

JOURNEYING WITH GENTLE TEACHING

Return to Gentleness



Anthony M. McCrovitz, Ph.D.

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Return to Gentleness
Journeying With Gentle Teaching
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*This book is dedicated to all of the Individuals
who meet us on this journey,
with whom we are given the opportunity and privilege
of celebrating their lives and honoring their stories.*

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“The salvation of the human world lies nowhere else than in the human heart. Without a global revolution in the sphere of human consciousness, nothing will change for the better.”

Václav Havel (1936-2011),
1st President of the Czech Republic,
speaking to U.S. Congress on February 21, 1990

INTRODUCTION

Like the element of water interacting with the porous clay upon a potter's wheel, a sense of *belonging* infiltrates the interior landscape, an impressionable terrain that is rooted in self-perception and cultivated by one's ability or supported accessibility for experiencing and processing external environments. A sense of belonging is mirrored in one's sense of identity, with the feeling that "I exist!"

Thus begins the centering of oneself as being human and the longing to belong with others, seeking expansion with the knowing and developing of oneself, becoming human, connected or disconnected within the constructs of social-emotional self-perception. The longing to belong leads to deeper questioning: *where is the value and what is the meaning of my existence?*

From the awareness that 'I exist with others, I identify with others,' the inherent quest for value and meaning arises: *but WHO AM I?*

A "self-concept" begins forming in early childhood and gradually develops over time as we become aware of a past self, a present self, and a future self. From our experiences, discoveries, and recognition of abilities and vulnerabilities, we imagine who we might be, developing a perception, an image of who we feel we are; a picture of ourselves in our story, our unfolding narrative.

Self-perception serves as a frame of reference for how we view our interactions and how we are able to engage, feel connection, and experience coherence between the emotional (inner) and social (outer) worlds of experience. A self-concept greatly influences how one's life can be experienced, but is based on the interpretation of experiences, as viewed through a foundational, social-emotional framework, the narrative structuring for one's quality of life.

The way a camera is used for taking pictures is similar to how each one's narrative structuring frames a self-concept and worldview. And just like aperture and shutter speed settings, the foundation for one's growth in awareness and "play-ability" (the degree of receptive 'play' factors, the cognitive, pliable resources one exhibits as tools for engaged learning with role-modeling, for growth in self-awareness and social-emotional coherence) is set for the outcome!

A Return to Gentleness begins with the re-centering and restructuring of one's social-emotional "processing" center with a framework of Gentle Teaching. This narrative structure is rooted in a psychology of interdependence, forming companionship and community with others, cultivating connections for the "well-being" development of one's self-concept and concurring quality of life. The foundation for one's social-emotional processes (interpreting, feeling, learning) is set with value and meaning, letting in the light of unconditional love and acceptance as we learn together, building upon and expanding from this foundation.

Without the integration of unifying principles and practices that nurture each one's inseparable and indigenous connection to all mankind, we will remain blind to one another, unknowing of our interconnected design and true potential (as individuals and as communities) for awareness, growth, and transformation toward interdependence.

"True learning"¹ is not possible without one's engagement. Engagement refers to a person's level of interest and participation in

a task or activity, and their expression of meaningful communication when interacting with others. This is different from one's *ability* that relates to skill level and how well one can complete a task or activity. A culture of gentleness is a learning culture that, with a person-centered narrative structure, focuses on the invitation to learn together—how to feel safe and loved, loving and engaged; how to trust and do things *with* and then *for* others (reciprocation). A practice of Gentle Teaching builds relationships that invite one's interest and curiosity in learning together. Role-modeling gives one the opportunity to re-imagine and re-frame a self-concept.

My own learning and vocation were influenced early on by the research and teachings of humanistic psychologist Carl Rogers (1902-1987). While he was on board with Maslow's "hierarchy" model of human needs, he brought to light a critical piece of the puzzling processes of social-emotional development with his conceptualization and validation of *true learning*: "For a person to grow, they need an environment that provides them with genuineness (openness and self-disclosure), acceptance (being seen with unconditional positive regard), and empathy (being listened to and understood). Without these essential elements in place, relationships and healthy personalities aren't able to develop as they should, much like a tree will not grow without sunlight and water."²

Gentle Teaching establishes a relational context for human existence by cultivating a sense of belonging (companionship) and creating the invitation to experience belonging with others (community).

Within the space of relationship-building, one connects with an identifiable "place" that becomes practical and meaningful for the centering of one's being and moral memory; for the shaping of awareness and the unfolding of one's story. Gentle Teaching is a social vision that connects the foundation of human narrative with the deeply held roots of our interdependent nature.

Interdependence...the word itself comes from the Latin root *inter*, meaning 'among' or 'between.' In origin, we are not separate. Among us, throughout our lives, an inseparable social fabric of community connects us. Between us is relationship-building potential, the invitational space where the mirroring of meaning and value exists for human connection; for creating new moral memory; for a return to gentleness.

Moral memory shapes one's outlook and develops a sense of meaning and direction. My use of the term 'moral memory' refers to Dr. John McGee's teaching of how this is formed through processes of social-emotional development and how this relates to feelings of inner security. "[Moral memory] is deep in our consciousness and serves as the framework for all that we do," he says, adding: *"From the moment we are born, we begin to develop a moral sense-- how safe and secure we feel, our connectedness with others, our self-worth, and our response to others. These feelings ...are learned responses that become internalized. They form the architecture of our soul and serve as a blueprint throughout our lives for moral guidance. Self-determination and decision-making and choice arise out of these memories."*³

As a social vision with a relationship-building framework, Gentle Teaching has always been at the heart of my counseling and mentoring work. In my own research and teaching and mentoring of caregivers, support staff, Individuals and families throughout my career, what I most commonly observe is the struggle for a sense of belonging, for one's center of existence to have (in companionship) and hold (in community) an affirmation of basic human values and a confirmation of their own existence. With this acknowledgment and self-recognition, social-emotional awareness and growth are cultivated, nurturing a genuine sense of belonging.

