer and shared it with committee members and my students.



## **Step 072**

### **Anonymous Support Groups**

As I opened up the newspaper one Sunday morning on a consulting trip and I noticed:

**Incest Survivors Anonymous**

**Messies Anonymous**

**Overeaters Anonymous**

**Nicotine Anonymous**

I kept on skimming the page and also found:

**Narcotics Anonymous**

**Cocaine Anonymous**

**Co-Dependents Anonymous**

**Gamblers Anonymous**

Then I wondered, Why not:

**Anonymous Anonymous**

## Step 073

### Ode to a Circle of Friends

I had the honor of being a member of a circle of support for Raymond “Todd” Kilroy at the time of his bout with cancer. I’m not sure this poem does justice to the sights and sounds surrounding that event. I believe I learned some important lessons that have influenced me greatly. I continue to advance toward my own inevitable encounter with the dying process with a keener perspective and peace of mind. Todd was an influential self-advocate in the disability rights community as a person living with cerebral palsy.

Bird on the feeder and squirrel in the air  
Friends stand around to watch the big fanfare.

A body dying - a soul rising  
Bonding, tears - embracing all.

Pain, pain and painful sounds  
Can’t do more in my morphine rounds.

Thinking often of how you are -  
As you wonder on that star;

Waiting for what’s in store for you -  
After this earthly life is through.

I’ve been to Pittsburgh. I’ve been to Maine.  
You’ve been to hell and back and living through the pain.

Dry lips, crusted tongue,  
Vaseline, suctioning on the run.

Residual and output are words I often hear  
Gevity? I’ll take that for \$800 Alex, my dear.

Oxygen tube running in your nose;  
Awake, asleep, and off you doze.

Classical music - Vivaldi I hear  
"What’s that, Pat? You want opera near."

Jokes, pain, music, and talk  
Beethoven, Vivaldi, Mozart, and Bach.

The words will come and the tears will flow.  
We make our peace; Todd surely knows.

"How long’s that breath been?" A voice calls out  
"It’s 6 times per minute and rattles about."

The circle of support has rallied to the call.  
Pat has the schedule taped up on the wall.

## Step 073

### Ode to a Circle of Friends

(continued)

"What color's that ceiling?" we ask Sarah's friend, Chris.  
"Is it green, yellow, limon or the color of bliss?"

The nurses are grand. The nurses are great.  
The nurses all know that Todd takes the cake.

The atmosphere here is good to behold.  
It's the best in Connecticut Joyce has been told.

There's a rattle I hear, a long, drawn-out sigh.  
When will the next one come from on high?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Step 074

### Commitments Pledge

At the conclusion of some of my courses I request students to sign a Commitments Pledge and I let them know I will not follow up to see if they have kept their commitments. I then share 25 possible commitments that evolved from the recently completed course. An example of a commitment might be – *I will discover an out-of-class interest of a student and build that interest into an academic content area in which the student currently struggles.*

Commitments Pledge
<p>Because I am a lifelong learner and realize that learning requires commitments to practice recently acquired skills, I agree to continue my exploration of resources that lead to a more inclusive classroom for students of all abilities.</p>
<p>By signing my name below and finding two witnesses, I am agreeing to further my education for no points because I realize that there are no points awarded for our ongoing professional development.</p>
<p>Therefore, in my capacity to be a creative teacher, I will endeavor to challenge my students with multiple paths to achieving anticipated outcomes. I will better understand each student's learning styles and match, as closely as possible, ways in which each student can demonstrate their competencies.</p>
<p>I will reflect on my teaching methods and content on a regular basis and seek feedback and input from students and parents about the way in which each student thrives within an optimum learning environment. I can set the tone for a positive experience for each student.</p>
<p>I will share my knowledge with my peers and become part of a learning community that strives to look at challenges from different angles and perspectives.</p>
<p>_____</p> <p>Your signature here</p>
<p>_____</p> <p>Witness One</p>
<p>_____</p> <p>Witness Two</p>

## Step 075

### The Changin' Truths

I have written several sets of lyrics to some Bob Dylan tunes over the years. One of my favorites is *The Changin' Truths*.

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

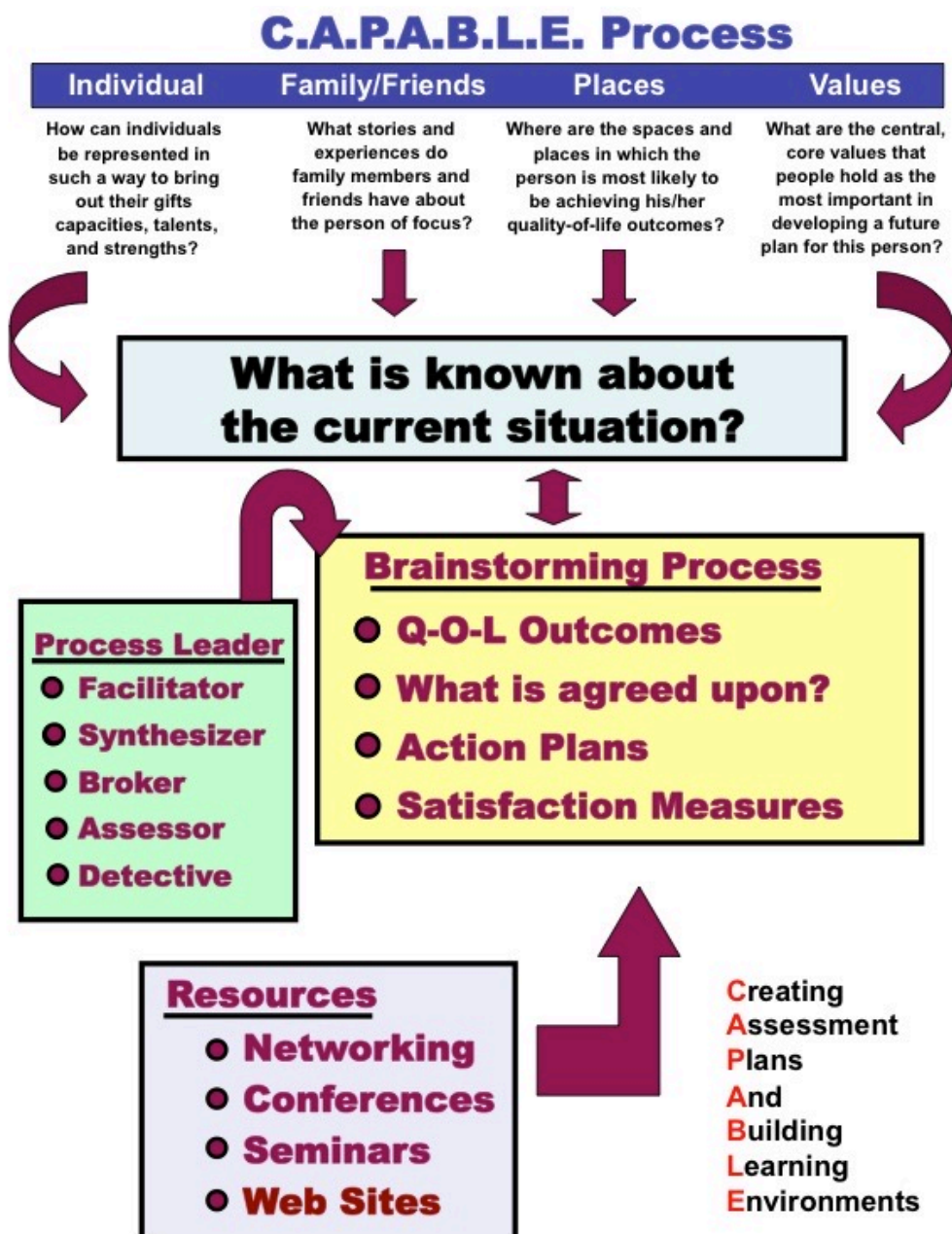
We're talkin' 'bout people with labels and names.  
Sometimes we're different & sometimes we're the same.  
We all have gifts and talents and skills.  
We all have minds and souls and wills.  
So look all around you and wonder in awe  
For the truths - - - they are a changin'.

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

## Step 076

### The CAPABLE Process

A colleague (Dan Steere) and I developed this graphic called the CAPABLE process to describe the decision making flow of activities for assisting a student to make the transition from school to post-school settings. I wanted a positive sounding acronym that emphasized the positive outcomes expected in this process. This diagram helps to solidify this focus as I share it with teams with whom I interact.



## **Step 077**

### **If Bob Dylan Was a Student in Your Classroom**

While attending the annual conference of the ARC/US, I spotted a postcard with a picture of Bob Dylan taken in 1962 in NYC. I composed the following poem and sent it to a friend who had recently sent me some Dylan CDs .

While in Boston at the ARC's national conference  
I picked out this postcard of a man of great prominence  
Who aspired to be a university professor \*  
But flunked the test created by an assessor  
Who said that he mumbled and jumbled and made no sense  
And would be a man of no great consequence.

How many Dylans are in our schools  
Who don't fit in and break all the rules?  
What labels do we apply  
To the sadness in his eyes?  
LD and ID are readily recorded  
And let's throw in behaviorally disordered!

The times they are a changin' each and every day  
I'm glad this "gifted" person happened upon my way.

\* To my knowledge, Dylan never aspired to be a university professor,  
but it makes good copy!

## **Step 078**

### **Please Raise Your Hand If ...**

After missing a class due to a medical emergency, this was the visual that I shared with students upon returning the following week.

### **PLEASE RAISE YOUR HAND IF ...**

- You have kicked a stone.**
- You have heard of the Rolling Stones.**
- You like Dylan's "Like a Rolling Stone"**
- You know someone whose name is Stone**
- You have ever passed a kidney stone**

## Step 079

### ERNIE PANCSOFAR

Along with my official name and affiliation, this Name Acrostic is on my office door at CCSU.

**T**E am Player  
**R**esponsible  
Depen**N**dable  
Av**I**d Red Sox Fan  
Cr**E**ative Teacher

**P**oppy  
**F**A culty Senator  
Husba**N**d  
**C**onscientious  
**S**ong Parodies  
**B**O rn in Maine  
**F**ather of Two Daughters  
**A**crostic Solver  
**R**eader of Good Novels

## Step 080

### A Profile of Two People

I address my former self in this brief set of verses and wonder if these two versions of “who I am” would recognize each other.



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

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



## Step 081

### Hope – Celebrate – Dream

I had some postcards with the words hope – celebrate – dream and decided to write a resolution for the new year below:



I **hope** that I am able to have good sense this year  
For working and for playing and having some good cheer.

I **celebrate** the chance to live free of cancer's reins  
And spend some time thinking what of my life remains.

I **dream** of solving challenges as they may appear  
And have a sense of satisfaction at the end of this new year.

I **hope** that those around me enjoy each other's time  
And have opportunities to compose their own verses of rhyme.

I **celebrate** the sense of peace I feel deep down inside  
And keep in good health enough to enjoy life's unpredictable ride.

I **dream** of times when everyone will sit and share common space  
And be content with where they're at instead another distant place.

On this day I **hope, celebrate** and **dream**;  
Together, these three words from a dynamic team.

## **Step 082**

### **Notes to My Students at No Specific Time**

Periodically, I compose notes to my students in verse form. Here is a sample from a Monday night class.

In order to get better at what you do,  
Discomfort and doubt will follow you  
Into each experience – into each class  
And into every job in which you will pass.

If you are feeling a little unease,  
Welcome to the club, but please  
Don't give up – go with the flow;  
You'll be surprised at what you know.

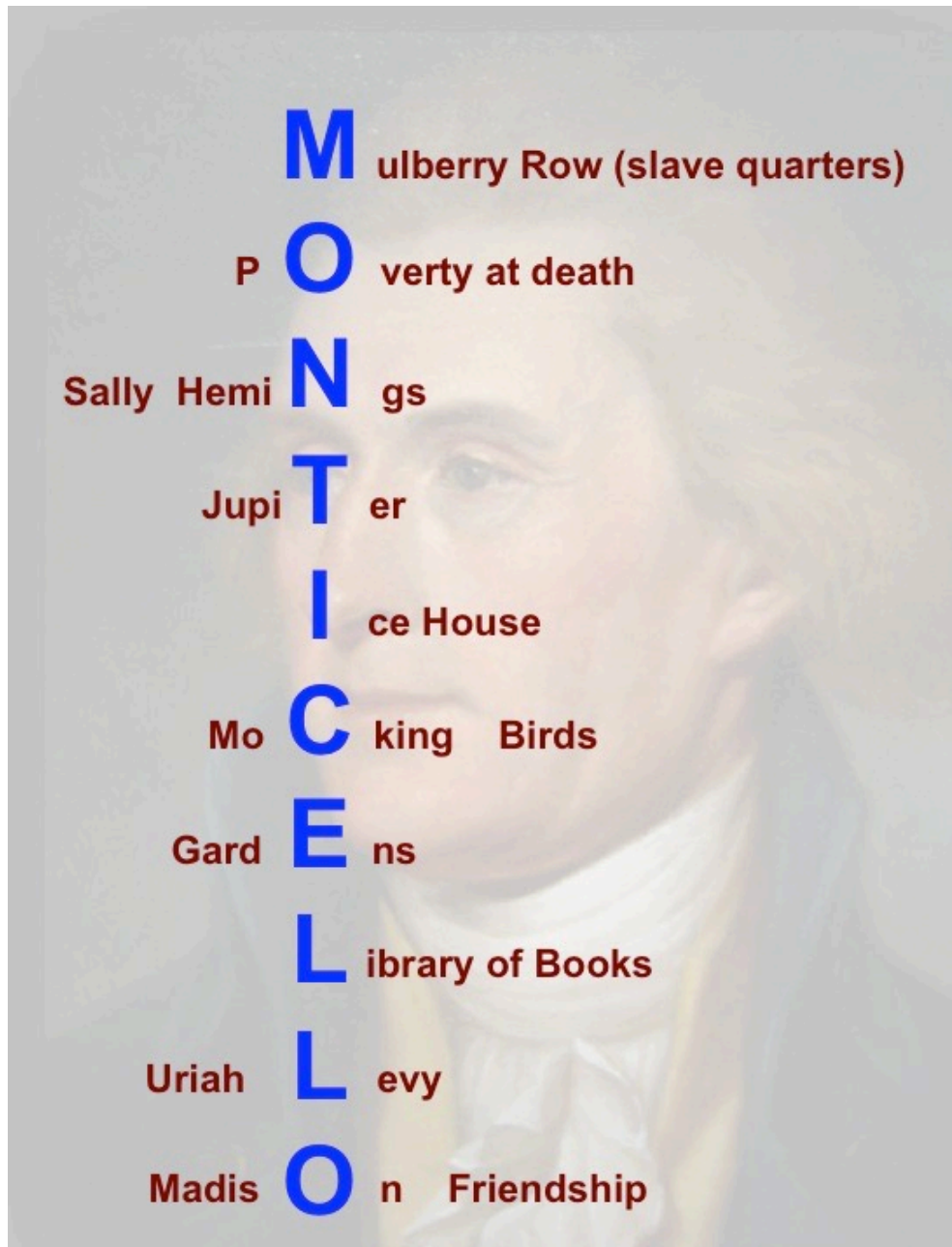
There are supports and talents available here  
To help make the muddy a little more clear.  
Already, the unexpected happened to me  
Someone brought me a cup of coffee!

So, bear with me as I plod on anew  
And before you know it, after a few  
weeks go by – you'll see the light  
As we meet once again on a Monday night.

## Step 083

### MONTICELLO

During the summer of 2013, my wife and I toured Monticello, the home of Thomas Jefferson. When I returned home, I wanted to capture some of the learning that occurred for me upon that visit and I composed the acrostic organizer below. I was proud of this representation of my visit and tell my students that I will remember more about Monticello from this summary than if I had studied for a quiz about the facts associated with this historical place.



## **Step 084**

### **Mistakes**

One of many reminders to the students in my courses is to allow for a learning environment in which students feel comfortable making mistakes, which are an essential part of the learning process.

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

But stay with me as I journey on;  
There are many more verses to my song.

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

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

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

There is no answer for everyone;  
The search for truth is never done.

We are all somewhere on our personal journey;  
Crossing my path, you just met Ernie.

We're each writing our own personal book  
About our life and how we look ...

At our values and truths every day.