It was during my years of attending a Catholic boarding high school in Donaldson, Indiana, that I first learned about Gentle Teaching

and its framework as a relationship-building approach. I was participating in a servant leadership project, interacting with Individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. “Brother Eugene” and “Ms. Karen” were mentoring my work as a peer tutor and had come across an article that introduced Gentle Teaching and the author’s work with severely handicapped Individuals. The author, I learned, was Dr. John McGee. My mentors were enthusiastic in sharing with me, and others in the program, a more innovative and humane approach to our work, a more compassionate and loving approach that was centered on relationship-building. This view was in stark contrast to the prevalent behavioral lens in the field of human services in the early 1980s.

I continued with my studies and began developing my career in counseling and human services. I learned more about Gentle Teaching when the book *Gentle Teaching of the Mentally Retarded: A Non-Aversive Approach to Helping Persons with Mental Retardation* was published in 1987, written by Dr. John McGee and his colleagues, F. J. Menolascino, Daniel C. Hobbs, and Paul Menousek.

A few years later I met Dr. John McGee, who became a dear friend, mentor, and colleague, up until his death in 2012. From 2005 to 2008, my wife, Amanda (a practicing attorney) and I worked together with John on a project in Puerto Rico that involved extensive dialogue and communications in working with the US Department of Justice and the Department of Health, advocating for Individuals with disabilities to be removed from institutions throughout the island and placed in homes with families. As the court monitor, John presented the recommendations we developed for each Individual.

For me, the philosophy and practical applications of Gentle Teaching interactions were learned from John McGee, and I am forever thankful for the years of opportunities I had to observe, first-hand, his practice of Gentle Teaching. John did not see institutionalized others as separate

from society, nor he, himself, as detached from them or the collective, social systems that prolonged their suffering. His works inspired and benefitted the lives of many people throughout the world, especially those to whom he dedicated his own life to serving--- people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and Individuals isolated because of mental health issues, homelessness, and oppression.

With his dedication to non-violence and the preservation of human dignity, his mentoring works cultivated hope in the lives of Individuals and in their communities, amidst despairing conditions. His interactions demonstrated unconditional love, creating the warmth of companionship that showed the joy and appreciation he felt for their presence. Regardless of circumstances or ability, John invited engagement, communicating with his *hands, eyes, words, and presence*. These, we learn, are “our tools” for Gentle Teaching.

In his footsteps, I join many others around the world who continue responding to the call of justice for all, especially for those in need of accessible support and mentoring/relationship-building opportunities that invite engagement with dignified learning processes that cultivate meaningful socialization. We respect the privilege we have for interacting, loving, learning, and creating, together, a culture of gentleness.

Gentleness is a dwelling place for unconditional love,
Breathing the space of “I and Thou”⁴
into each one’s place of belonging, as it was in the beginning.

Soon after completing a master’s program in business administration, I began my own practice that, since 1996, has included serving as the director of a family-owned agency in Indiana that offers human services. This work led to the development of a Quality-of-Life Model™ of services that evolved as a business and management tool for the development and delivery of quality-of-life services and programs that integrate the principles, practice, and promise of Gentle Teaching.

“To value every human being as whole of mind/body/spirit” is the social vision of Gentle Teaching and is the foundation and heart of a Quality-of-life Model of services. This affirmation of our human nature is cultivated in the common ground of world spiritual traditions and is a key tenet of a *psychology of interdependence*.

Interdependence is understood as the underlying formation of community in a practice of Gentle Teaching. This formation values human potentials, inclusively seeking interactions that deepen connections and strengthen social fabric. When supported with values of interdependency and relationship-building properties (aka elements of companionship), this formation of community cultivates meaningful connections and seeds of hope, nurturing quality-of-life outcomes. Relationship-building is the integral value that factors into developing interdependence.

The narrative structure of the self...

The construction and integration of a narrative ethic is an essential aspect of this development. A Quality-of-Life Model expands the relationship-building framework with crossroads for narrative development. Intersections on the shared journey invite possibilities for nurturing and relationship-building, cultivating preferences for one’s experience and capacity for self-determination.

A narrative ethic establishes groundwork for choices, based on the person’s preferences and what becomes known about their gifts and vulnerabilities. This aspect of development is critical for social well-being and is vital to a Quality-of-Life Model with its foundational philosophy of Gentle Teaching.

In *mentoring a spirit of gentleness*, we are engaged in navigating the social vision of Gentle Teaching. Interactions that focus on creating companionship and community acknowledge one’s value and ability

to trust the mentoring processes. This lays a foundation for *one's intrinsic ability* for learning how to feel safe and loved. The learning sometimes means “unlearning” trauma-informed responses and takes patience while new moral memory is being created. This topic is discussed in Chapter 9 when I talk about *Navigating the Heart*, a skillset for crisis intervention. But one thing we can remember in our learning and practice of Gentle Teaching is a simple law of physics: we do not need to remove the darkness from a room before it can be filled with light. As one is able to develop a sense of self or grow in self-awareness, social-emotional connections can naturally occur and develop greater value and new meaning.