## Step 085

### There Is No Answer

I developed this poster for my office bulletin board as a reminder of the role I can play in the development of strategies for challenging situations. I am not the “ANSWER” man, but I do have many responses to offer:

**THERE IS NO**  
**“ANSWER”**  
**BUT THERE ARE MANY**

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

## Step 086

### Profiles in “P” and “S”

In 2001 I used “P” as a starting letter to ascribe traits and characteristics to which I would ascribe. Then, in 2011 I used “S” to complete a similar self-analysis.

**Profile in “P”**  
4/17/01

**P**riorities **P**ile-a-tizing  
**P**erseverance **P**roductive  
**P**ersistence **P**rivate **P**horthy-nine  
**P**urposeful **P**ractical  
**P**rofessional **P**unctual **Dr. P**  
**P**ersuasive **P**ersonable **P**rotector

**Profile in “S”**  
11/4/11

**S**uccessful **S**olitude  
**S**erious **S**ixty **S**atisfied  
**S**enior **S**howman **S**peaker  
**S**ensitive  
**S**pecialist **S**teady **S**upportive  
**S**hy **S**ynergistic **S**tudent

## Step 087

### State-of-the-Art Educational Practices

(New doesn't necessarily mean better!)

What is the length of time a  
“state-of-the-art” practice remains so?  
My profession has a set of practices  
that seem to come and go.

A state-of-the-art car  
seems to last about two years.  
I often owned a used one  
when state-of-the-art disappears.

I wonder how long  
this quality can last  
As a new model emerges  
to replace the past.

I bought a “state-of-the-art” laptop  
at a computer store.  
I couldn't possibly want any better one  
or ask for anything more.

It had memory and speed and  
plenty of storage space.  
I thought it was just perfect  
as I left this selling place.

But I read a flier later  
in that very same year.  
It said a “state-of-the-art” version  
would soon be coming here.  
This works the same in education,  
I am sad to have to say  
When state-of-the-art curricula appear  
in much the same way.

A product emerges with high,  
professional acclaim.  
The “best of its kind”  
is often included within its name.

But this product too  
lasts just about two years  
When a different publisher's creation  
suddenly appears.

I think “state-of-the-art”  
Loses all its spark  
When you pay your first bill.  
It's already over the hill.

It was just a marketing ploy  
To buy the latest educational toy.

## Step 088

### Ruth's Advocacy

Ruth was a school nurse who was a student in one of the summer courses I taught at CCSU. She demonstrated how the advocacy of a school nurse can have a profound effect on a student who had difficulty accessing one of the cherished rituals of a high school experience: the senior prom.

Ruth described a heartwarming tale  
About Carlos, a student, whose body was frail  
And he had a condition called Duchenne Dystrophy.  
His life was brief, but he left quite a legacy.  
His dream was to go to his senior prom;  
A decision echoed by his mom.

That's when Ruth got into the picture.  
She wouldn't take "No" as an answer  
to her requests for funds for the ticket and ride.  
He brought his sister by his side  
And at the prom there was a wonderful thing  
When his peers selected Carlos as their prom king.  
A lesson learned from this story from Ruth:  
Anything's possible when you search for the truth  
Of assisting a student to reach his dreams.  
He enriched our lives - so it seems.

Ruth informed me that she shared my poem with Carlos' mom. If I am not mistaken, Ruth told me that Carlos passed away shortly after the prom.

## Step 089

### There Are No Guarantees

I enjoyed creating this visual when describing our relationship to families when on a team of professionals seeking to discover supports for a family member with a disability. We offer no guarantees, but we can offer HOPE!



## Step 090

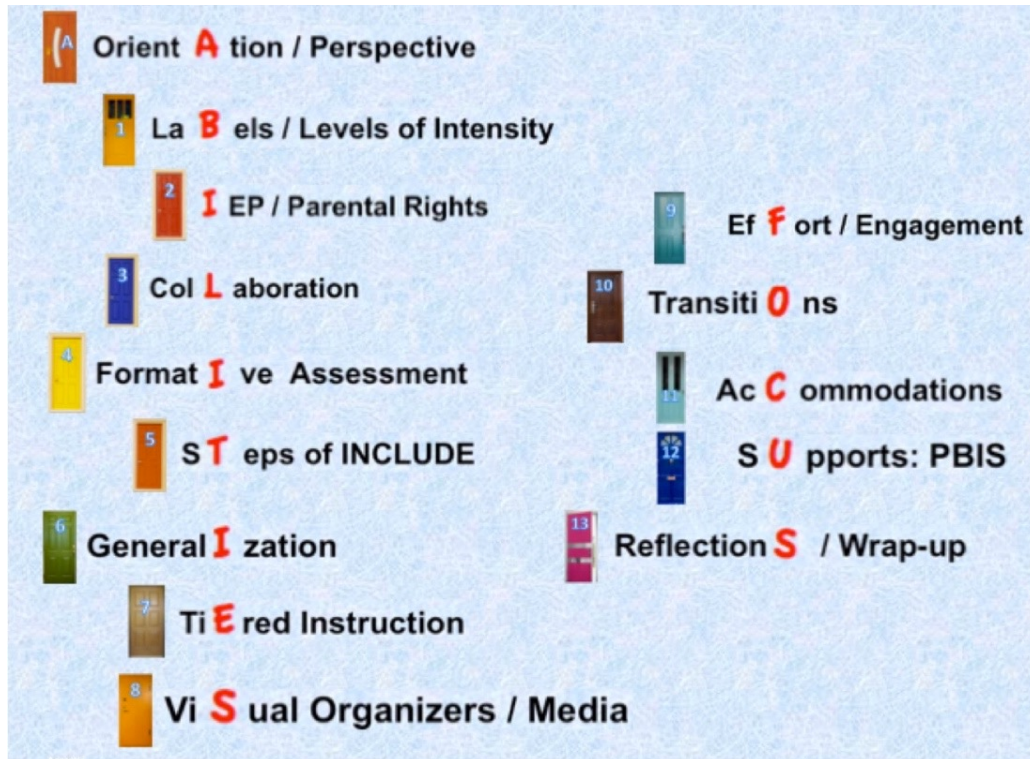
### The Writing on the Wall

A cookbook of learning does not exist.  
 There is no master strategies list.  
 Creativity – you’ll find is the key  
 To help unlock the mystery  
 Of how to teach  
 The hard to reach  
 And how to yearn  
 For ways to learn  
 That allow you to grow and show  
 How much you now know  
 And how much more there is still out there.  
 It’s a life-long journey to become aware  
 And focus on the positive and limit the strife;  
 To discover the roles we play in each student’s life.

## Step 091

### ABILITIES FOCUS

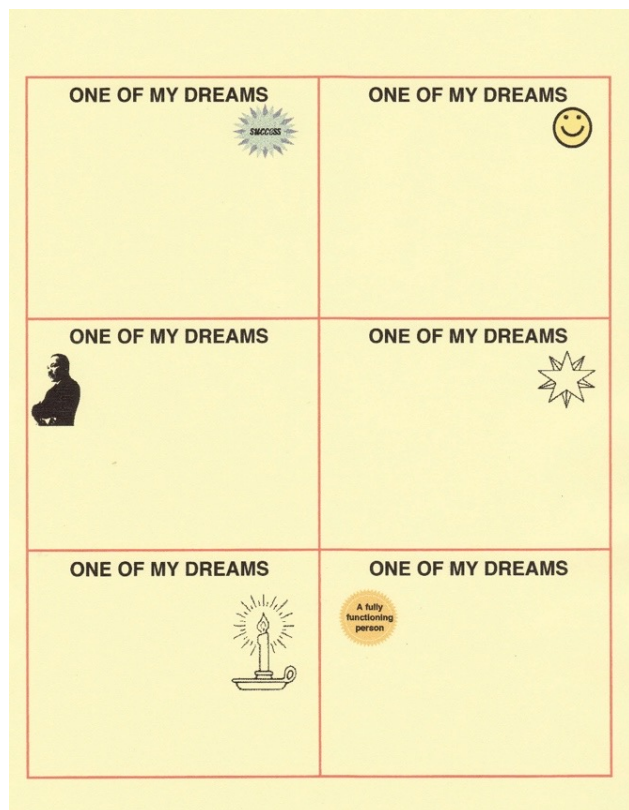
At the beginning of one of my courses I introduce this visual as one of opening doors to new resources based on the themes/titles for each session. The overall theme of the course is to focus on the “abilities” of students and not a “fix-the-disability” orientation.



## Step 092

### I've Been Dreaming

On the first day of class while engaging in a “getting to know you” session, I requested students to identify one of their dreams on a Post-it note. Then, I had them put the Post-it note on the top of a piece of paper and go around to their peers and take notes on what people had to comment about regarding their dream. Comments could take the form of “Oh, I did that and this is what I found useful!” or “Please clarify more about what you mean.” Or “I have a friend who might be able to help you.” Seldom, if any, do I hear someone say “That’s unrealistic!” I then comment to students about the dreams that parents have for their sons/daughters both with and without disabilities. We need to honor their dreams just as we want people in our lives to honor our own dreams.



### I've Been **Dreaming**

The **Dreams** of the young;  
The **Dreams** of the bold;  
For people we support  
Their **Dreams** must be told.

**Dreams** are uncertain.  
**Dreams** can be vague.  
But all **Dreams** are visions  
From Sue, Bob and Peg.

Stop and reflect.  
Listen with care.  
Give your support  
And your **Dreams** to share.

Today's a good day  
To sit and to listen;  
To share and reflect;  
To talk and to vision.

A **Dream** will grow.  
A **Dream** will shine.  
Because of your efforts  
And also of mine.

## Step 093

### Why People Come to College

I always hope students in my courses fall within the last three rows indicating their role as learners.

Some come	sit in their seats	read the requirements	and slowly nod off.
Some come	act quite smug	need certification	and look displeased.
Some come	take good notes	don't say anything	and space out.
Some come	act interested	ask good questions	and pay attention.
Some come	are optimistic	do all the assignments	to get a good grade.
Some come	are motivated	build connections	and personally grow.
Some come	expect the best	use their talents	to build community.
Some come	are challenged	build on their skills	are life-long learners.

## Step 094

### My Thoughts Early One Morning

Sometimes, I wonder  
if I've given you enough  
Resources that emerge  
from my piles and piles of stuff.

Then I realize that there's always  
more that I could give  
About the ways to teach and help  
the students learn to live

And use their strengths and  
gifts and talents more  
And help them with their struggles  
so that they can explore

And meet their daily challenges  
from what our teaching brings  
To help them find their rightful place  
within the scheme of things.

## Step 095

### HOPE Brings Forth PEACE

The tragedies that surfaced on 9/11 influenced my remembrance of this event with the following visual:



## Step 096

### Thoughts on Teaching My Course One Semester

Overall, I am quite happy with the feedback I receive from students. Their satisfaction with the way in which I develop and present the content is greatly appreciated. However, there are occasions, and I think all teachers have these moments, when a particular student is vicious and mean when sharing comments about the course.

The power of words can cut quite deep  
Once the send button is hit – it's for keeps.

Be careful of the words you write today.  
Be careful it's what you want to say.

Feelings are feelings – facts are facts.  
Don't confuse the two – Don't be lax

And state a feeling as if a fact to be true;  
Harm can come when this you do.

It's OK to be angry. It's alright to be mad.  
Just be sure your facts are true to be had.

## Step 097

### PLAYING FOR CHANGE

In one of my courses, we listened to a song “Stand By Me” by Playing for Change and I asked students to record some words that connected to the song as it relates to inclusive practices in the schools. Here is the visual organizer I constructed from their input.

Acce **P** tance

We al **L** work together

Te **A** mwork

**C** ombined talents

Diversit **Y**

Enric **H** es all!

Happ **I** ness

Common go **A** l

Commo **N** ality

We're all i **N** this

Stren **G** ths

To **G** ether

Make a conn **E** ction

Advocate **F** or student needs

**C** o llaboration

Suppo **R** t one another

## Step 098

### The 10% Solution

I like to share this poll at the very beginning of a large presentation or in my courses in the late fall leading up to local/national elections.

**10%** of you are here physically but not mentally.  
**10%** of you are not here yet.

**10%** don't believe anything I'm saying.  
**10%** believe everything I'm saying.

**10%** dream of what is possible for students.  
**10%** dream because they're sleeping in class.

**10%** take in food for thought.  
**10%** take in food.

**10%** are in the right place at the right time.  
**10%** should be some place else.

**10%** will nod in agreement.  
**10%** will nod off!

**10%** will write notes about what I say.  
**10%** will write notes to their friends.

**10%** will be glad to leave with excellent material.  
**10%** will just be glad to leave!

This survey has an error margin of

About **10%**

Give or take **10%!**

## Step 099

### CHOICE

As you can see (top of visual below), I noticed that the word CHOICE could be read among other words that looked backward and/or inverted. I had found this arrangement on a transparency in my resource notebook one day and realized that I had not intentionally developed a graphic like this. When I picked it up and looked at it from the other side . . . (bottom of visual below) I could still see the word CHOICE but the other words now made sense. I bring this to your attention as a way of emphasizing the importance of giving choices to students as part of an overall style of classroom management.

**SECURITY**  
**RESPECT**  
**FRIENDS DIGNITY**  
**CHOICE**  
**PRESENCE**  
**INTERDEPENDENCE**  
-----  
**INTERDEPENDENCE**  
**PRESENCE**  
**CHOICE**  
**FRIENDS DIGNITY**  
**RESPECT**  
**SECURITY**

Choices allow for the development of an atmosphere of learning highlighted by the words Interdependence, presence, friends, dignity, respect & security.

## Step 100

### Instructor's Reflection on 6/30/15

I don't know how you think things went  
From your own point of view - - -  
I just know I enjoyed my time  
Learning and teaching with you.

The summer is a time to reflect now & then  
And see how things are going - - -  
Thank you for being part of that time and  
To keep my learning growing.

Every time I teach this course  
It keeps on getting better  
Because I meet people like you - - -  
The readers of this letter.

We are more alike than different.  
We use our strengths and skills.  
We meet ourselves at different levels;  
Our hearts, our minds and our wills.

*I teach so I can hear myself think -*  
I once heard a wise man say.  
Thank you for being part of that time  
As we met along the way . . .

To advance forward;  
To be better than we were before;  
That was the purpose of the past five weeks  
To build up from a solid core . . .

Of values, strategies and  
To meet people of inspiration,  
So we can find that inner voice  
That leads to our celebration . . .

And we move on  
Maybe never to meet again - - -  
But, your presence  
Will not be forgotten - when . . .

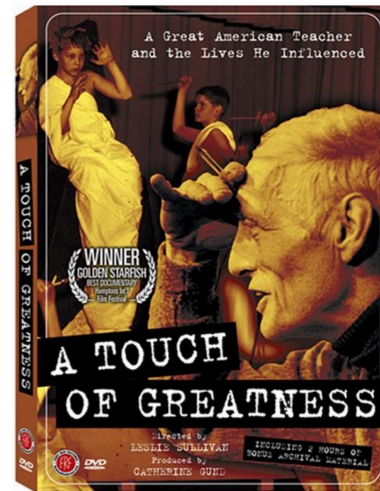
I plan the agenda  
For each future lesson,  
I will remember this group  
From the summer 2015 session.

## Step 101

### Albert Cullum Quotes

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

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



## Step 102

### Who Is Olivia Wise?

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

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

## Step 103

### Thoughts Upon Completing a Training Session

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Step 104

### Welcome Back

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

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

Welcome back, people  
are here to give you cheer.

Well, they meet to help you  
plan your future around

For your dreams to begin  
on some solid ground.

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

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

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

Welcome back, Welcome back, Welcome back.

Welcome back, Welcome back, Welcome back .