Self-reflection serves as an important aspect for assessing how we are mentoring and teaching, and for learning more about how one is able to experience the mentoring processes. We cultivate the foundation for social-emotional growth and intrinsic learning with the vehicle of companionship and community. How will these connections be made? How can we understand this person and learn of their gifts and vulnerabilities? What are we communicating with our interactions, and how are we using our tools? How are we valuing and protecting this person? How will we create meaningful moments, develop dialogue, and invite engagement? How will we plan to stay the course that involves goals and reaching different destinations, while navigating the ebbing and flowing waters of social-emotional experiencing and processing of varied internal and external environments?

We ask ourselves, **how?** A narrative ethic is *the HOW*. Developing narrative creates a venue for one's voice, identifying the important and meaningful aspects of one's story. The process invites one's capacity to be present and experience a sense a purpose. With our privilege of listening, engaging in dialogue, writing about and sharing one's story, one's value is deeply acknowledged. This is the beginning of community formation. It begins with companionship and one's

growing sense of awareness. Developing a narrative script cultivates, with one, a foundational sense of belonging. A narrative ethic is interested in *the history of the future*, the possibilities of where one's story can go and how it can grow and unfold.

Prolific American author and teacher Carolyn Heilbrun (1926-2001), suggested that "the narrative structure of the self means that we can reflect critically on the *scripts* by which we have lived and write new ones, new scripts of possibility."⁵

The natural design and inclination of human beings for understanding and developing the social-emotional aspects of themselves, is within a community-centered formation that engages a relationship-building framework for processing and developing narrative, a way to develop a coherent quality for one's life experience.

In his writings about quality of life and vantage points for research ("Quality of Life: Questioning the Vantage Points for Research"), author Michael Bach discusses the value of a life plan as it relates to social well-being, emphasizing that it differs from a detailed documentation that is "managed by an interdisciplinary team of professional caregivers." "A life plan," he teaches, is a narrative of the person's past and present circumstances and future hopes, a narrative that is a condition for a coherent self."⁶

From a research perspective, Bach discusses essential elements and aspects of human life, addressing the degree of quality and question of standards that are used for measuring and determining quality of life. This topic raises very important questions for our discussions, because, as Bach phrases it, "It is a question that goes to the heart of how we think about policy, program, and service system reform. What features of a person's life should count in determining the quality of their life?"⁷

Bach quotes Carolyn Heilbrun's point about "the narrative structure of the self," adding that "this narrative approach to the birth of the self suggests that the life plan, central to realizing the ideal of self-determination, can be seen as the narrative that people put together about their lives (or that is put together for them), about who they are, where they have come from, and what they want. How this narrative is put together and the choices it reflects is then a central issue for a social well-being approach to quality of life."⁸

Dr. John McGee cautioned that "*self-determination is only meaningful when it is grounded on the feeling of companionship and feeling connected with a safe and caring community.*" Without these feelings, the choices a person makes can easily be based on fear instead of on inner strength and the desire to develop potentials.

One can engage in the unfolding of gifts and potentials, only in proportion to the accessible means and mentoring opportunities one has. In developing the social-emotional self, human beings learn from interacting with others, exploring and cultivating the roots of connection to self, to others, and to their inner and outer world. The philosophy, practice, and promise of Gentle Teaching creates this accessibility with relationship-building, the growing of companionship, and the formation of community.

The relationship between service provider(s) and Individual(s) is paramount in our work. The relationship-building dynamic shapes the social structures (companionship and community) that give mobility to mentoring processes. The relationship itself serves as the vehicle for navigating the heart and for preparing the course of destinations that teach, build upon, and expand from the Four Pillars of Gentle Teaching: feeling *safe, loved, loving, and engaged*. As we teach these four foundational lessons, mentoring gentleness invites and engages one's unknown capacity for intrinsic processes of social awareness. The social vision of Gentle Teaching focuses on *who*

this person is, rather than on what they can or cannot do, or on judging *what* they are doing.

A basic principle of Gentle Teaching is to not let the valuing of others be contingent on conditions. Valuing without conditions (unconditional love) is practiced in addressing social-emotional barriers that tend to define existence. These barriers include feelings of isolation, disconnection with self and others, a lack of meaning for one's life, a lack of purpose or value, disorientation brought about by mental instabilities and disorders, or oppressive, abusive, or other unpredictable environments, including homelessness. Even transitioning to an assisted living home or care facility can break the spirit, impact a sense of belonging, or alter one's sense of who they are and where they are, especially if they are succumbing to these changes without the support of meaningful connections.

The list goes on, but what research lets us understand today is that emotions one might be vulnerable to or chronically experiencing, primarily stem from the deeply rooted, social-emotional human need for a sense of belonging. Balancing social-emotional development in human beings requires opportunities for interacting with others and forming meaningful connections one can relate to that value and support the unique, unfolding narrative of one's life.

Also woven into the social fabric is the wear and tear of trauma and grief in its many garments. Quality of life for a community and its members increases with awareness, education about healthy social-emotional development, and having resources, skills and support for a way to sort out and mend adverse patterns that affect social/self-perception and collective cultural views, as this condition of social-emotional development impacts quality of life and frays the overall, social fabric of community.

A Quality-of-life Model addresses some of the most common challenges in the delivery of human services, offering practical support and solutions for daily business operations and growth, internal processes, stakeholder interests, communications, staff training, leadership development (TQM), and finances.

In the training and mentoring of staff, a Quality-of-Life Model views each role within an organizational structure as one of daily striving to understand and demonstrate leadership that acknowledges each one's intrinsic value within a community (aka *servant leadership*). This mindful valuing affirms and strengthens the roots of community and broadens the horizon of a learning and mentoring culture. This approach to interacting with others brings levels of communication, tolerance, inclusion, and justice back to the heart of human existence and how we are connected with, rather than separated from one another; engaging others in conversation and dialogue that in-forms with life-giving and life-sustaining value and meaning; collaborating in a shared mission to return to gentleness, to the intrinsic value of being and becoming human.