---

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

## Step 105

### 20 Pretty Important Things to Know About Teaching

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

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

## Step 106

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

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

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

## **Step 107**

### **COLLABORATION**

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

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

## Step 108

### Advice for Future Students

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

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

## Step 109

### SOCIAL SKILLS

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

**S** elf-control

**C** **O** mmunication

Eye - **C** ontact

**D** **I** alogue

Self - **A** wareness

**L** aughter

**S** elf-esteem

**K** indness

Shar **I** ng

Emotiona **L** expression

**L** istening

Re **S** pect

## **Step 110**

### **When I Review Your Work**

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

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

## **Step 111**

### **Value of Self-Reflection**

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

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

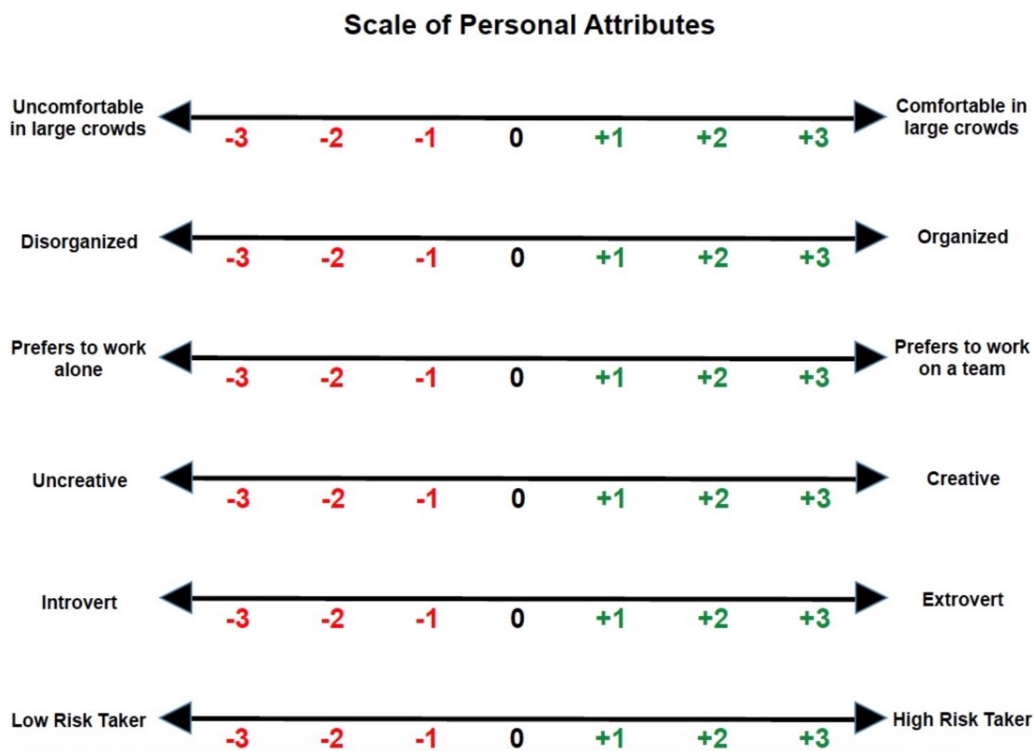
**Ron Ferguson**

## Step 112

### Do You Have Pancsofar Syndrome?

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

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

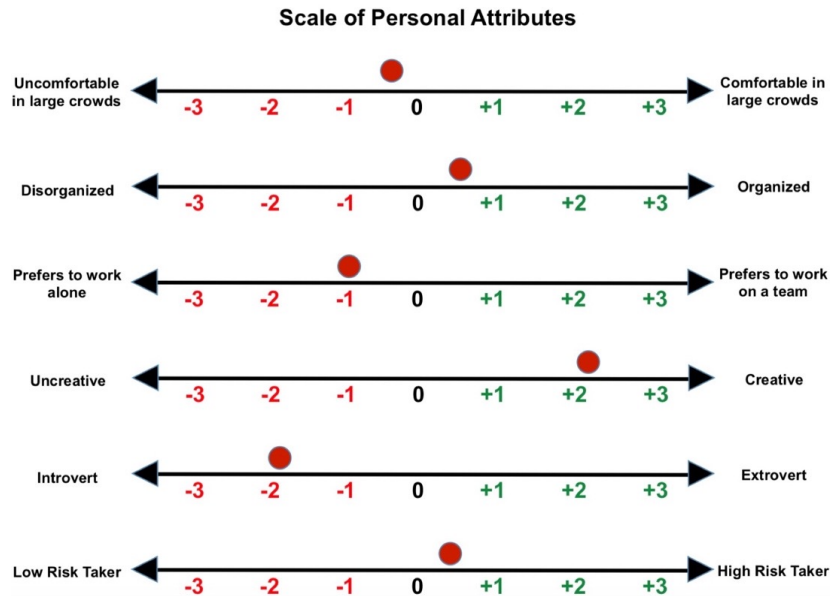


## Step 112

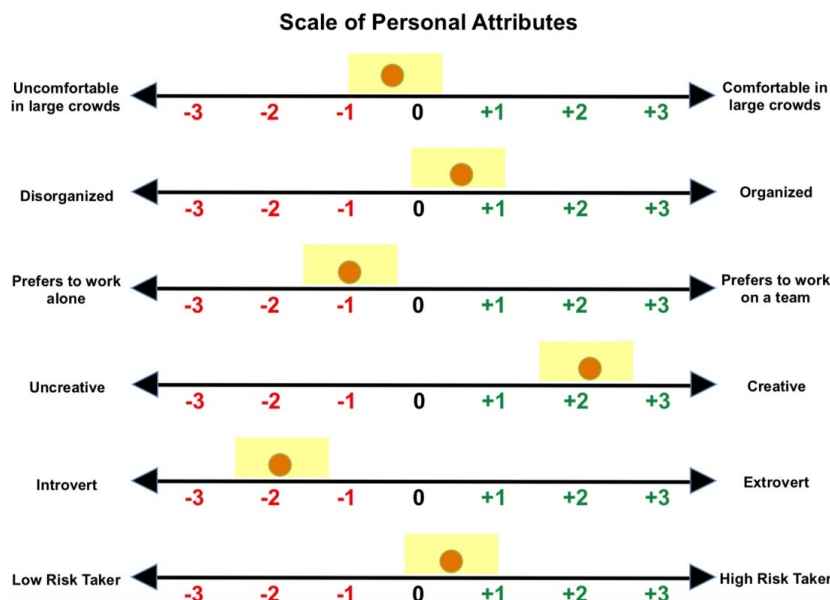
### Do You Have Pancsofar Syndrome?

(continued)

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



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



## Step 112

### Do You Have Pancsofar Syndrome?

(continued)

#### The results:

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

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

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

## Step 113

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

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

---

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

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

## Step 114

### ENGAGEMENT

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

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

In **N** ovation

**G** ames

**A** nalogies

Carin **G**

Conn **E** ctions

**E** M otions

Learn **E** r Styles

Fu **N**

Flexibili **T** y

---

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

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

Richard P. Feynman

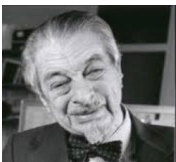
## Step 115

### Burton, Gunnar and Bob

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



Burton Blatt



Gunnar Dybwad



Bob Perske

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

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

## **Step 115**

### **Burton, Gunnar and Bob**

(continued)

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

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

## Step 116

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

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

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

---

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

**Robert Sternberg**

## Step 117

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


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

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

## Step 118

### BRUCE PERRY

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

**Acrostic Organizer**  **Summary Statements from Keynote Speaker**

**Center for Excellence in Social & Emotional Learning**  
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION & PROFESSIONAL STUDIES

**The capacity to love cannot be B** uilt in isolation.  
**R** elationships Matter  
The most powerf **U** l therapy is human love.  
**H** istory of **C** onnectedness  
People, not programs, chang **E** people.

**Relational P** overty / Wealth  
**R** **E** gulate, Then  
**R** elate, Then  
**R** eason.  
Stress is Necessar **Y**

## Step 119

### SPED 501 Acronym

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

**SPED 501: Session 13**

**Resources**

... where you learn more about yourself through the study of people who have disabilities (diff-abilities).

**Students who P**roduce **E**xciting **D**iscoveries  
- **501** to be exact -

## Step 120

### What's Important Today?

What you learn may not be as important as why you learn.  
What you say may not be as important as having your say.  
What you aspire to may not be as important as that you do aspire to something.  
What you earn may not be as important as that you yearn.  
What you do may not be as important as for whom you do it.  
Who you know may not be as important as who knows you.  
Where you go today may not be as important as why you go there.  
To be is just as important as to do.

## Step 121

### The Value of Experiences

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

---

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

**Tana French**

## **Step 122**

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

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

## **Step 123**

### **Our Sphere of Influence**

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

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

## Step 124

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

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

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

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

It's 9:30 PM - Encore awaits  
**S**eventy-Eight !!  
**L**ighting casts shadows  
**A**nother day/another city/another show  
**N**ever the same song twice  
**D**ylan delights a final time

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

## Step 125

### INSPECTOR MORSE

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

*When I'm thinking, I get thirsty.  
Morse. Everyo N e just calls me Morse.  
What's your fir S t name? Inspector.  
The secret of a hap P y life, Lewis, is to know  
when to stop and th E n to go that little bit further.  
There's always a pri C e to pay, Lewis ... always.  
The most suspicious T hing is a perfect alibi.  
Instantaneous, Lewis. C O ffee may be instant, death is not.  
Is this a dagger which I see befo R e me? I'd rather see a pint.*

*Curiosity becomes so M ething of a habit with policemen.  
I stumble about. That's what I d O . Sometimes I stumble in the right direction.  
Morse's Law is The R e's always time for one more pint.  
Watch the mouth. It give S away what the eyes try to hide.  
Thank L E wis for me.*

## Step 126

### *I Missed Class Tonight*

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

## Step 127

### Next Door to Me

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

At first, I thought it was some kind of joke.  
The neighbors you know, are different folk.  
I kept careful watch on them every day  
To make sure they didn't get in my way.  
  
Scared, frightened, tense as could be,  
The nerve of them moving right next door to me.  
Nothing happened to me on that scary first day;  
Nothing to report – nothing to say.  
  
Just in case, I built a fence all around my land  
So they couldn't see how my life's been so bland.  
But now, I'm sure – just wait and see  
Some weird things are bound to happen to me.  
  
A year's gone by as I'm writing to you -  
Still nothing to say – to write – or to do.

## Step 128

### This Must Be the Place

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



## Step 129

### A Response to an OP ED

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

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

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

## Step 130

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

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

#### Blank Template

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

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

The following page contains my projected entries for one course.

## **Step 130**

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

(continued)

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

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

## Step 131

### BOSTON Marathon

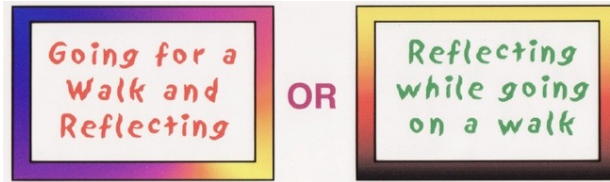
Following the Boston Marathon bombings of April 15, 2013, I constructed the Acrostic below to commemorate this event.

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

## Step 132

### Developing a Mindful Perspective

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

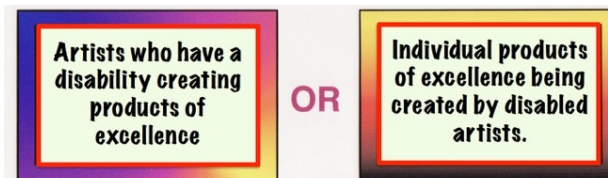


What becomes the primary activity and what becomes an accompanying activity? Is going for a walk the primary activity and using that time for reflection or is reflection the major activity being addressed while going out for a walk?



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

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



## Step 133

### Satisfaction from a Personal Perspective

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Step 133

### Satisfaction from a Personal Perspective

(continued)

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

#### Ernie's Rating for Hotel Satisfaction

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

Rating: (- 5) - (+ 5)

Importance: 1 - 5

## Step 133

### Satisfaction from a Personal Perspective

(continued)

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

## Step 134

### The Data Are Neutral

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

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

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

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

## Step 134

### The Data Are Neutral

(continued)

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

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

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

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

## Step 135

### Wisdom Interspersed in the Syllabus

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **Step 135**

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

(continued)

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

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

## Step 136

### Random Thoughts from Dylan's Lyrics

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

#### 01. From One Too Many Mornings

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Step 136

### Random Thoughts from Dylan's Lyrics

(continued)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Step 136

### Random Thoughts from Dylan's Lyrics

(continued)

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### 07. From My Back Pages

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

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

## Step 136

### Random Thoughts from Dylan's Lyrics

(continued)

#### 08. From Sweetheart Like You

*Steal a little they throw you in jail.*

*Steal a lot and they make you king.*

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

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

*... and I say that every question,*

*if it's a truthful question,*

*can be answered by askin' it.*

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

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

## Step 137

### Accuracy of Assessment Tools

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

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

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

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

## Step 138

### The Paradox of Student Feedback

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

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

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

Compared with the following feedback - - -

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

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

## Step 138

### The Paradox of Student Feedback

(continued)

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

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

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

## **Step 138**

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

(continued)

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

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

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

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

## **Step 139**

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

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

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

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

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

## Step 140

### Tangled Up in Bellevue

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Step 140

### Tangled Up in Bellevue

(continued)

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

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

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

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

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

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

The people there have gone back to their lives  
And I have done so too,  
But I realize that for all these years  
I still haven't got a clue  
But I've paid my dues . . .  
Tangled up in Bellevue .

## Step 141

### Traits of a Creative Person

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

#### Identifying the Traits of a Creative Person

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

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

<input type="checkbox"/>	_____ _____
<input type="checkbox"/>	_____ _____
<input type="checkbox"/>	_____ _____
<input type="checkbox"/>	_____ _____
<input type="checkbox"/>	_____ _____

#### Traits Identified by Your Peers

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

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

# Step 141

## Traits of a Creative Person (continued)

### Identifying the Traits of a Creative Person

Bob Dylan

Your Creative Person's Name

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

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

### Traits Identified by Your Peers

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

## Step 142

### Quotes of Note

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

- *Students should certainly think about what they read, but they should read something worth thinking about.* (p. 20) as quoted in The Death and Life of the Great American School System by Diane Ravitch
- *The essence of America lies not in the headlined heroes ... but in the everyday folks who live and die unknown, yet leave their dreams as legacies.* Alan Lomax as quoted in the preface of the book Listening is an Act of Love: A Celebration of American Life from the StoryCorps Project, 2007
- *Experts, he would say, are expected to know things. That's a big responsibility. About all I know is that things change, and in the meantime, it's fun to have opinions about them.* (p. 2) Home Water: Near and Far by William Tapply
- *If too few opportunities for curiosity are available, if too many obstacles are put in the way of risk and exploration, the motivation to engage in creative behavior is easily distinguished.* Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi
- *A local reporter approached me and asked me what makes a good teacher. I told him that passion, professionalism and perseverance are three main traits a good teacher must display in the classroom – and they are.*

*The really good teachers are able to read a child's story and recognize the remarkable opportunity to help author that story. ... Really good teachers know they have the ability to make a child happy or sad, to make a child feel confident or unsure, to make a child feel wanted or discarded. And students know when we care.* Anthony Mullen – 2009 National Teacher of the Year – Greenwich, CT

- *There is as much difference between us and ourselves as between us and others.* Michel de Montaigne
- *I admit my style is unorthodox - - - but I feel students can look up any facts they want at any time they want outside of this course. However, I feel one of the purposes of this course is that I can influence how they use those facts.* Attributed to a wise instructor of SPED 501
- *When I first began this course, I felt a bit overwhelmed with concern that providing special services would take up too much classroom time, or involve tons of preparation to be able to assist all my students. Now, I realize that many of the adaptations can benefit all the students in the classroom so the time it takes is well invested to help all my students.* From a student in my course, Joe V.

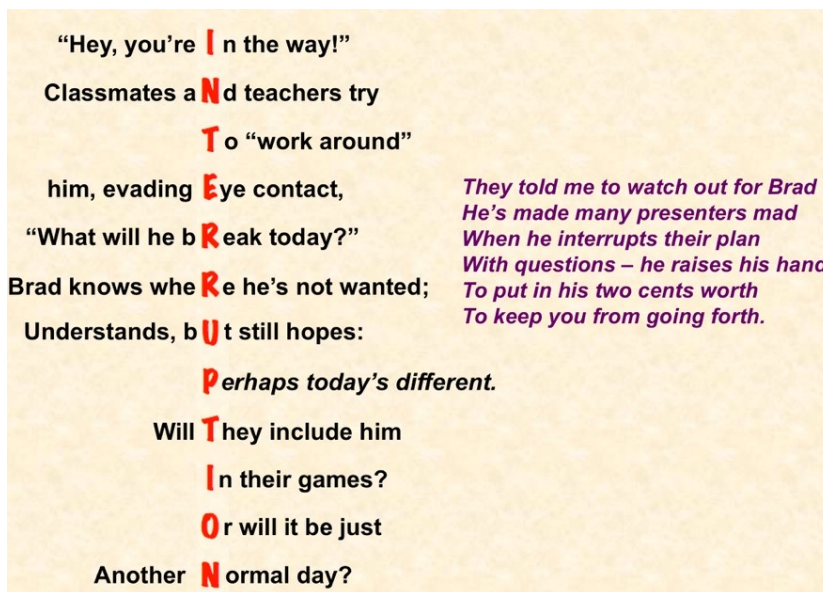
## Step 143

### Brad: INTERRUPTION or PARTICIPANT

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

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

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



## Step 143

### Brad: INTERRUPTION or PARTICIPANT

(continued)

**P**icked from the crowd  
**A**ssigned a seat of  
Hono**R**, and a job,  
wi**T**h real responsibilities: *Help me, Brad, I need you here*  
Keep th**I**s presentation going. *At this table – by me near*  
**C**an everyone see me? *I have a job for you to do*  
I'm really do**I**ng this. *You'll look competent when you*  
**P**eople'll say I can't *Give each person papers to read*  
**A**nd I'm showing them! *You're just the person that I need!*  
Who k**N**ows what  
**T**omorrow will bring?