Alongside improving quality of life for those receiving services, a Quality-of-Life Model implements organizational systems and community-building supports for managing and providing services. As providers, our role extends accountability into the community of support for the Individual and/or to those overseeing the delivery of services.

A relationship-building framework for a *practice* of Gentle Teaching has Four Pillars, or life lessons we learn and live by: *safe, loved, loving, engaged*. A safe and loving environment invites trust and engagement. Interactions that mentor a spirit of gentleness are resonant with one's intrinsic, human nature to be social, to belong with others; to feel a sense of unity within oneself and a sense of community with others; to feel one has a place to be and interact without judgment

(safe and loved) and to feel at home within one's sense of self and in the world (loving and engaged).

A relationship-building dynamic is the platform for engaging a practice of Gentle Teaching. It is the vehicle for accelerating awareness and navigating, together, experiential learning toward destinations of the Four Pillars. These mentoring environments affirm existence and support the learning processes with increased value and meaning for social well-being.

We mentor gentleness with unconditional love, *valuing*, *teaching*, and *protecting* this person, *reciprocating* what is being discovered and learned together, supporting, challenging, and nurturing their awareness and growth in *learning how to feel* safe and loved, loving and engaged.

In *teaching* the Four Pillars of Gentle Teaching, we plan and prepare the destinations for our journey together; we offer acts of gentleness; we strive to build bridges in advance of the unfolding narrative, because each step is important to the whole process. Each step carries within it the unknowable degree of potential for connections that open a door for awareness and growth.

Return to Gentleness shares the relationship-building principles and underlying philosophy of a Gentle Teaching foundation and framework, building upon and expanding from this foundation with a business/management/training model (Quality-of-Life Model™) for groups, agencies, or organizations who are providing human services.

The following chapters celebrate a culture of gentleness and invite you, as a parent, teacher, caregiver, family, agency, or member of an organization who is providing support for an Individual or a group of Individuals, to learn more about Gentle Teaching as

a presence and practice of unconditional love, and as a mentoring path for enriching quality of life by developing, with others, companionship and a sense of community. These are the roots of belonging that nurture and cultivate social-emotional awareness and growth.

“Being is our capacity to find our deeper purpose in all that we do. It is the capacity to be present, and to discover our authenticity and whole selves. This is often thought of as an Individual capacity, but it is also a community capacity. Community is the container within which *our longing to be* is fulfilled.”

-Peter Block⁹

FOREWORD

Gentle Teaching is a philosophy that began evolving in the 1980s from practical, social work with homeless youth in South America.

As a psychologist, Dr. John McGee went to Brazil to provide intervention and improvement of lives for a growing number of young people striving in areas of Brazil, especially in the main cities.

The reality of working together with these marginalized youth began producing outcomes that demonstrated how a very unhappy and oppressive situation for these kids could be turned around in order for them to achieve a better quality of life.

Instead of working with an explicit, systematic strategy, unlike behavior modification approaches that worldwide practices were modeling at this time, he implemented a relationship-building approach that demonstrated unconditional acceptance and presence with compassion. He identified “our tools” that communicate unconditional love: *hands, eyes, words, presence*. In describing the essential aspects of this approach, he used his education and personal experiences that worked effectively with others and referred to what he was doing as *Gentle Teaching*.

The initial message to the professional world about Gentle Teaching was that we cannot change other people’s behavior, but in cultivating companionship and a sense of belonging/community with others, we

can teach another to feel safe and loved and they can learn ways in which they can engage in change for themselves, with needed support that becomes identifiable through relationship-building. With Gentle Teaching, we learn that quality of life is achievable, even in the midst of dire circumstances.

What is universally applicable about Gentle Teaching is not only that it is founded in a psychology based on our interrelated human nature, but the foundation stems from the importance of loving interactions in human relations, having respect for one another, and cultivating companionship with human beings who are living in very different circumstances.

Understanding and working with Gentle Teaching creates an urge to find only the best sides of your personality and create the possibility for finding this in others. Working with others who need us will always require finding a way to build on mutual understanding, with a result that benefits the awareness and growth in companionship and community by both parties. Together we can create something meaningful that can manifest only in a world that values and deepens human connections.

Return to Gentleness paves a path for learning all of the foundational concepts of Gentle Teaching and provides practical knowledge for understanding how to apply the concepts with a framework of Gentle Teaching. In the later chapters, Dr. Anthony (Tony) McCrovitz expands these concepts further by discussing a business model for the human services industry that “breathes” the philosophy of Gentle Teaching and a psychology of interdependence. Dr. McCrovitz makes it easy and understandable for you as the reader.

For many years, I served and supported various social service organizations in Denmark and Scandinavia. In 1991, I became the managing director for Denmark’s largest institution, *The Village of Solund*,

mentoring 750 staff members within this organization that serves people with severe handicaps. In the early years of my work at Solund, I was invited to represent my country in a leadership role, along with colleagues from Sweden, Holland, Japan, and the United States. A project had begun in Japan that was assembling thought leaders from these countries, who assembled in Japan with the goal of sharing and discussing a better way (other than a behavior modification approach) of working with people who were very difficult to connect with in a meaningful way. This is where I met Dr. John McGee and how I got involved with Gentle Teaching. In 2010, I became the founding chairman of Gentle Teaching International. John and I organized a Board of Directors, of which Anthony became a member. For five years, I served as the board's president.

When I first met my friend Anthony, he was working with John in Puerto Rico. We all continued supporting John and each other in our practice of Gentle Teaching. Since that time, I have joyfully been working with Anthony in many countries, on almost all continents. He combines his interpersonal skills and theoretical knowledge with much practical experience, resourcefulness for supports and effective solutions, and extensive knowledge of business operations and administration.

He is able to quickly and genuinely relate to the Individuals he works with, even when language is a barrier. Our tools of Gentle Teaching incorporate a "hands-on" approach and create connections with a universal language, helping to bridge challenges that can arise due to missing language abilities.

It is good to experience that human relations are always at the core of all of our efforts, no matter where we are, interacting with others in the world, no matter what culture or religion. Anthony's agency in Indiana (Globe Star) was established with Gentle Teaching as the main understanding for all of the work that is done and the services

that are provided. He and his staff practice building and expanding from the foundation of Gentle Teaching.

The principles of Gentle Teaching are rooted in a psychology of human interdependence, that focuses on the whole being—mind, body, and spirit—not just observable behavior, but also the inner nature of the human condition. It focuses on the marginalized person as well as the caregiver. It is a process that breaks us from the chains of control through a coming together with those who are marginalized. It brings us and others into a process of solidarity, but it needs to begin with us.

This is what Anthony writes about in this book. It can help you better understand Gentle Teaching, but also it can help you see through some of the barriers you might be experiencing in your own daily routines. It can give you the courage to accept your own feelings, stimulate your abilities, and make you more self-assured in relating to others and cultivating relationships.

For many, Gentle Teaching is common knowledge, or, as John McGee formulated it: *“Although Gentle Teaching is common sense, it sometimes seems to be the lesser used of all our senses.”*

This book offers practical knowledge about Gentle Teaching and its applications that enrich quality-of-life outcomes. The discussions bring much value to the dialogue about marginalized human beings, human services, and providers who are cultivating a compassionate practice and approach to those we serve.

Maurits Eijgendaal

24 March 2020, Denmark

President of International (S)-MSE Association (isna-mse.org); former president of Gentle Teaching International and co-founder with John McGee of its Board of Directors

INVITING COMPANIONSHIP AND COMMUNITY, *Four Pillars of Gentle Teaching that we learn and live by: safe, loved, loving, engaged*

What is companionship?

“Companionship is a sense of connectedness. Connectedness to others is the center of the human condition.” -Dr. John McGee

The foundation for one’s self-perception and sense of “I AM” existence is linked to social-emotional connections (or disconnections that distort one’s self-perception), created with the gift of companionship. We learn how to be and become human from other human beings. This is the cultural nature of human development that is shaped by our interactions with one another and by how we are able to experience a sense of belonging.

Mentoring a spirit of gentleness teaches about companionship and that it is safe to trust and engage in mentoring processes that cultivate one’s foundation of self-perception. This is a primary goal of Gentle Teaching. It is a social vision for perceiving and expanding connectedness within oneself and within one’s community, resonating from the center of the human condition.

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Mentoring a spirit of gentleness creates meaningful dialogue (verbal and non-verbal) that values the other and invites their response and engagement. Mentoring moments and steps of discovery teach one how to feel *safe, loved, loving, and engaged*. These Four Pillars of Gentle Teaching lay the foundation for self-perception and sense of belonging, then build on and expand from this foundation. Moments become milestones and new moral memory, supporting positive growth in awareness and learning that is fundamental to social-emotional development.

With a framework of Gentle Teaching, the social fabric of our interactions is shaped with an understanding and application of these Four Pillars through mentoring: How do we value? How do we teach? How do we protect? How does an Individual reciprocate the value of our teaching?

This is especially beneficial when working with those who feel isolated and separated. How can we communicate and become a “safe” presence and hope to create a connection with this person? We begin by taking steps that create trust and open the door, by presenting the invitation for this person to respond, to become engaged, to make a connection with us.

Both verbal and non-verbal elements of companionship open doors of understanding and let us reflect more about who we are as a community of interdependent, social beings. These openings for reflection and assimilation invite connectedness and a sense of community.

The relationship-building dynamics of companionship, based on mutual respect and developing trust, lay the foundation with what is essential for social-emotional awareness and growth. The mentoring environment invites and cultivates natural curiosity and ability for discovery and awareness, for responding and reciprocating. When effectively used as a relationship-building vehicle, companionship teaches about trust and what it means to feel safe and loved. When this is in

place to support an authentic sense of belonging to oneself and with others (sense of community), possibilities for social emotional development expand; the basic human need for social connection has been met, and the mentoring relationship can now cultivate and build upon this foundational connection for continued growth and awareness.

Inviting Trust, Using Our Tools

“They first see our presence,” John McGee would say. “Here are my words, and they connect with our eyes; here is my hand.” *Our tools* are *our hands, our eyes, our words, and our presence*. It’s important to have an understanding of what is being communicated and conveyed through the use of our tools. With these, we construct and incorporate both verbal and non-verbal dialogue, building the relationship and engaging, together, in the mentoring and learning processes.



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A practitioner of Gentle Teaching comprehends the vast potential for intended and unintended messages and is aware of the impact our hands, eyes, words, and presence can make, simply by how we are using our tools and the innumerable ways we communicate. Being aware of how and what we might be communicating through our interactions and understanding how our communications create interpretive meaning for another, gives the Gentle Teaching practitioner a task of mindfulness about using *our tools*.

The pedagogy for teaching the four main lessons of Gentle Teaching (safe, loved, loving, engaged), is communicated and formed through the use of our tools, unfolding through companionship and expanding with a sense of community.