## Step 144

### PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT

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

Em <b>P</b> owerment	Comm <b>E</b> nt Cards
It's <b>A</b> Matter of Trust	<b>O</b> Nly Positive Page
The Majo <b>R</b> ity Come From the Minority	<b>G</b> eoaching
Leave th <b>E</b> Jargon Out!	Boot Sw <b>A</b> p
Thi <b>N</b> k Creatively!	Droppin <b>G</b> Names
Paren <b>T</b> Camps	Self – D <b>E</b> termination
School Clim <b>A</b> te	<b>M</b> ental Health Challenges
<b>L</b> iteracy Parties	“ <b>B</b> <b>E</b> With – Be Available
	Abse <b>N</b> t Role Models
	<i>Beyond <b>T</b>he Bake Sale</i>

## Step 145

### Palace Theater Review

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

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

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

*Ripple – Grateful Dead*

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

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

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

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

## Step 145

### Palace Theater Review

(continued)

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

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

## **Step 146**

### **A New Year's Toast**

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Step 147

### Welcome to the Best Course ...

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **Step 147**

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

(continued)

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

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

## Step 148

### Shush!

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

## **Step 149**

### **Celebrate – Don't Replicate**

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

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## **Step 150**

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

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

## 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  
**T**eacher 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  
**P**lays 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

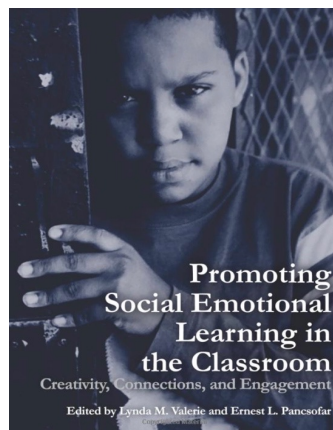
During a retreat for educators on the topic of mindfulness and when asked what our intentions for the day were, I created the acrostic summary below:

**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:



**T**ake  
Tim **E**  
**A**nd  
**C**ome  
Gat **H**er  
Togeth **E**r  
Fo **R**

Ce **L**ebrating  
**O**ur  
De **V**otion To  
**E**ducation

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

**What:** A Time to Celebrate Teachers

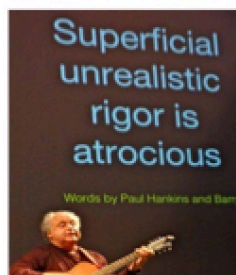
**When:** May 5<sup>th</sup>, 2015: 5:00 – 7:00 PM

**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 28<sup>th</sup> 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 13<sup>th</sup> 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 2<sup>nd</sup> 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** <sub>2</sub>O

**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.*

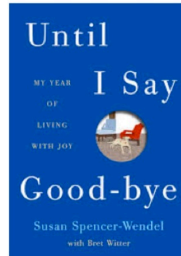
*This can be an enjoyable learning experience for everyone. It will be a terrific learning experience for most of us.*

*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 <b>HOPE</b> 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.

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

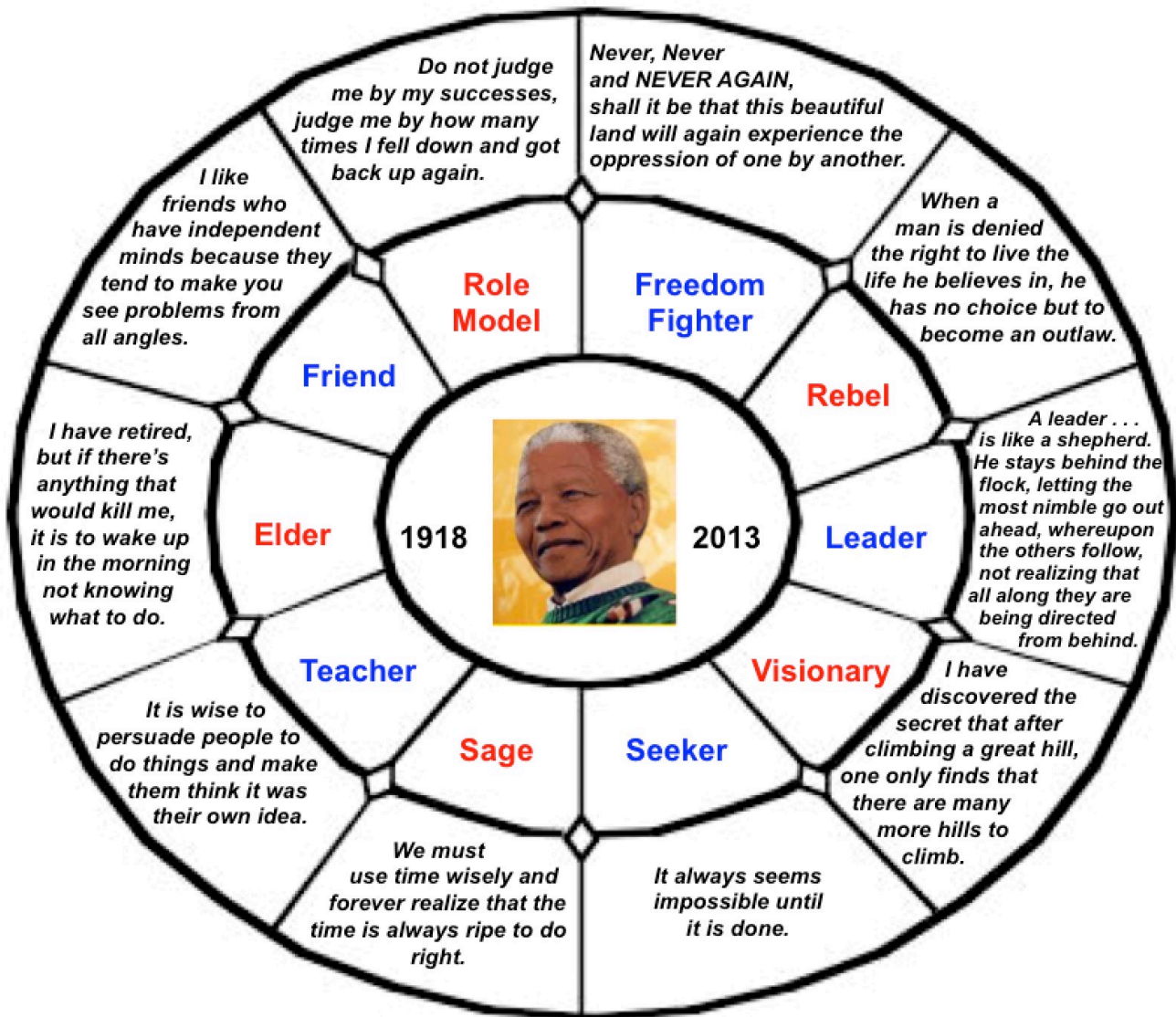
#### **S** ession web links

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 98<sup>th</sup> 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 – SSHHh” 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

### WATCH

While watching the UConn women’s basketball game yesterday, I noticed on the back of their warm-up jerseys the following acrostic, which I thought was quite cleverly designed:

**W**e  
**A**re  
**T**he  
**CH**ange

## **Step 201**

### **Profile in Song Titles**

As part of a novel way to describe ourselves to others, I once suggested that students look through their playlists to identify ten song titles that help to describe some of their traits / characteristics to others. Here is the list I developed:

1. *Diamonds in the Rough* – John Prine
2. *River of Dreams* – Billy Joel
3. *Blowin' in the Wind* – Bob Dylan
4. *Stand By Me* – Ben E. King
5. *You Got a Friend in Me* – Randy Newman
6. *I Can See Clearly* – Johnny Nash
7. *With a Little Help From My Friends* – Joe Cocker
8. *Heart of Gold* – Neil Young
9. *Courage* – Bob Blue
10. *Both Sides Now* – Judy Collins

## **Step 202**

### **Your Work Is Superb!**

Below are my comments upon reviewing the products of one student's out-of-class engagement activities. I could have written these comments for many other students in my courses, as well.

Your work is superb! Whenever I review the products from a student with your creativity and skills, I know that you could excel in whatever style of assessment I required in this class. However, because I allow students to demonstrate their competence from a wide menu of options, I am enriched by the quality of your output. These products reinforce my value that creative teachers will be the best supporters of inclusion out there. You are going to be an extremely creative teacher!

## **Step 203**

### **Reflections Reviewing Student Assignments**

I see my coffee table in my living room  
Where piles of student work does before me loom.  
Hours and hours of reading lie before me now;  
I'll find much inspiration that will show me how  
Each person took some seeds that I did sow  
And with their imaginations essentially did grow  
Resources they will surely some day use  
And hopefully plan to spread the news  
That creativity is a vital skill.  
It can't be captured in a pill  
But practiced and practiced and practiced some more.  
Each product you make will help to ensure  
That your teaching has energy, freshness and wit  
When you meet your challenges, you will not quit,  
But take a deep breath and think in your mind,  
I just need to invent a one-of-a-kind  
Resource for my students some days  
As you continue to teach in creative ways.

## **Step 204**

### **Ramblings 1**

Teaching is more about what is happening to you as a person than what the student learns as a result of your instruction. Someone else could be in your shoes and be just as efficient a teacher for that student. Instead, teaching is a craft that allows us to learn about ourselves as creative problem solvers, collaborators with colleagues and how we grow in our depth and breadth of skills to handle challenges of greater proportion.

I view teaching as a great opportunity to improve upon the various drafts of my strategies to bring out the strengths within the students with whom I have contact. Every time I struggle to figure out how to help a student overcome a particular challenge, I am also repositioning myself to work from a better perspective for the next student whose challenge may be equally perplexing. We are continually fine-tuning our detective skills at discovering what combination of supports and services will match best to the challenges each student brings to our attention.

I hope that your participation in this course helps you evolve into a person whose life is enriched and enhanced through the vocation of teaching.

## Step 205

### Welcome News

Many students do not realize the hours and hours of preparation that go into each class session. This preparation occurs in solitude with my inner voice being the only feedback I typically receive about more creative ways to present the content. However, on occasion, I will receive feedback such as what I present below, which makes it all worthwhile!

*My overall thoughts about taking this course in the manner in which it was constructed:*

*At last, a professor who practices what he preaches. Actually, he doesn't preach and that's part of what is so wonderful. He certainly has a gift for communication and provides information and strategies to be a good communicator in a non-threatening manner.*

*I appreciated the format of the class and am impressed by how engaging the professor made an online course. My only regret is that I didn't have more time to explore all of the resources provided.*

*Frequent feedback was greatly appreciated. It kept me on track and motivated me. It was also done in a supportive and productive manner.*

*The clearly organized Blackboard setup with expectations and procedures helped me work efficiently. The flexibility of deadlines allowed me to take this class. I had childcare conflicts and work commitments that precluded me from getting to campus and dedicating time during the first half of the class but had more time during the second half and was able to attend to the class.*

*The content was directly related to my work and life in general. I feel better informed and equipped to work with the unique students who come in and out of my classroom and I feel a renewed sense of empowerment and hope that I can help my students achieve their goals.*

*I found learning about the referral process, 504s and IEPs, autism, strategies for supporting students, graphic organizers, and twice exceptional students to be especially helpful but thought all of the material covered was useful.*

*The text was a great resource. I appreciated the supplementary materials just as much as they related the content to real life. I think this course was perfect as is and I would love to see a conference or workshop offered in addition. I know that I would attend and would urge my colleagues to as well. The information is useful for all involved in education and the professor's positive and productive attitude inspires and motivates. Just the shot in the arm that I needed.*

*Thanks, Dr. Pancsofar.  
Karen G.*

## Step 206

### Thoughts Listening to a Parent Describe Her Experiences on Behalf of her Child with a Disability

During one class session, I invited a parent of a child with a disability to talk about their role as an advocate and share their wisdom with teacher candidates and other students preparing for professional roles in the public schools. Please find below my notes from this session.

1. Parents have a history of frustrations, wrong turns, misdiagnoses, broken promises and unfulfilled expectations.
2. By the time we see their son/daughter, there has been a history of others before us who have come in and out of their son/daughter's life.
3. Other parents and families who have a son/daughter who functions in a similar manner and/or who has a similar label often provide support and hope for their own child.
4. Parents receive information from multiple sources, some of which is in agreement with the professional literature and some of which runs counter to the current suggestions for support/treatment/education.
5. Highly educated parents who seek advocates among well-known lawyers typically obtain different services than parents who are not highly educated or who don't have the means to secure the private services of well-known lawyers.
6. In my understanding, ABA (applied behavior analysis) is not a marketing name of one separate package owned by anyone, but rather an approach first articulated in 1968 in the *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*. The main principles lie in the application of currently recommended interventions with the frequent use of assessment in which to make decisions based on that data.
7. Consistency, perseverance, volunteers, resources, timing, and follow-up all appeared to be significant factors in this parent's success with the "recovering" of his son.
8. The willingness to be politically active by running for and being elected to the school board is admirable and noteworthy.
9. Documentation and keeping notes is an essential part of verifying progress, keeping abreast of action taken and holding accountable the different members of the PPT.
10. It is extremely hard to pinpoint just what parts of a prescribed regimen of strategies are, in fact, responsible for subsequent changes in a student's behavior. Are all the ingredients in the "package" necessary for future success? This is a hard question to answer.

## Step 207

### Magpie Murders Quotes

I read the *Magpie Murders*, a mystery, who done it, book for pleasure. Then, I started from the beginning to read it again - - - only more slowly and to focus on the literary skill with which Anthony Horowitz constructs the unusual plots to this book. Below are my quotes that caught my attention without giving away anything from the story line for any reader who may want to read this excellently written book.

*There's something quite comforting about a mess, especially when there's no one else there to complain.*

*But, I'm not sure it actually matters what we read. Our lives continue along the straight lines that have been set out for us. Fiction merely allows us a glimpse of the alternative. Maybe that's one of the reasons we enjoy it.*

*... plumbing in the house was at least fifty years old and complained loudly every time it was pressed into service, ...*

*... putting a steel lid on all her emotions so that only a cold veneer of politeness showed through.*

*He never used the tube train, disliking the presence of so many people in close proximity; so many dreams, fears, resentments jumbled together in the darkness. He found it overpowering.*

*Rumours and malicious gossip are like bindweed. They cannot be cut back, even with the sword of truth.*

*Clarissa sipped her sherry. It clung to her lip as if reluctant to enter her mouth.*

*The index and third fingers of his right hand were permanently stained - like old piano keys.*

*... was keen to be on his way. He was holding his bicycle as if it were an animal, straining at the leash.*

*How it is the small lies and evasions which nobody sees or detects but which can come together and smother you like the fumes in a house fire.*

*But he was a man without a shadow - or perhaps a shadow without a man. He was both as prominent and as unremarkable as the weathervane on the steeple of St. Botolph's.*

*... had a strange, slightly unsavoury quality; a sense of some secret that he was refusing to share.*

*He was in his late fifties but looked much older, worn out by a struggle that he had actually lost a long time ago.*

## Step 208

### OLGA TOKARCZUK

I just finished my reading of *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead* by Olga Tokarczuk: Nobel Prize winner in literature. Below I have extracted sample quotes that resonated with me as I read through this exceptional book.

The best conversations are with **O**urself. At least there's no risk of a misunderstanding.

Tough. As it says in **B**lake: "Opposition is true friendship."

And the flowers in his **G**arden are neat and tidy.

Standing straight and slender, **A**s if they'd been to the gym.

Everything will pass. The wise man knows **T**his from the start, and has no regrets.

The prison is not **O**utside, but inside each of us.

One has to tell people what to thin **K** There's no

altern **A**tive. Otherwise, someone else will do it.

It's a feature of flashlights that they' **R**e only visible in the daytime.

Sometimes I think that only the si **C**k are truly healthy.