Companionship develops as we create meaning and build a collaborative relationship. Understanding how we use *our tools* is an integral part of a Gentle Teaching practice. *Our tools* cultivate connections, communicating and developing meaning that affects the quality and integrity of the model. Keeping in mind how we are using our tools, we begin creating the invitation.

Being aware of the dynamic aspects of the social-emotional environment, we begin setting the foundation of *safe and loved*. By using our tools for communicating, we are inviting the person to feel unconditionally accepted and trusting, as we, ourselves, prepare to engage in the developmental processes for this journey together. Trust becomes discoverable through elements of companionship that value the person and create growing room, cultivated with meaningful dialogue and interaction.

Initiating a sense of companionship is the first step toward opening the door of possibilities for the journey. This point of departure, in the direction of Gentle Teaching, begins when trust, sometimes very slowly, opens the door.

Trust is the key connection for cultivating companionship. It is an essential quality for building the relationship and creating new moral memory. *Trust* prepares the foundation for mentoring a culture of gentleness and teaching the Four Pillars.

“Until I can risk appearing imperfect in your eyes, without fear that it will cost me something, I can’t really learn from you.”

-Rudolf Dreikurs

Austrian psychiatrist and educator Rudolf Dreikurs was referring to the parent/child relationship with these words, but he is emphasizing the critical importance of trust becoming established, as this prepares the foundation for relationship-building and effective learning. His statement very much relates to a practice of Gentle Teaching and the conditions for a learning environment that invites engagement in the learning processes.

Developmental psychologist Erik Erikson (1902-1994), well-known for his psychosocial model and insights into social-emotional development as a life cycle, also emphasizes “trust” as the foundational stage for social-emotional development and connects success in this stage with “the virtue of hope.”¹⁰

Trust plants the seed for a culture of hope. A journey without trust lacks meaning and value, functioning as rote or mechanical movement. “The first stage of social-emotional development is *Trust vs. Mistrust*. Is the world a safe place or is it full of unpredictable events and accidents waiting to happen?”¹¹

TRUST is the beginning of awareness and growth and listening for one’s authentic voice. Establishing trust creates a sense that anticipates a path of discovery for beginning or continuing the navigation of a journey. Hope, taking root in the foundation of trust, holds the promise of new beginnings or of a new life chapter that, together, can develop a narrative for feeling safe and loved.

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We are ready. We've asked ourselves, "How am I using each of my tools to help the Individual feel safe and loved?" We observe and reflect from *their* perspective. "How might this Individual feel, or not be feeling, safe and loved? What does it look like? And what does it mean to *do* things with the Individual, to do things *together*?"

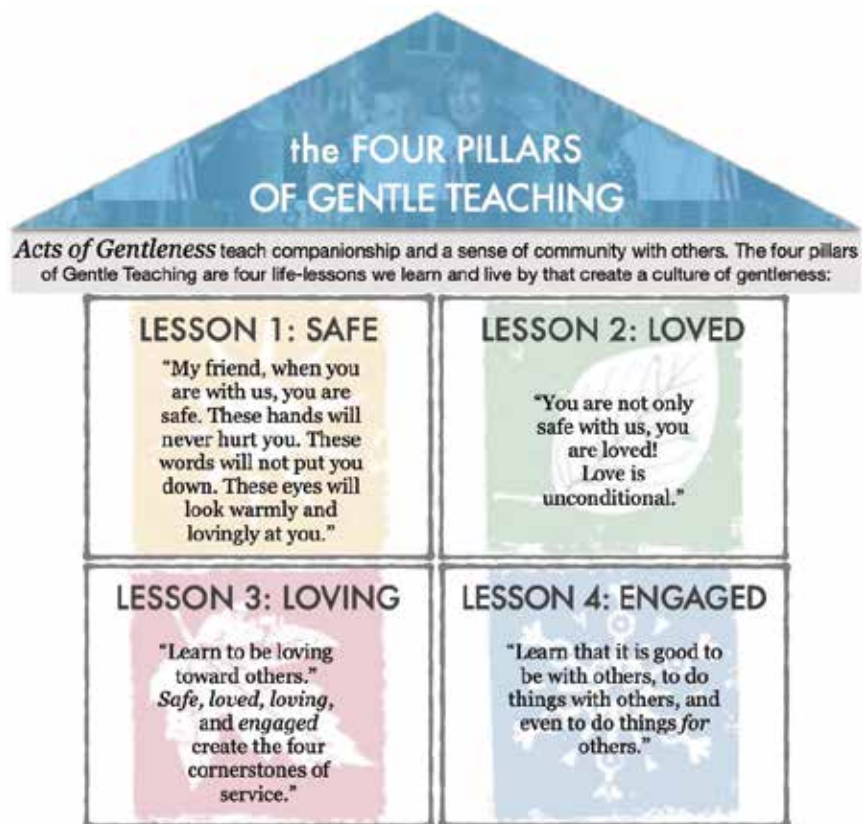
In the practice of Gentle Teaching, we, as mentors, become engaged in a "mutual change" process with those whom we serve.

"The central care giving intention of Gentle Teaching is to focus on a mutual change process leading to companionship and community." -Dr. John McGee

How does this "mutual change process" begin?

Like the ripples created by a pebble dropped into a body of water, the journey outward begins with our own immersion into the vision and processes generated by an engaged framework of Gentle Teaching. Movement upon the static surface raises questions.

Our own commitment to action precedes our interaction and the invitation we create for a person. This affects broad aspects of community that are not always directly related, but are, in fact, interrelated with our initial commitment and willingness to act. Elements of change may require a navigational shift from a surface or status quo vision toward one that returns and rebalances human value and meaning to the person and to the community. Commitment is about being dedicated to the mentoring processes, learning who the other is and becoming instrumental in developing, with them, an authentic and dynamic narrative script. One's narrative continues to be updated as the person's life continues to unfold.



*The mentor*¹² fulfills the initial "call to action" by creating an invitation. This act of gentleness is inviting *trust*, the key for opening up the potential growth for companionship; the foundational relationship-building element that holds the promise of Gentle Teaching: to be and to experience throughout one's life, feeling safe and loved, led by companionship and community.

The journey begins with me and my willingness to venture into some uncharted territory, learning and trusting the processes and navigating the framework of possibilities. The mentoring role is one of valuing, teaching, and protecting, with *acts of gentleness*.

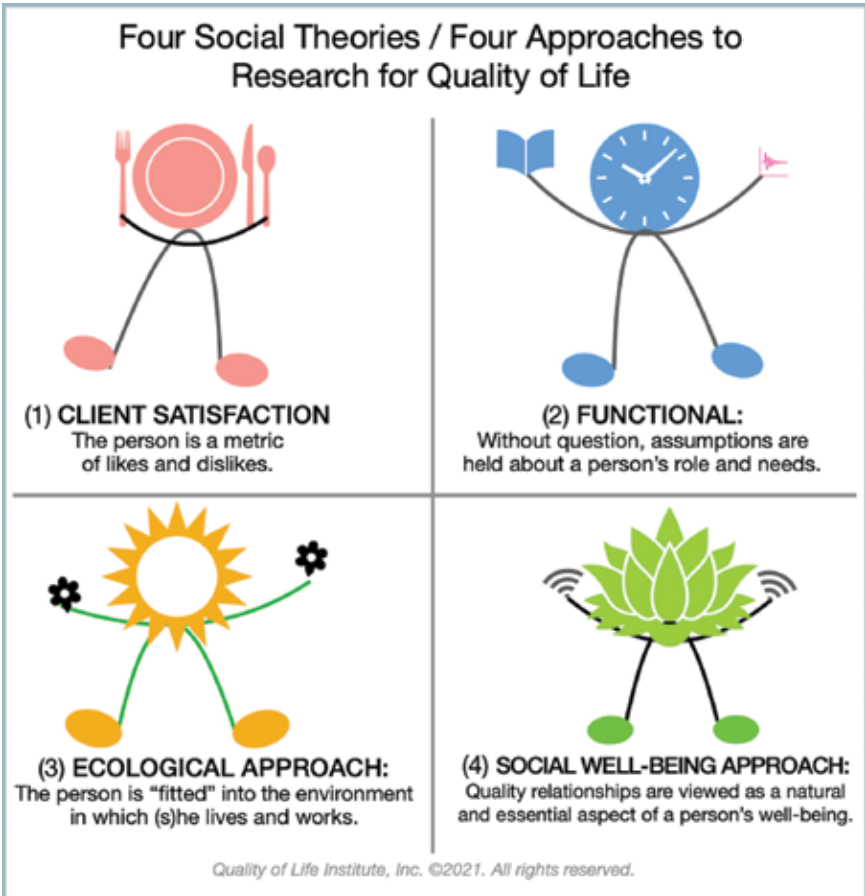
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Acts of gentleness address the deep issues of social justice that fray and tear the social fabric, calling into action each person's human capacity to model mutual respect for diversity, equality, and the preservation of human dignity.

In its scope of a social vision, the philosophy of Gentle Teaching adheres to precedents that reiterate the United Nations' proclamation in 2013 "to promote happiness as a universal goal and aspiration in the lives of people around the globe,"¹³ and achieving the positive dimension of a mental health standard set by the World Health Organization as of 2014: "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity."¹⁴

Mentoring processes within a framework of Gentle Teaching develop, with and for this person, a structure of belonging. In social-emotional development, intrinsic learning begins with having a sense of belonging. Collaborative relationship-building with Gentle Teaching develops elements of companionship and creates a sense of community.

The objectives of Gentle Teaching are to live and learn by the teaching of four main lessons: to feel safe; to feel loved; to be loving; to become engaged. The outcomes of Gentle Teaching use a *social well-being* approach to assess *quality of life*. As an approach to research, *social well-being* is one of four internationally recognized states of human existence that measure human development and fulfillment.



A social well-being approach compares a person's quality of life to "the nature and quality of the relationship of a person to the society in which he or she lives. This goes beyond an examination of social relationships, social networks, personal relationships and other psychosocial indicators,"¹⁵ says author Michael Bach, who discusses three main elements for social well-being: "(1) People should be self-determining with respect to their life plans, able to make choices about what will be significant in their lives and about how they will go about living out their lives; (2) To realize one's life plan, certain conditions must be met, such as basic human rights, needed goods and services and responsibilities to

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others; (3) Viewing justice as an attribute of society and its institutions; a life plan cannot be conceived as separated from social justice.”¹⁶

“If we do not formulate our questions from the standpoint of justice, we run the risk of entrenching and justifying, through quality-of-life research, the immense injustices people with a developmental disability face in society today.”¹⁷

Gentle Teaching is not about more work or different work, but a different approach to our work of adding value and meaning to a social well-being approach, using dialogue (verbal and non-verbal) for the development of narrative and the cultivating of an attainable and sustainable quality of life.

Unconditional love means *unconditional acceptance*. This is the cornerstone of a Gentle Teaching framework. The four “pillars,” or life lessons, teach this. With elements of companionship, we can teach a person how to feel safe and how to feel loved.