"Mrs. Duszeńko ..." "Dus **Z**ejko," I corrected him.

(Weather Channel) ... division ... three gro **U**ps: skiers, allergy sufferers and drivers ...

Everyone **K**nows the profit to be reaped from the useful,  
but nobody knows the benefits to be gained  
from the useless.

## Step 209

### Living in the Moment

Because I have lived many years and bring that longevity to my challenges, I recognize that "living in the moment" is all that really matters. There is so much we cannot control, but we can determine how this current "minute" or "second" will go. There, it's already gone! I took a sip of coffee and appreciated the flavor a little longer than I usually do. I am taking more time responding to your feedback than I typically do. Later will take care of itself. I need to practice this more, especially when there is a current, external crisis continuing to brew and influence my mobility out of the house. We will ALL face limitations in our movements and actions as we age – some will just get a taste of those limitations sooner than others – whether those challenges be physical, emotional, intellectual or a combination of all three. Being there for loved ones is what is important.

## Step 210

### Building a Healthier Me

In one course I have an assignment titled – Building a Healthier Me. As part of the orientation to this assignment I share the following essay about how having a 10-step program may be just as important as the Ingredients in one’s 10 Step Program. See if you agree.

#### From the Dusty Files of Your Instructor

#### Why Ernie Will Succeed on His Current Weight Loss Program

The principal reason that I will succeed in reaching my goal of losing 25 pounds by June 30, 1990, is that I have a ten-step plan. It doesn't matter what the actual steps are in this plan as long as there is a reasonable assumption that each step is a helpful strategy toward weight loss. The key is that for each step you complete, you increase your odds by 10% that you will, indeed, succeed in losing the 1 - 2 lbs. that have been targeted for that week. Time will tell if this program is effective, but I am explaining my steps below in the hopes that it may help others toward their own personalized program. The ten steps do not have to be completed in any particular order, nor do you need to do any of the ten steps of my program. Write your own, but you must have ten of them! Your own ten step program may have just as high a probability of succeeding as my ten-step program. Then, you can make a lot of money by publishing your ten steps. Someone will buy it if you place copies next to *The National Enquire* at the supermarket check-out. An appropriate headline might be “A Never- Before-Published Ten Step Program That Worked For Me” and put a before and after photo of yourself under the headline.

**A note of disclaimer written on 2/1/20:** *Hi, it’s me again – 30 years later. I did lose some weight following my 10-step program: more like 15 pounds, but they found their way back! I am embarking on a new set of ingredients in my Top 10 List TBD.*

#### Step 1: Don't Drink Coffee.

I learned the benefits of this step a couple of months ago when I had the flu (or more aptly stated, “The flu had me.”). My stomach was rather queasy and I could not tolerate anything acidic in my stomach. This flu lasted about four days during which I didn't drink coffee. After I regained my health, I suddenly resolved not to drink coffee again for the duration of following my 10-step plan. I don't know if caffeine contributes to the appetite drive or actually reduces that drive, but I've decided to include it as step one because there is a 50-50 chance that it contributes to 10% of my ability to remain on my current weight loss program.

**Step 210**  
**Building a Healthier Me**  
**Why Ernie Will Succeed**  
**on His Current Weight Loss Program**  
(continued)

**Step 2: Eat Tofu.**

I like the flavor of tofu and, particularly, steamed with vegetables or stir fried. Tofu is an excellent source of protein and is low in calories. For those who have not tried this delicacy, begin with a piece of Pancsofar's fine tofu pie and you will be hooked on this ingredient.

**Step 3: Exercise.**

I began this step by getting up early and turning on the television and watching exercise programs while making and eating breakfast. This is a good start! But watching exercise programs is not enough! I began the corporate walk. The corporate walk (only in good weather, however) consists of a briskly paced walk along streets where corporate people work. You have to discuss business or at least talk about someone at work in order for it to qualify as a corporate walk. In addition, take the stairs unless you are carrying a heavy load. The excess weight that I now carry does not qualify as a heavy load. This is excellent advice since our office is only in a three-story building. If you work in an office on the twelfth floor, take the elevator to the tenth floor and walk the remaining two floors. Also, park in a space that is a good way away from your building. Use your own judgment for how far a "good way" is.

**Step 4: Don't Go Grocery Shopping on an Empty Stomach.**

You are less likely to buy junk food if you do your grocery shopping on a full stomach. In addition, only buy what is on your list and not what catches your eye. Limit purchases to what is on the menu for the upcoming week.

**Step 5: Only Eat at Designated Meal Times.**

This is a key step but again is only worth 10% of the total success to this program. Cutting out snacks is a key to the Pancsofar 10-step program. An apple or fruit here and there is permissible but avoid snacking at night or at work. Rely, instead, on seltzer water with a mixture of fruit juice.

**Step 6: Brush Your Teeth After Each Meal.**

This step is important because it removes the taste of food from your mouth at times that you are apt to be tempted to violate some of the steps of the program. As a side effect, this also helps prevent tooth decay. I prefer aqua fresh toothpaste, but it is not felt that the exact brand name of the toothpaste makes an appreciable difference to the 10% weighting.

**Step 210**  
**Building a Healthier Me**  
**Why Ernie Will Succeed**  
**on His Current Weight Loss Program**  
(continued)

**Step 7: Only Weigh Yourself Once Per Week**

Since this weight loss program results in a gradual reduction, it is important not to get discouraged by not seeing weight reduction each day. Weighing should occur once per week. The weighing should occur in the afternoon, with clothes on, but without shoes. Cheating is not advised.

**Step 8: Bring Lunches to Work**

There will be no more L-2s from the Chinese Restaurant on this 10-step program! Lunch should consist mainly of leftovers from the night before or from meals prepared in advance during the weekend. If forced to eat out under peer pressure, eat sensibly noting that your ability to lose weight that week has been lessened by 10%.

**Step 9: Put a Chart Up in the Office To Mark Progress on One or More Steps of The Program.**

This step is important as a visual reminder of how well this ten-step program is going. For example, I might use the +1 and -1 system. For each day that I eat only at meals (fruit snack is permissible) I'll award myself +1 points. If I do not adhere to this step, I get -1. I can keep a running total and designate a reinforcer for each 10 points earned under this system. Or, I could keep a list on which 25 pounds are marked off in one-pound segments. If a certain number of pounds has been kept off for one week, I can clip off those segments pertaining to the amount of pounds lost toward my goal of 25 pounds.

**Step 10: Put Your Fork Down After Every Bite**

This step takes practice to do without drawing unnecessary attention. It allows you to chew your food longer, talk to people at the table, and extend the length of time that the meal takes place. You will have a more satisfying and less hurried meal by following this step.

Will this 10-step program work for you? Probably not. Remember, the key is following an individualized set of 10 steps that you develop that you think contributes to a healthier lifestyle. Now, Go For It! I will accept whatever donation you find worthy to provide pending the outcome of your own, individualized 10-Step Program.

## Step 211

### A Note to My Students – 2

Our lives have been disrupted by a virus we cannot see.  
Our friends are at a distance finding a new way to be - - -

Connected - Isolated  
Comforted - Frustrated

Reflective - Selective  
Reactive – Protective

Words take on more meaning than they did before.  
We don't quite know what else will be in store.

*Life goes on; we know that adage well.*  
Take time to think about our values and dwell - - -

On stopping and listening to each of our inner voices;  
Wondering what it means as we make our many choices.

This too will pass but not without much sacrifice.  
"We are in it together." is often the advice - - -

Given to us by our leaders as we each do our special part.  
Please stay healthy and safe and reach out to others with your heart.

## Step 212

### INFJ

When my wife and I completed the Myers-Briggs Assessment, we were surprised to discover that our initials to indicate our personality traits were the same: INFJ. Here is my response:

**I = introversion; N = Intuitive; F = Feeling; J = judging.**

Thanks for spend**INg** the morning with me today. **F**irst, I en**J**oyed  
d**I**scuss**INg** personality traits **F**or bringing clarity **J**ust when we needed  
**I**t most. We ca**N** **F**requently **J**oin in  
d**I**scussio**Ns** o**F** **J**oint  
benef**I**t a**Nd** **F**orge ahead from **J**anuary to  
December **I**n k**N**owing **F**irsthand the **J**oys we  
br**INg** to each other. Who know **F**or sure what **J**udicious  
not**I**o**Ns** we will **F**eel by **J**umping at the chance to engage  
**IN** discussions o**F** our **J**ubilant personality traits.

## **Step 213**

### **The Language of Covid19**

I was intrigued by the different words that appear in the media that are now connected to the virus pandemic we are in the midst of. I contrasted the use of specific terms prior to this outbreak and what those terms tend to mean now.

Once - Corona was a brand of beer;  
Now - it's a virus lurking near.

Once - flattening the curve could be a baseball toss;  
Now - it's a graph to minimize society's loss.

Once - epicenter referred to major earthquakes;  
Now - NYC - this designation takes.

Once - early bird special was a certain dinner reservation;  
Now - it's for the elderly shopping in a special time designation.

Once - face masks were for hockey goalies' needs;  
Now - they provide protection to stop this hideous disease.

Once - social distance meant to visit relatives afar.  
Now - it's space between people - about 2 yards.

## **Step 214**

### **Wondering About Being a Teacher**

I wrote the following feedback to a student studying to be a history teacher who wondered about what she might be getting into – given the era of high anxiety and uncertainty that currently exists in our schools.

To make History come alive, we must make students come alive. This was a significant statement from the article about teaching history to which you linked in your first set of comments. I think it is acceptable and quite normal to question wanting to be an educator given today's times and anxieties. To me, being a teacher is an outlet for my creativity, writing, values and need for a sounding board on my points of view. Viewing teaching as a transformative experience means that we are changed by the act of teaching. We are a different person because of choosing this profession than if we went down another path. Your comments cause me to take a brief pause and reflect on my own career path. Paradoxically, as the steps on my own path are nearing an end, your path is just beginning! I'm glad our paths crossed.

## Step 215

### John Prine Died Today

John Prine died today - complications from the Covid19 virus -  
A gentle man, poet & song writer. He sang for all of us.  
I remember Billy the Bum  
On his very first album.  
I'm saddened that I never saw one of his shows,  
But part of me surely knows  
That listening to him sing on my daily walks -  
Songs of life – were always full of paradox.  
He was a genius with words  
Mixed among his guitar chords.  
I'll miss his folksy sound  
And in this singer I have found  
Everyday messages  
Amid his lyrical passages.  
John Prine died today.  
I'm sad as I go about my way  
In my daily routine  
And get caught in between  
A new "normal" way to be.  
His music helped me to see  
The common daily events in life,  
Even as we endure this strife  
That filters in and out our day -  
John Prine had a lot to say.

## Step 216

### John Prine Lyrics That Resonate With Me

#### The Late John Garfield Blues

*An old man sleeps with his conscience at night.  
Young kids sleep with their dreams.  
While the mentally ill sit perfectly still  
And live through life's in-betweens.*

#### Quiet Man

*Oodles of light what a beautiful sight;  
Both of God's eyes are shining tonight.  
Rays and beams of incredible dreams  
And I am a quiet man.*

## Step 216

### John Prine Lyrics That Resonate With Me (continued)

#### **Billy the Bum**

*Now some folks they wait  
And some folks they pray  
For Jesus to rise up again,  
But none of these folks  
In their holy cloaks  
Ever took Billy on as a friend.  
For pity's a crime  
And it ain't worth a dime  
To a person who's really in need.  
Just treat 'em the same  
As you would your own name  
Next time that your heart starts to bleed.*

#### **Hello in There**

*You know that old trees just grow stronger,  
And old rivers grow wilder every day.  
Old people just grow lonesome  
Waiting for someone to say, "Hello in there, hello."  
So, if you're walking down the street sometime  
And spot some hollow ancient eyes,  
Please don't just pass 'em by and stare  
As if you didn't care, say, "Hello in there, hello."*

#### **Everybody**

*Everybody needs somebody that they can talk to;  
Someone to open up their ears  
And let that trouble through.  
Now you don't have to sympathize  
Or care what they may do,  
But everybody needs somebody that they can talk to.*

#### **Humidity Built the Snowman**

*The scientific nature of the ordinary man  
Is to go on out and do the best you can.*

## Step 216

### John Prine Lyrics That Resonate With Me

(continued)

#### Glory of True Love

*You can climb the highest mountain;  
Touch the moon and stars above  
But Old Faithful's just a fountain  
Compared to the glory of true love.*

#### Far From Me

*Well, a question ain't really a question,  
If you know the answer too.*

## Step 217

### One Piece at a Time

I have a jigsaw puzzle spread out on a table;  
It's a map of the United States and I am able  
To separate the pieces and make some sense  
Of where they go. It does take some patience  
But here is the unique feature I share in this rhyme:  
I only put one piece in the puzzle - one sitting at a time.  
When preparing my notes or reviewing an assignment,  
I take a break and put one puzzle piece in its alignment  
To its proper place in the grand scheme of things;  
Then, I return to my work to see what the next assignment brings.  
You may think it odd, but to me it's just fine;  
A quick break is all I need to quiet my mind  
Until 10 - 15 minutes have gone by  
And I return to my puzzle - you can ask why?  
What's the purpose of this slow, inefficient practice  
Of assembling a puzzle? But, as God is my witness,  
I return to this activity so I can better direct  
My energies anew and reflect.  
I need no applause!  
I just need a brief, mindful pause.

## Step 218

### PANDEMIC DIVERSIONS

#### P A N D E M I C

J I g-saw Puzzle

V irtual Meetings

Luth E r

B Rokenwood

Miss Fi S her Murder Mysteries

M I ndful Pauses

Je O pardy

The Ma N dalorian

Walk S - Treadmill

## Step 219

### Equality - Fairness - Best (Feedback to a Student)

Your comments on the topic of equality / fairness / best / etc. was intriguing to review. To me, having the conversation about what is fair / just / best is worth having and, perhaps, that is the perspective that matters most: having the important players involved in the conversation. We can't predict what circumstances a student will be in next week, month, year, etc. Look at Sam Berns. His prognosis was that he would not live to see 20 years of age. With that knowledge, what is the purpose of his education? Yes, he had the privilege of being born into a family with two medical doctors as parents. However, this did not affect his life expectancy. In my opinion, we need to go with a consensus of people who are on a student's team, including the student, in making decisions about what direction our efforts should be in NOW. We look at a profile of who the student is, what skills and competencies each student has and how to nurture each student's talents, gifts and competencies within a framework that is called the school's curriculum. In my "best world" scenario, each student would have an Individualized Learning Plan, which is organic and changes based on each student's circumstances / interests / projected path of learning. This goal may never occur, but how do we, within our current restrictions and multiple paradoxes, develop a learning map for each student that maximizes each student's strengths, interests, passions and competencies? The discussion of how to do this is an important part of the solution. Thank you for reflecting on this issue and influencing me to record my own thoughts today.

## Step 220

### Thank You for Making It Through

Thank you for making it through - well almost - this memorable semester.  
This will be a time you will not soon forget and long remember.  
Perhaps, the details will become a little hazy with time.  
When that happens, please take out and reread these lines of rhyme.  
Whose lives did you touch with your words of kindness and love?  
What actions did you take and how did you rise above  
The isolation from your friends and still keep in touch?  
How did you feel when you awoke amid such  
Terrible news that greeted you each day?  
There were bright spots, too, about the way  
Neighbors helped neighbors and the ones on the front lines -  
In hospitals and trauma centers where there were all kinds  
Of emergencies and acts of heroism and where kindness prevailed  
Amid the chaos of lives lost and others regained - while some failed  
To see the serious nature of this infection  
As each day the death toll projection  
Eclipsed the previous day's total.  
Love prevails - we are inseparable  
From our family, friends, students and teachers;  
Bakers, store workers, grocers and preachers.  
You are stronger today than you were a month ago;  
Pause and reflect amid all you feel and know.

## Step 221

### ISSUES

The Every Student Succeed Act could have/should have been called the **I**ndividualized **S**tudent **S**uccess and **U**nified **E**ducational **S**upports act (ISSUES-ACT). The question becomes – What are the main ISSUES for each student in this school? What data do we need to collect about each student's ISSUES? Each student's progress is measured from that student's baseline because each student's ISSUES are different from another student's ISSUES. When we let politicians and non-educators define success, the data are likely to be skewed in the expected direction of how the assessors are defining success; i.e., lower in-school suspensions / higher standard test scores.

## Step 222

### ROUGH AND ROWDY WAYS

I decided to look up a sample of various reviews from media outlets addressing the most recent album by Bob Dylan: *Rough and Rowdy Ways*. Then, I took sample words from those reviews to compose a poem reflecting on this recent work.

pulp-noi **R** masterpiece [LA Times]  
often frequently c **O** nspirational [NY Times]  
one of the most timely alb **U** ms ever [Rolling Stone]  
keepin **G** an eye on heaven's door [Boston Globe]  
enthraling, misc **H** evious – and very male [The Guardian]  
-  
m **A** sterful, reflective [MN Star Tribune]  
breathes, expa **N** ds and contracts [NPR]  
masterful (and cru **D** e) collage ... [Slate]  
-  
one long magnificent **R** iddle [The Telegraph]  
Bob Dylan c **O** nfronts his mortality [USA Today]  
pessimistic Americana **W** ith hallucinatory fervor [The Atlantic]  
reflective, meditative befu **D** dling, funny and awe inspiring [ABC News]  
sa **Y** ing what he wants while he still can [WSJ]  
-  
If it **W** ere a painting, I'd call it a masterpiece [BBC]  
a menacing and pl **A** yful return [The Irish Times]  
he's making up for lost rh **Y** me [Variety]  
soul **S** earching masterpiece [Ernie Pancsofar]

I contain multitudes reverberates in my mind  
As I think of how Dylan captures the mysteries that I find  
In a collage of memories reflective in his rhymes.  
His masterful collection is speaking to our times  
And each one's mortality for what could be in store  
When each of us go knocking up on heaven's door.  
Befuddling, mysterious and even some soul searching  
I think this master's songs are greatly awe inspiring.

## Step 223

### Quote by Charlie Daniels

Charlie Daniels died on July 6, 2020, and a quote of his resonates with the theme of this Path to be a “Perfecting” Teacher:

From the Hartford Courant on July 7, 2020: *He (Daniels) said in 1998 that he kept touring so much because “I have never played those notes perfectly. I’ve never sung every song perfectly. I’m in competition to be better tonight than I was last night and to be better tomorrow than tonight.”*

## Step 224

### Changes

As I reviewed a student's work one morning, some thoughts entered my head that took the following form:

Once, I tried to set the world on fire;  
Now, I need a spark just to feel inspired.

Once I sought to go that extra mile;  
Now, I’ll settle for a little smile.

Once, I wondered how famous I could be;  
Now, humbleness is a trait I seek for me.

Once, I would be traveling near and far;  
Now, I go to Big Y in my family car.

Once, I wondered if success meant great wealth;  
Now, I realize success is measured in health.

Once, outside I could run and jog;  
Now, inside I walk and it’s more like a slog.

Once, I could work 14 hours straight;  
Now, in my schedule a nap I do make.

Once I listened to Dylan on records and tapes;  
Now, I listen to Dylan on playlists for my escapes.

Once, I wrote articles and books and more;  
Now, I write these words to think and explore

About changes that happen each and every day;  
About changes that happen as I go about my way;  
About changes that happen in what I will say;  
About changes that happen that I’ll be OK  
About changes that happen ...

## Step 225

### JOHN ROBERT LEWIS

Every once in a while, great American heroes pass from this world to the next and we must find our own way of honoring their presence. One such hero is John Lewis and here are some universal truths I extracted from some of his quotes.

The reward for playing	<b>J</b>	azz is playing jazz.
Get in good trouble, necessary tr	<b>O</b>	uble, ....
You must be	<b>H</b>	eadlights and not taillights.
Be hopeful. Be optimistic.	<b>N</b>	ever lose that sense of hope.
You have to be pe	<b>R</b>	sistent.
I believe in nonvi	<b>O</b>	lence as a way of life, as a way of being.
We may not have chosen the time,	<b>B</b>	ut the time has chosen us.
... the cause of justic	<b>E</b>	... is the struggle of a lifetime.
We come to Selma to be	<b>R</b>	enewed. We come to be inspired.
Sometimes you have to get in	<b>T</b>	he way. You have to make some noise.
The vote is the most powerfu	<b>L</b>	nonviolent tool we have.
The means by which we struggl	<b>E</b>	must be consistent with the ends we seek.
Now is the time to get in the	<b>W</b>	ay. We will be silent no more.
No human being	<b>I</b>	s illegal.
You have to go with your gut	<b>S</b>	ometimes, and how you feel.

## **Step 226**

### **Approaching 69**

I'll be 68 for just a few more days.  
I wonder what my horoscope says  
About how I should plan my way  
And what to do – I just may  
Loaf around and soak up some rays  
Or sit on the couch and watch the Blue Jays.  
I think I'm stuck in a rhyme as I lay  
In bed and think about my next pay  
Check which arrives on Thursday when I stay  
Home to ponder and perhaps to pray  
For many more years yet to weigh  
My contributions in life - - - Hooray!

## **Step 227**

### **Creative Feedback to Student Opinion Survey**

As is my practice, I share the anonymous feedback to the participants in the recently completed course as well as share this feedback with the incoming group of students in the next semester. I do this in my aim to be transparent in my self-reflections as a major part of how I practice mindfulness and improvement on the path of the “perfecting” teacher.

#### **First, I will start with the objective data:**

- 13 students completed the student opinion survey.
- Over 90% of responses to each item on the survey was in the “strongly agree” and/or “agree” columns.
- All 13 students added comments to the section titled: Please give specific feedback as to what in this course was most helpful and/or relevant to you. Please explain why.
- 9 students added comments to the section titled: Please indicate any changes that you think should be made in this course.
- All student responses were anonymous.
- The instructor reviewed the results of this opinion survey three weeks after grades were submitted to the registrar.

## Step 227

### Creative Feedback to Student Opinion Survey

(continued)

#### Now for the creative part of interpreting the data.

I started with a word bank of 16 nouns / adjectives / verbs that evolved from my review of the student opinion data:

<b>Gratitude</b>	<b>Thanks</b>
<b>Honor</b>	<b>Respect</b>
<b>Encouragement</b>	<b>Creativity</b>
<b>Honesty</b>	<b>Growth</b>
<b>Improvement</b>	<b>Curiosity (Amazement)</b>
<b>What's Next (Horizon)</b>	<b>Reflection</b>
<b>Thoughtful (ness)</b>	<b>Humbleness</b>
<b>Values</b>	<b>Wonder</b>

**Next** – I composed an acrostic using a series of letters that would equal the same number of words I composed above: 16. I searched for what that central theme could be. Since one of my recreational activities during this course was working on various NY Times crossword puzzles, I decided to use CROSSWORD PUZZLES as the central theme. To do so, I needed to locate synonyms for “What’s Next” and “Curiosity” to account for the two “Zs” in the acrostic. I also needed a word with an “s” so I expanded “thoughtful” into “thoughtfulness.”

**C**reativity  
Encou**R**agement  
H**O**nor  
Thank **S**  
Re**S**pect  
Gro**W**th  
H**O**nesty  
G**R**atitude  
Won**D**er  
Im**P**rovement  
Val**U**es  
Hori**Z**on  
Ama**Z**ement  
Ref**L**ection  
Humbl**E**ness  
Thoughtfulnes**S**

## Step 227

### Creative Feedback to Student Opinion Survey

(continued)

**Next** – I wanted to express my appreciation and comments via a poem that would include all the elements from the acrostic organizer I composed.

#### Upon Reflecting on a Recent Student Opinion Survey

My teaching allows me to expand my outlet for **creativity**,  
As I receive **encouragement** from students at this university.  
It is an **honor** that I deeply appreciate  
And I give **thanks** and hope to reciprocate  
My show of **respect** for the quality of work from students in this course  
As we each advance in our personal **growth** and become a source  
Of **honesty** when we provide our feedback to our peers  
Mixed with the **gratitude** that comes with the years  
Of continued **wonder** at the meaning of it all.  
**Improvement** must be the constant call  
In how we advance our set of **values** in everything we do  
Both today and over the **horizon** and before we are through  
We will never cease to be in **amazement** at each student's abilities.  
When, in self-**reflection**, we will never cease  
To practice **humbleness** for all we have still to know  
As in **thoughtfulness** and love we will continue to grow.

The image of a crossword puzzle is a powerful one for me. There have been times when I will work on a specific puzzle, on and off, for months, while other times, I will finish one in 15 minutes. Clues and patterns of letters in the puzzle cause me to think differently about the clues that are offered. There are some extremely creative individuals who take pride in the subtle wording of clues. For example, in a recent puzzle, the clue was “Bounty work?” I thought about the movie Mutiny on the Bounty or bounty as in bounty hunter. But, as I put different letters in the puzzle, a pattern emerged and the word “absorption” appeared to fit. The clue was referring to the paper towel “Bounty!” You may not agree yet, depending on where you are at in your career, but “solution seeking” for the challenges our students bring to the table involves hunting for patterns that may or may not fit the ecology of the current situation. But, if you stick with it and have creative people on your team, it is amazing what strategies can emerge.

## **Step 228**

### **I've Got My Eye on 69**

I had a cataract removed from my left eye  
Yesterday and spent my birthday with my  
Eye swollen and feeling quite ostracized.  
I didn't expect to be in bed and lie  
Down in such discomfort when I  
Should be celebrating birthday 69, but, with a sigh,  
I squint my eye shut as I magnify  
My computer to read my e-mails and wonder why  
This unexpected discomfort happened when I turned sixty ni-ne!

## **Step 229**

### **The Semester Begins Anew**

The semester begins anew.  
I wonder what things will brew  
In the days ahead – I wish I knew.  
There are many resources in my queue.  
I need to look at my courses and view  
The time commitments and when things are due.  
It takes a lot of energy to keep on top of things – Phew!

## **Step 230**

### **Closer to Fine**

My left eye is closer to fine,  
Although I still see a blurry line  
When I review work at 5:49,  
But the doctor said it's a good sign  
That the swelling is receding and not to pine  
And get the blues. It should be quite benign  
And when for supper I choose to dine  
With the lights on low, it seems sublime.  
This too will pass and get better with time.  
I had to stretch a little to make all my lines rhyme!

## Step 231

### CCSU Family

**Sent over the University Listserv:** Please find attached my mini-poster of what the CCSU FAMILY means to me amid the tumultuous beginning of the school year with frustration levels heightened and the "send" button pushed one time too often. I have worked in many jobs over my career and the peers with whom I interact in the School of Education and Professional Studies and, in particular, the department in which I work, embodied the elements of this image.

**C**onsiderate

**C**ollaborative

**S**acrificing

**H U**mble

Re **F**lective

**C A**ring

**M**indful

Support **I**ve of one another

**L**oving

Happ **Y** to Serve Others

## Step 232

### Ol' Blue Eyes

As I reviewed one student's reflection for one of my courses, I was influenced to write the follow feedback:

The option to choose our labels or not is not as cut and dry as it may at first appear. Someone had to convince a group of professionals that certain traits, if seen often enough in an individual, would put a label on that individual. As an example, the DSM-V (diagnostic statistical manual) did away with the category of Asperger syndrome with a vote of its executive board. Many parents refuse to allow their children to be tested for special education via the learning disability route, because they don't want their child to have the stigma of a label. I have asthma but do not refer to myself as an asthmatic. We can choose to own the label given to us by others or we can refer to ourselves by the words and terms that we want others to know us by. Yes, having Down syndrome means the individual has an extra 21st chromosome and certain physical characteristics they share in common with others who also have an extra 21<sup>st</sup> chromosome. . However, if teachers keep referring to that student as a Down's child as a major label, that individual is limited by the expectations others have put on students with that label. I have blue eyes via a hereditary process. However, I am not referred to as the "blue eyed" professor.

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*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.* **Marilynne Robinson**

*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**

*We were born astonished. We should never grow out of our astonishment.* **Andrea Gibson**

## Step 233

### To Be Creative or Not to Be Creative – What a Question!

One student commented about whether a teacher ought to be creative when working with students in special education or use more linear strategies with a carefully planned sequence of scripted lessons.

You bring thoughtful insights to the role of creativity in how teachers interact with students in special education. You are right in the sense that many curricular programs have quite linear steps to follow that have been researched and validated to increase the likelihood of success for students. However, I often wonder why there are so many non-responders to this curriculum. The answer, I believe, lies in that fact that students are much more than their label. There were probably no students in the original research for that curriculum who had exactly the same backgrounds as the students in your class. It may be necessary to tweak the curriculum to include more out-of-school interests for a student or to break down a large concept into smaller, more manageable steps. Creativity, to me, rests in the spirit and approach to problem solving while a member of a team when a student's misbehavior or learning challenges don't conform to the tried and true methods of teaching. Often, publishing companies offer teachers a script to follow. I wonder, at times, whether you need a professional with a master's degree to follow a written script without any changes based on the unique ecology each student brings to the classroom. We need all types of thinkers on the teams of individuals with disabilities and it may be critical to recognize when to turn our creativity muscle on and off.

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*You must keep collecting threads – threads of meaning, threads of hope, threads of purpose, truth and will – along with all the knowledge, skills that every weaver needs. You must keep on weaving – stopping only to repair your broken loom – lacing threads of warmth and light against the coldest night, a cloak in which to wrap whoever comes to you in need, the world with all its suffering, those near at hand, yourself.*

**Parker Palmer except from his commentary on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the assassination of JFK**

## Step 234

### I Am a Curator

I often think of a different word to describe my role instead of using “instructor.” Some of the words that come to mind are facilitator of learning, a guide to personalized investigation, a source of reflection of student insights, provider of current strategies, summarizer of important content in my discipline, etc. Then one student used the word “curator.” I immediately liked that choice of what I do in my courses. I curate resources for student investigation. I then looked for elements of that role and developed the following acrostic visual:

**C** hoices  
**F** **U** ture **U** tility  
**Sha** **R** ed by **S** tudents  
**Reson** **A** te  
**The** **T** est of **T** ime  
**Kn** **O** wledge  
**Relevant** **R** esearch

I seek to offer **choices** in what students can review  
For **future utility** in all that they pursue  
And present work **shared by students** whose work I admire  
And **resonate** with my own values and inspire  
Me to assemble resources that meet **the test of time**  
To add **knowledge** to form a new paradigm  
With **relevant research** I keep in my files  
In my office amid my piles and piles.

## **Step 235**

### **We Gain Insights from Each Other**

One of the reasons why I provide a diversity of resources in the three sections of this introductory course in special education stems from the diversity of disciplines from which students enroll in this course. In this current semester, the breakdown of students with their majors follows:

Technology Education – 8

Special Education – 7

Art – 5

Mathematics – 5

Unknown – 5

History – 3

Counseling – 2

Marriage and Family Therapy – 2

Sciences – 2

Elementary Education – 1

Information Design – 1

Music – 1

Physical Education – 1

As a community of students investigating the content from this course, what can we learn from each other? What are the generic competencies that can be taken from this course that transcend all disciplines? It is not the memorization of facts and the testing of what you don't know that is of most importance to me, as the curator of resources in this course. Rather, it is the set of values and attitude toward continually expanding our range of strategies to provide a more inclusive environment for students who have diverse learning challenges. Are we ready for students who represent some of the disabilities mentioned in our opening sessions: traumatic brain injury, autism spectrum disorder, Down syndrome, Progeria, and the list goes on? We don't need to be experts in the attributes and characteristics of students with varying disabilities. We do need to be ready to provide instructional supports as a member of a grade level team and be willing to expand our skills to provide strategies of increasing intensity based on data collected on the path of learning for each student in our future classrooms. You are up to this challenge. I can sense that by the way you reflect on the resources I have been providing in these opening sessions. The profession you are entering should be challenging, but the rewards are immense when you witness the progress by students on whom others may have given up.

## Step 236

### The One Best Thing in This Course

As you look back over the semester that has gone by  
I want to ask you about the **One Best Thing** and why  
It stands out as something you will remember  
When this semester ends in mid-December  
And someone asks you about what you did learn.  
This is something you will tell them about Professor Ern-  
i.e. and what he did share for one of his resources  
As you venture forth into more of your courses.  
This is what will stick in your mind:  
The One Best Thing was one of a kind!

- One of the things I enjoyed most was the field experience aspect. One of the woodshop classes in the school I was in has a student with a visual impairment next semester. He is not blind, but has such bad vision, glasses offer minimal help. They decided to measure the lighting in the room to accommodate him. To see the class concepts in action really opened my eyes to how real these situations are.
- Throughout this course, there were many valuable takeaways. For me, the largest one was the differentiation in each assignment. This allowed students to make connections and express themselves in different ways. Another topic that stood out to me is the disability path. I chose ADHD. Previously, I didn't know much about it and I learned enough to even write a 6-minute speech on it for my public speaking class. After I gave that speech, one of my peers, who mentioned that he had ADHD, told me that my info and speech was spot on and very accurate.
- I think the disability path was a starting point. Both with the investigation and the technical aspect of using my computer ... more with the PowerPoint representations. That was just the beginning of the homework challenges for me, but I enjoyed it. I did use a theme in most of the assignments of my work experiences because I was looking for answers. You provided those and I'm grateful. I'll use much of what you taught in this class! Thank you!
- I found a lot of use from the disability path assignment which I did on blindness / low vision. I know a bit about this disability, but I had no connection to it for teaching strategies and I learned about alternate accommodations and materials that can be used to help students with blindness / low vision. Also, it was great to visit Tommy Edison's videos about his experiences growing up blind, thinking from a teaching perspective.

## Step 236

### The One Best Thing in This Course

(continued)

- I can't pick any one project or book/text, but in many I was led to (or you showed) people who overcame so many disabilities to do or learn about what they are interested in! Truly amazing people! I most enjoyed the Final. It was fun to try and tie the aircraft to different things covered in the class. Thank you – great class!
- I liked the way you didn't push your values on us and treated us as equals. I wasn't convinced on the ??? lost at the beginning but now I'd try it. I liked way ... treated us and I also liked the analogy assignment at the end where we connect 5 things from SPED to our content area.
- I found the accommodations project the most helpful during the course. It was the most relevant and applicable to me. I also liked seeing real world application of the themes we explored during SPED. It also showed me that anything is possible as long as the right accommodations / modifications are made.
- I personally really liked the icebreakers that showed that everyone thinks differently and approaches problems differently. This whole class really opened my mind to a lot of amazing people and skills for teaching and I really appreciated the lectures.
- Another thing I found useful was Disability Pathway. I learned a lot and enjoyed the student choice. I have dyslexia and learned more about it. I also enjoyed the multiple, real-world connections. It helped me connect book content to real world scenarios.
- My biggest takeaway from this class is differentiation. The class forced me to try and realize that not everyone sees things from my perspective. I have started offering many more opportunities for my students to show what they have learned.
- The best takeaway I had from this course came from doing the differentiated note-taking activities and realizing now changing how I reviewed and took notes on each chapter helped me approach each lesson differently. It helped segment each chapter in my mind easier so I could remember the main themes of each chapter. It also helped me realize that having students do more creatively-oriented exercises can help cement lessons better.

## Step 236

### The One Best Thing in This Course

(continued)

- My favorite part of this class is the icebreakers. I really liked these because they allow for a lot of individual thinking and creativity. Also, they provide a good idea of what is going to be discussed in class and gets me interested. I also liked the disability investigation about the disability I investigated that I did not know about before. It also helped to break stigmas that I thought were true about dyslexia.
- One thing I found great is the accommodations pathways. I learned that “where there is a will, there is a way.” I discovered the Foot/Mouth painting association!

## Step 237

### Words of Wisdom

As I review student assignments, I think differently about my values and my feedback reflects those values in a way I might otherwise have expressed.

- *It takes time to be the type of teacher ALL students need in the classroom. It takes baby steps in modifying one's lesson plans in an UDL (Universal Design for Learning) fashion. It takes a lifetime. When I teach my courses here at CCSU, the current version of how I organize and deliver content has steadily improved over 20 years. Teachers must make a commitment to be on the road of the "perfecting" teacher every day of every week of every year they teach.*
- *ALL students are the responsibility of ALL teachers and staff at a school. No longer should we hear "those students" when a teacher refers to a student in special education. ALL students are OUR students.*
- *I think the best ways to be patient with students include: having a set routine with clear expectations; developing a levels of intensity of instruction knowing what assistance to provide next based on each student's previous learning history; let students make mistakes on their way to learning content without worry of penalties; group projects at times when a peer can provide assistance in a way a teacher cannot; provide choices or options for what to do next; i.e., think-tac-toe for assignments. If none of these work, take two aspirin and leave the student's area for 5 minutes, take a deep breath and try again. [Tylenol may work as well as aspirin!]*
- *My creativity occurs in brief spurts of time when I seem to be focused on a theme and the muse visits me, much to my surprise and satisfaction.*

## **Step 238**

### **A Reflection in 13 Parts**

One summer, as I taught a course, I introduced each session with a summary of the session before in a verse style format. This reflective log of events provides a journal like experience of the ingredients of the course and observations of how the content interweaves with the theme of more inclusive practices in the public schools.

#### **Session One**

I think a lot about the words I say  
When I get home at the end of the day.  
Will they understand what I mean  
Or, am I getting a little extreme?  
I speak my mind and to a degree  
I don't expect everyone to agree with me.  
It's taken me 30 years to think like this.  
Sometimes I'm right - Sometimes I'm amiss.  
I can speak my mind  
And please do so in kind.  
The answer lies in the talking  
Amid the chatter and the walking.  
Your path has different turns and bends  
And no one knows where it's all going to end.  
No one's right - No one's wrong.  
We all can sing a different song  
If respect and dignity are key  
In the words you say to me.  
It's an honor to teach this class.  
It's an awesome yet enjoyable task  
To help you teach a student who learns  
Differently from others yet earns  
The right to be with their peers in school.  
This should not be the exception, but the rule.

## **Step 238**

### **A Reflection in 13 Parts**

(continued)

#### **Session Two**

Tonight is Wednesday and Session 2  
I talked about “Choices” and we met Bob Blue.  
Bob is a mentor - teacher extraordinaire;  
With him there is music always in the air.  
He talks about love and respect for the child,  
Whether the child is quiet or even a bit wild.  
Bob is gentle in both manner and mood.  
(Also, some students brought in plenty of food.)  
The assignments are becoming a bit more clear  
With more explanations to lessen the fear  
About being overwhelmed to get things done.  
We may even have a little bit of fun.  
Everyone’s work will be read with care  
And already I’ve seen excellent writing with flare.  
I feel quite tired at the end of the day  
As I work on Session 3 and what I will say.

#### **Session Three**

Inclusion was the topic for session 3  
With a base in the law from which to see  
How students can be with their peers.  
Why has it taken close to 30 years?  
Jonathan Kozol writes in his book  
About finding answers where we don’t look.  
The wisest answers we ever can find  
Come from questions of the spontaneous kind.  
In the news is a picture of a little boy  
Whose hair will bring about much joy  
For one whom he will never know  
Who wears his hair as a wig to show  
That kindness happens with gestures of hope  
For children who may find it hard to cope.  
Partial disclosure is a good teaching plan  
To give students credit for what they can  
Show you when they have an additional clue  
That they are smarter than they thought they knew.

## **Step 238**

### **A Reflection in 13 Parts**

(continued)

#### **Session Four**

There are a lot of thoughts going on in my head  
At 4:48 when I get out of bed  
As I continue on my journey  
I began with a book called "Who Is Ernie?"  
As a profile of pages that talk about me:  
A non-confidential file for all to see  
And decide what I will share  
To those who read it - to those who care.  
Richard LaVoie showed us how  
To see the image of a cow.  
He said the image was there to see  
If we only perceived what it could be.  
Rosemary brought us stories to read  
From pages she said that we all should heed  
About the lessons other parents have learned  
As they fought their fights and victories earned.  
I mentioned my thoughts for the first exam due  
Of connecting to some of the works of Bob Blue.  
Also, to build upon what you already know best  
About students with disabilities on this first test.

#### **Session Five**

It seems to me that in lesson five  
The words from the text came alive.  
A label means nothing without a face.  
A child's a child and not a case.  
The highs and lows of manic depression  
Have left on us a lasting impression.  
Each story was told with sensitivity  
As we learned from each one's past history.  
It reminds me to stop, sit and think  
About students who may be near to the brink.  
What can I do? What actions are right?  
No easy answers come into my sight.  
Some students are torn in the midst of disease:  
Living in darkness - then soaring on a breeze.  
I don't know if answers are always there,  
But I do know I must continue to teach with care

## **Step 238**

### **A Reflection in 13 Parts**

(continued)

#### **Session Six**

This is the end of week number two.  
I thoroughly enjoy everything that we do.  
This class of students has many talents  
To share as we maintain our precarious balance  
In the early days of the month of June  
With hundreds of priorities due too soon.  
I enjoy reading papers and writing my notes.  
It gives me a feeling of confidence and hope  
That each of you will pause and reflect  
And each of you will always select  
To be open to greater diversity  
As you leave this university  
And step into a room of your own  
And take on a challenge to show how you've grown  
Into a teacher creative and true  
Just like our mentor - Mr. Bob Blue.  
After reading some papers I often see  
A mirror reflecting back to me  
Of values and thoughts I also hold dear;  
Held also by others with thoughts put so clear.  
To be by himself meant freedom to Fred  
After 40 years living in drudgery and dread.  
Humor, friendships, work and fun  
Seem to be part of his usual run  
Of activities in which he feels more in control  
Where he sits down and when he can stroll  
The streets of Willimantic, a not-so-big city.  
People don't look at him with sadness and pity,  
But as a person whom they often meet  
Walking along as they go down Main Street.  
Institutions bring destitution,  
Isolation and Incarceration;  
Loneliness and sadness;  
Helplessness and madness.  
Treat with respect  
And try to effect  
Positive supports for folks like Fred  
To live lives of quality - enough now is said.

## Step 238

### A Reflection in 13 Parts

(continued)

#### Session Seven

Time to start another week  
And new lessons for to seek  
On a day that's muggy and hot  
When my energy level is all but shot.  
It's very hard to stay awake.  
Go give (you know who) a little shake!  
Jason explored some icebreaker tasks  
To line up in two rows to begin with he asks.  
Team one, of course, was second to none  
As they followed the request to have some fun.  
We brought out our objects to show, of which  
I introduced to all my winged, golden snitch  
And exchanged it for a compass from Al  
Who said, "Don't follow me - Go follow Hal!"  
Developing a community of learners was the key  
By sharing something of importance for all to see.  
Some people brought a similar item of fare  
When they introduced their favorite pen to share.  
We listened to Diane read a story so bold  
Of Christy Brown's story, *My Left Foot*. He told  
Of growing up with quite a large family  
And finding his place in society  
As a poet and writer and painter of art  
And as a person whose heart has been torn apart  
By others who don't think he has feelings to share  
As he sees those around him join families to care  
For one another - in love and connection.  
Christy is lost in a world of rejection.  
Attitude is such an important word  
For everybody to have heard.  
It means more than what you know.  
It means your values begin to show.  
Honoring differences - looking beyond the label;  
To know that many of your students are able  
To function well in a regular class  
With their peers who don't have to harass  
Nor bully them and call them names  
But treat each other about the same.

## **Step 238**

### **A Reflection in 13 Parts**

(continued)

#### **Session Eight**

Mark O'Brien took center stage.  
He got polio at a pretty early age.  
Poet, writer, thinker and friend -  
He played these roles right up to the end.  
Everyone's disabled to a degree  
So treat those who are as you expect to be.  
He had many lessons for us to learn  
If we listen well enough we can discern  
That quality of life is where it's at;  
In your own apartment you can have a cat.  
We met Raymond, whose brother did find  
A person who functioned with a different kind  
Of actions, words and deeds;  
Judge Wapner at 8:00 if you please.  
He had his set routines each day  
Like Who's On First he would often say.  
I shared some notes about autism's mystery;  
A little bit of its rocky history.  
Bettelheim in the 50s once blamed  
Refrigerator Moms were who he named.  
We all have quirks and repetitive acts  
Some twirl their hair - others recite unusual facts.  
Make rejection work for you  
Brought some humor from out of the blue.  
Speaking of blue, I read your connections  
To Bob Blue and his incredible reflections  
About how to best help everyone  
Think they're Number #1 under the sun.  
A modification check list to be used by a teacher  
To connect to Mary; we might begin to reach her  
And provide some changes in tests and time  
So students make sense of what doesn't rhyme.  
ATTITUDE provided by a gentleman named Chuck,  
Who says our outlook is better than luck  
As we go about our work each day  
That we may have important things to say  
About students who function a little bit strange  
Can still think of themselves in the normal range.

## Step 238

### A Reflection in 13 Parts

(continued)

#### Session Nine

Now, it's time to take a test  
And you have choices - pick the best  
Questions that number ten.  
Be sure to come back next week again.  
Kerry talked about a curious condition:  
Selective Mutism and its definitions  
And she responded to a parent's plea with grace  
About involving this boy in her classroom space.  
We watched a video about two teenage kids  
Who met when both were on the skids.  
They joined forces and felt as one  
And worked together to get things done.  
"Mighty" was the name of the clip;  
These boys seemed to be joined at the hip.  
We highlighted some of what's in the news;  
Things we agree with and some opposing views.  
Funny, shocking, interesting and sad;  
Some of the stories made us real mad.  
Many readers stated when they wrote to me  
That this assignment really helped them to see  
That often in news we overlook  
People whose labels are in our book  
Who live in our society  
And become part of the community.

---

*... interdependence, a way in which each person is important to every other person for collective existence and thriving.*

**Norma Wong**

## **Step 238**

### **A Reflection in 13 Parts**

(continued)

#### **Session Ten**

SPED 501 enters week number four  
As Claudia and Noel took the floor.  
Gifted and talented was their discussion  
And they sadly noted when it comes to instruction  
For students who learn differently than most  
Either act up in class or seem like a ghost  
Who withdraw and make no waves  
But stare out the window, a mind in a haze.  
Something can be done -  
Identification is step number one,  
Then challenge all students to do their best.  
Advocate for changes and don't let things rest.  
Parents must fight for programs and supports  
And read documents, papers and formal reports  
And hear teachers and principals begin to say  
Each child must progress in their own best way.  
Next, Teresa brought her best friend Matt  
To speak to us from where he sat  
As a child identified with talents and gifts  
But he had some rough times - turmoil and rifts.  
It's hard to be told what your future should hold.  
It's hard to be brave - it's hard to be bold  
And venture off with your own song to sing  
And wear your hair long and do your own thing.  
People expect you to carry the flame  
Of their own definition of fortune and fame.  
But, what makes you happy, joyful and true  
Are better questions to explore with you.  
A video was presented by John  
Not too short - and not too long.  
About a young boy who's playing chess.  
He's quite good and among the best.

## Step 238

### A Reflection in 13 Parts

(continued)

#### Session Eleven

Week four has come to an end  
And week five is just 'round the bend.  
Jason introduced us to Doug whose cool:  
An accomplished artist who raps at school.  
In his mind he has set his sights  
On being a member of the Acolytes.  
He has a web page with information and facts  
And has been part of some opening acts  
For musicians who see him with a different view  
Instead of judging him by what he can't do.  
Stephanie showed a film about two guys:  
Two friends who talked and gave some jive  
About who was better at a video game -  
Seems to me they're just about the same.  
Friendship evolves in its own natural way.  
"Get out of our way," you might hear them say.  
"We're teenagers who talk about girls and song.  
We go by the names of Donnell and Bong."  
The food's been good and such a nice treat  
And flowers too just can't be beat.  
People greet each other as friends  
And learn from each other - It depends  
On mutual respect, trust and sincerity  
As we wrap up our class in its entirety.  
We will remember this course for a time  
And maybe even the instructor's rhyme  
As we each continue on our way  
To reflect back upon this day  
And learn to include diversity, I know  
Each of us will continue to grow  
And develop into great teachers - I'll hear  
Some of you will be teachers of the year.

## **Step 238**

### **A Reflection in 13 Parts**

(continued)

#### **Session Twelve**

Diane introduced us to her friend Michelle  
Who, from a lawyer's perspective, did tell  
About accommodations, modifications and rights  
For people with disabilities who set their sights  
On access, transportation and equality,  
Respect, dignity and advocacy.  
She shared a story from last week's news  
In which a student decided to choose  
To walk with pride on her graduation night  
But to the principal she caused a fright.  
Ralph had come to the class prepared  
With a video clip of something to share  
And it happened to relate to Michelle's tale.  
That's how connections and learning prevail  
When people are ready to share what they know  
And the timing is right and they're ready to show  
How single, isolated bits of news  
Become enriched when together they're used.  
One is good but two are better.  
Now this story I'm bound to remember.

#### **Session Thirteen**

Ruth described a heartwarming tale  
About Carlos, a student, whose body was frail  
And he had a condition called Duchenne Dystrophy.  
His life was brief, but he left quite a legacy.  
His dream was to go to his senior prom;  
A decision echoed by his mom.  
That's when Ruth got into the picture.  
She wouldn't take "No" as an answer to her  
Request for funds for the ticket and ride.  
He brought his sister by his side  
And at the prom there was a wonderful thing  
When his peers selected Carlos as their prom king.  
A lesson learned from this story from Ruth:  
Anything's possible when you search for the truth  
Of assisting a student to reach his dreams  
He enriched our lives - so it seems.

## Step 239

### Basic Insights

Instead of listing lesson objectives for one session of a course I had been teaching, I decided to list insights I hoped students would have upon viewing the resources I made available.

1. I wonder how the atmosphere of the learning environment changes when a positive message is shared with students when they enter your school space each day.
2. When we read from/view a new resource, I wonder what way of taking notes fits that resource in such a way that when we go back to that resource in the future, we remember important dimensions that seem right to reflect on for our current circumstances.
3. Meaningful engagement with any activity/resource allows both students and teachers to experience life more fully and feel the flow of energy and buzz in the room when such engagement occurs.
4. Mindfulness is a practice that takes time to nurture and realize that this current moment, the writing down of these words, is the most important part of the day. Now that the words are written down, I can move on to the next "most important" part of the day.
5. The same words can have different meanings in and out of the educational context.
6. It is nice to share quotes/cartoons/resources that bring a smile to ourselves and others.
7. Why can't going to school be more like going to summer camp?
8. Universal Design for Accessibility has applicability in both community environments like recreational parks as well as in school.
9. When students who receive special education supports struggle in school, they are also apt to struggle doing homework at home.
10. Study guides help students to focus on the key/main ingredients of a lesson. Students do not always distinguish between the important elements and the peripheral information in a lesson.
11. Is "grit" just another buzz word for perseverance and can we influence the amount of grit a student displays toward their investment of time in the classroom?
12. In most disciplines, you can break down an activity into more manageable steps for those of us who may be overwhelmed by the activity.

## **Step 239**

### **Basic Insights**

(continued)

13. Functional MRIs allow us glimpses into what areas of the brain are more active when certain processes like reading are occurring.
14. Learning about the similarities we all share in common is a much better emphasis than focusing on the differences among us.
15. Public figures can have a tremendous impact on how students with a challenge such as stuttering view their capabilities.
16. There are certain guidelines that need to be followed when having a Sign Language Interpreter in the classroom.
17. One type of universal design accommodation is to locate resources that have video captioning for students who are blind.
18. Using familiar tunes is a great way to change the lyrics to address a topic in a creative way.
19. There are many useful teaching resources located at the various State Department of Education websites throughout the country.
20. Outcomes can be achieved through different means and all students don't need to achieve that outcome the same way.
21. There are ingenious ways for individuals with disabilities to participate in sports activities.
22. Analogies are great ways to compare elements of activities in which we may participate to the supports we provide for students with disabilities.
23. We need reminders that our students do not all perceive information in the same way.
24. The competence that a student has influences the perception of others about that student's overall capabilities.
25. I enjoy sharing my writing and creative products with my students.
26. Often, assessments do not always capture what a student really knows in a content area.

## Step 240

### Study Guide Example – Bob Dylan

In one of my courses, I discussed the value of using study guides to alert students to the important ingredients of a lesson. One type of a study guide is a list of true and false statements. As students read through the content of the lesson, they verify if each statement is true or false. If the statement is false, they change it to a true statement. Contained in this step are the different variations of the study guide composed of content related to Bob Dylan.

	Fill in the bubble before True Statements with Green / False Statements in Red – Change False Statements to be True.
<input type="radio"/>	Bob Dylan is dead.
<input type="radio"/>	Bob Dylan's name at birth was Robert Zimmerman.
<input type="radio"/>	Bob Dylan married Joan Baez.
<input type="radio"/>	Your instructor has been to 50+ Dylan shows.
<input type="radio"/>	Dylan wrote Blowin' in the Wind.
<input type="radio"/>	Bob Dylan and Paul Simon have sung together.
<input type="radio"/>	Bob Dylan wrote "Heart of Gold."
<input type="radio"/>	Bob Dylan was born in Nashville, TN.
<input type="radio"/>	Dylan plays the drums at most live performances.
<input type="radio"/>	Dylan won the Nobel Prize for Literature.

## Step 240

### Study Guide Example – Bob Dylan (continued)

	Fill in the bubble before True Statements with Green / False Statements in Red – Change False Statements to be True.
<input type="radio"/>	Bob Dylan is dead.
<input type="radio"/>	Bob Dylan's name at birth was Robert Zimmerman.
<input type="radio"/>	Bob Dylan married Joan Baez.
<input type="radio"/>	Your instructor has been to 50+ Dylan shows.
<input type="radio"/>	Dylan wrote Blowin' in the Wind.
<input type="radio"/>	Bob Dylan and Paul Simon have sung together.
<input type="radio"/>	Bob Dylan wrote "Heart of Gold."
<input type="radio"/>	Bob Dylan was born in Nashville, TN.
<input type="radio"/>	Dylan plays the drums at most live performances.
<input type="radio"/>	Dylan won the Nobel Prize for Literature.

## Step 240

### Study Guide Example – Bob Dylan (continued)

	All Statements Below Are True
<input checked="" type="radio"/>	Bob Dylan is alive and well at age 79.
<input checked="" type="radio"/>	Bob Dylan's name at birth was Robert Zimmerman.
<input checked="" type="radio"/>	Bob Dylan married Sarah Lownds.
<input checked="" type="radio"/>	Your instructor has been to 30+ Dylan shows.
<input checked="" type="radio"/>	Dylan wrote Blowin' in the Wind.
<input checked="" type="radio"/>	Bob Dylan and Paul Simon have sung together.
<input checked="" type="radio"/>	Neil Young wrote "Heart of Gold."
<input checked="" type="radio"/>	Dylan was born in Duluth MN / raised in Hibbing, MN.
<input checked="" type="radio"/>	Dylan plays the harmonica / keyboards / guitar.
<input checked="" type="radio"/>	Dylan won the Nobel Prize for Literature.

## Step 241

### Tribute to ALEX TREBEK

You forgot to phr **A** se that in the form of a question!

Spel **L** ing doesn't count in Final Jeopardy.

Di **E** d on November 8, 2020 at 80

**“X”** - You know what that means.

**T** hank you, Johnny.

**R** eturning for a 10<sup>th</sup> time.

Sorry, you add **E** d an extra “s.”

Our champion can't **B** e caught.

Tim **E** to meet the contestants.

**K** en Jennings – G.O.A.T.

---

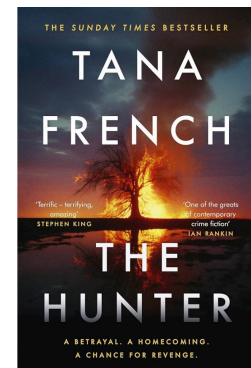
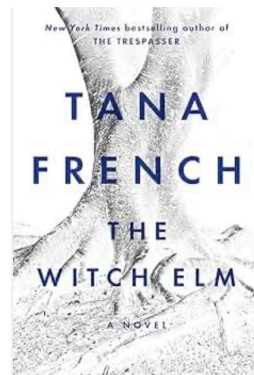
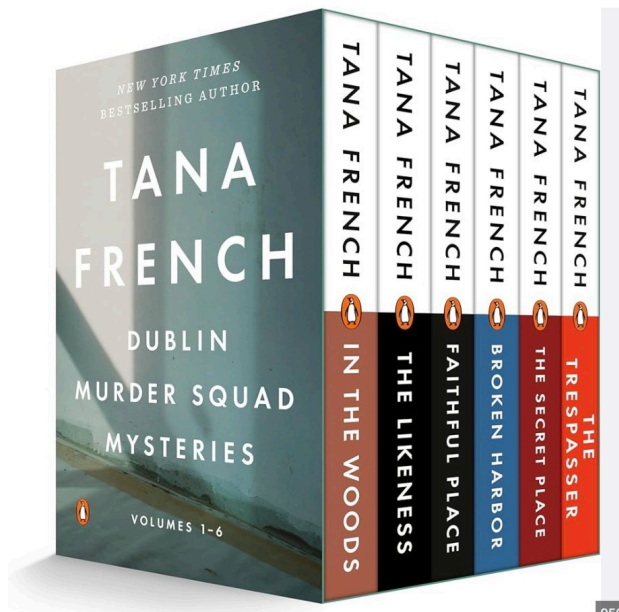
Please leave your worries at the door  
Or drop them quietly on the floor.  
It's time to focus on what really matters.  
As your thoughts & ideas begin to gather,  
Be mindful and engage in the lesson.  
Welcome to a brand new session.

## Step 242

### ***The Searcher* – Goodreads Book Review**

I submitted the following book review on the Goodreads site after listening to an audiobook of a recent Tana French novel: *The Searcher*

I chose the audiobook for this latest Tana French work and was enthusiastically satisfied with the results. Roger Clark, the narrator, was phenomenal! I have read most of the books by Tana French and would place the pace of the narrative with that of *The Witch Elm*. Some readers have commented on the slow pace of the book to their dissatisfaction. I listened to this book on the treadmill and I found the pace of 2.6 mph to be about perfect. There are elements from the book that interweave throughout each chapter, each with its own sense of beginning-middle-end: refinishing a dilapidated desk in the cottage / the chatter of the rooks in the trees on Cal's property / the songs in the pub and others sung by Cal and other characters with whom he makes an acquaintance / the path of the search both internally and externally. One of my favorite descriptions in the book, and this relates to my increasing weight gains over this pandemic, was how one character's "stomach was currently under construction." One particularly interesting exchange of dialogue had a focus on politically correct language for describing a person with a disability. As special education is my career path, I found this brief inclusion quite interesting. All in all - Tana French does not disappoint and has enriched my 15 hours of walking and I look forward to her next offering.



***Other books by Tana French  
that received my strong  
endorsement.***

## Step 243

### Anticipation: RETIREMENT

I started a notebook of resources as I advance toward retirement from my current work along my path of the perfecting teacher. I will be entering the “reflection” stage of this path and welcome the insights that will occur along that journey.

**Ernie Pancsofar**

D.O.R. – 8/15/21

**R** efreshment  
**E** mbracement  
**T** estament  
**I** mprovement  
**R** ecommitment  
**E** nchantment  
**M** ovement  
**E** mpowerment  
**N** ourishment  
**T** emperament

The interested reader is directed to a follow-up document in which I reflect on each of the elements above prior to retirement and while being a caregiver for my wife, Marsha:  
**On the Path of the Perfecting Caregiver**

## Step 244

### The Covid19 Stuck-at-Home Blues

Members of my academic department wanted to share with our students our perspective of the past eight months. Each of us covered a different month and we will construct a TikTok with how we are putting those months behind us. I had July – 4 months into the pandemic. I did a 30-second parody to a Dylan tune: *Subterranean Homesick Blues*.

Is it Rolling, John?  
The Covid19 Stuck-at-Home Blues  
Take 51

ERNIE'S in the basement  
Gradin' his assignments.  
All along the highway  
Dylan isn't gonna play.  
Covid  
No gig  
Four months at school  
Unfair, that's not cool.  
It's Covid Kid  
We are all hid.  
Got to get out my door  
Riding in my Forester.  
Duckin' down the alley  
Lookin' for Sally;  
John comes round the bend  
Look out Ma – This is ...  
THE END

---

*When I was young, I admired clever people. Now that I am old, I admire kind people.*

**Abraham Joshua Heschel**

## Step 245

### Connection to Quantum Mechanics

In the directions for the Final Examination of Content assignment in one of my courses, I asked students to connect aspects of special education to their content majors. One student, whose major is physics used quantum mechanics as his point of reference. Here are my notes to him.

Since I started my college life as a physics major, I enjoyed your treatment of this final examination of content.

1. One of my favorite quotes from Niels Bohr is - *For every expert, there is an equal and opposite expert* - perhaps never actually said by Niels Bohr but attributed to him, nonetheless.
2. Chaos theory probably resembles the actual learning process when we need to make sense of unexpected phenomena in our environment every second of every day of every week .... for a lifetime. Everything is in flux and a true sign of emotional stability is how we function within this flux.
3. The Heisenberg uncertainty principle has relevance in the assessment process we use to determine each student's competence. Does the very act of assessing a student influence our perception of what that student has learned? Do different measures produce different results? Can we really measure what a student learns and retains by our current assessment methods?
4. Each of us is gifted and disabled at the same time; it just depends on which activity we are engaged at the time. I will not display my intellectual disability until you ask me to complete a Sunday edition crossword puzzle from the *NY Times*. If this never happens, that disability will not surface. However, if you ask me trivia questions about the works of Bob Dylan, I would probably do better than the average person. What is the worth of that knowledge? His music has enabled me to feel satisfied for hundreds of hours, yet each time I hear his music, it's like I am listening to it for the first time.
5. I had better conclude so that I can review the remaining assignments in my queue.

## Step 246

### Thank You Jimmy Carter

I watched a special on CNN about the relationship of Jimmy Carter's run for political office and his association with music legends of our time including Bob Dylan, Willie Nelson and the Almond Brothers. My respect and admiration for him increased from an already high place of honor.

After watching a special on CNN  
About Jimmy Carter whose life of Zen  
Was captured in just two hours' time  
In both his deeds and verses of rhyme.

He is a hero among the human race  
Who left this world a better place  
Because of his values, commitment, and drive.  
He helped keep our enduring truths alive.

Our society needs more people like Mr. Carter  
Who lives and breathes a life of moral character.  
He is a beacon and north star to guide us onward  
And keep our path moving steadily forward.

His greatness is equaled by his humility  
As he includes us all in his family  
Of hope, love, and prosperity.  
Thank you, Jimmy Carter, for your enduring legacy.

## Step 247

### *The Aosawa Murders*

Notable quotes from a recently read book by Riku Ondo:

*There are two kinds of people in this world, I believe, those who frequent bookstores and those who do not. (p. 224)*

*... when an elderly person dies, a library disappears. (p. 230)*

*Every person spoke in the sincere belief that what they said was the absolute truth, but if one thinks about it, it's difficult to describe an actual event in words exactly as one sees it. (p. 249)*

*Her body retains an approximate memory of the geography that allows her to meander through the hustle and bustle like a migratory fish returning home. (p. 296)*

## Step 248

### Improvisation

While attending a conference in Orlando in 1997, I wrote the following statements beneath the heading Improvisation:

- Do something – debrief later.
- Put yourself in uncomfortable situations and observe how you respond.
- Make a lot of mistakes quickly.
- Treat each person as if you haven't the faintest idea what to do.
- Be open to surprises!
- We are members of each other: John O'Brien and Connie Lyle O'Brien.
- Be open to paradox, chaos and uncertainty.
- Practice mindfulness – *Wherever You go – There you Are!*
- Do Your Homework – path to success – things that work.
- Read the biography of Mother Teresa, Tilda Kemplen, Saul Alinsky, Thurgood Marshall, Walt Disney, etc.
- Substitute the word “recipe” for “program” – don't follow a cookbook but understand the function of the ingredients.
- Change your mind a lot.
- Pick your battles and what you're willing to fight for.

---

*Don't be afraid to be confused. Try to remain permanently confused. Anything is possible. Stay open, forever, so open it hurts, and then open up some more, until the day you die, world without end, amen. George Saunders*

*... I respond to reality in such a way that I look on existence as a great mystery and that at times, at certain moments, this mystery carries a strong charge. Tomas Tranströmer*

## **Step 249**

### **Upon Reading of the Death of Sir Ken Robinson**

The writings and videos of Sir Ken Robinson have greatly influenced my outlook on the purpose for education at all levels: to enhance the gifts and contributions a student can make to the community and a sense of well being, both academically and within social-emotional contexts. If my own educational outcomes are any measure, I would conservatively estimate that 95% of all information to which I was exposed and tested has long since left my long term memory or is buried so deeply I have lost the directions for where to find it. I am nearing the end of my formal teaching experiences at the university trying to influence teacher candidates and seekers of other professional certificates such as school counseling, marriage and family therapy, social work and educational leadership. I tried to mirror the way I would prefer they interact with future students. In doing so, their own creative energies would treat each unique learner as if that learner had a personalized, individualized program that differed from any other learner. How would the activities/content be assessed? Simply, with another question: Do you want to go on and learn more about this subject or move on to something else? It seems so simple, yet there is a fear that if enough minutia of content is not poured into a student's brain, education has failed that student. I don't see the logic in such a position, yet I don't have the persuasive nature that Ken Robinson had when commenting on this alternative approach. He will be missed. I'm glad to have been influenced by his presence in my life.

## **Step 250**

### **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.

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