As stated in the foreword, the social vision of Gentle Teaching is “to value every human being as whole of mind/body/spirit.” This affirmation of our human nature is from the common ground of spiritual traditions and a key tenet of a *psychology of interdependence*.

A mentor’s engaged processes model a Gentle Teaching philosophy and guide the navigation of a Gentle Teaching framework, from which the relationship-building journey emerges. In a mentoring role, ongoing self-assessment and self-reflection increase competence, strengthen mentoring skills, and add value to the dialogue and the developing of one’s unique narrative.

With an application of the knowledge and underlying principles of the conceptual framework, the patterns of *safe, loved, loving, and*

engaged shape social interactions, weaving together the social fabric of companionship and community.

“The social fabric of community is formed from an expanding, shared sense of belonging. It is shaped by the idea that only when we are connected and care for the well-being of the whole, that a civil and democratic society is created.”¹⁸

The Substance of Social Fabric

Gentle Teaching interactions “connect and care for the well-being of the whole.”

Unconditional acceptance underlies the message and meaning of all that is communicated with our hands, eyes, words, and presence (*our tools*).

The Four Pillars (*safe, loved, loving, engaged*) supply a network of connectivity that creates context and new meaning, shaping an alternative social vision.

For meaningful interactions, *elements of companionship* become the channels for communicating and connecting, and for self-assessing and aligning our goals with a framework of Gentle Teaching.

Interactions alternate patterns of conversation and shared meaning, threading the social fabric with filaments that become the substance of design and structure of community.

Within social structures that promote social services for community enrichment, by way of programs, policies, public amenities, and improvements, the fact endures that the forming and shaping of the social fabric itself becomes the necessary, interwoven fulfillment and shaping of a social vision within the heart of community.

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Cultivating one's capacity for social-emotional development is primarily created through one's opportunities for personal choices, for social interaction and then integration of the social-emotional self.

When these natural processes of human development are obstructed or interrupted (by oppression, ignorance, cultural bias, isolation, etc.), the very threads that can weave a community together, instead, loosen the social structure. Patterns of integrity become obscured, developing remnants, loose threads, unfinished seams, and plenty of tears.

With the collaborative relationship-building processes of Gentle Teaching, trust and elements of companionship work with aspects of value and meaning that hold true to *safe, loved, loving, and engaged*. These *feeling* states of *being* human (safe and loved), work together with the natural inclinations of one's social-emotional nature, creating meaningful connections that cultivate each one's capacity for *becoming* human (loving and engaged).

Alfred Adler, considered to be the grandfather of humanistic psychology, proposed that "social interest, and consequently mental health, can only be attained with success in the three basic tasks of life: work, love, and social interaction. Adler strongly disagreed with his precursors and peers (such as Freud) because his theory revolved around the notion that one has control over one's life."¹⁹

Adler is speaking to the intrinsic motivation in human development; to each one's natural longing to fulfill potentials by belonging to oneself. This becomes learned and known through the experiencing of companionship and community (social interaction). Looking at the three basic tasks of life (work, love, social interaction), he illustrates the context for our interactive environments where we become rooted and from which we experience impressions and form perceptions.

While we may perceive ourselves as being separate from the interconnected web of humanity, we are not. But obstacles, obstructions, and restrictions can certainly give us the feeling that we are. This is why it is important to begin with *feeling safe and loved*; with one's foundation of social-emotional development, where value and meaning (true learning) are discovered and cultivated.

How we see ourselves in relation to others, and how we perceive others in relation to what we feel we understand of ourselves, is a determining factor for how we set ourselves up for successful engagement/outcomes with what Adler spells out as *the three basic tasks of life*

We hold in our hands and in our eyes, and carry in our words and our presence, the ingrained patterns of who we are and the shaping of our perceptions and views. With the very fibers of our being, interactions shape the social fabric, establishing cultural value and meaning in design, structure, and language. Are we engaging in a culture of non-violence? A culture of gentleness? A culture of hope?

A practice of Gentle Teaching creates meaningful context for encounters and interactions by incorporating elements of companionship. "Creating a context" is like *setting the stage* or *setting the table*, inviting presence and possibilities to unfold, using repeatable patterns that identify a basic structure that belongs to an ongoing story.

Developing narrative for a person's life allows for the integration of one's self-determined voice to have value and meaning in the community. The documented writing of one's narrative script is *the setting* for one's quality of life and invitation to the community for their presence and engagement with the open-ended narrative.

This "setting" relates to the social-emotional environment that is an important, cultural aspect of social interactions. A Gentle Teaching environment nurtures an aspect of human life that cultivates *quality*

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of life, placing value with the person in his/her time and place, and utilizing their setting as an invitation for presence and for creating meaningful moments that mentor gentleness through elements of companionship.

A social well-being approach is evident within a framework of Gentle Teaching. Persons with disabilities are presented with choices for exploring options that affect quality of life. Learning to feel safe and loved, and then becoming loving and engaged with others in collaborative decision-making, cultivates interdependency. This is also a testament to social justice, reflected in the values of a community.

From individual and family units (that may or may not seek community resources and support), to what looms beyond signatures and documentation of paper or digital movements that shuffle back and forth between a person and a policy, or between an organization's mission and its administrative tasks, are real human interactions, weaving the threads of social signals and exchanges of communication (both verbal and non-verbal) as the social fabric. From the most subtle to the most pronounced, each interdependent unit represents a part of what a whole society embodies in its social vision. Each unit affects and becomes affected by the community conversations; what is accepted or rejected as the vision for interaction and dialogue at every level.

In the writings of Peter Block, what becomes so very clear is how important the underlying structure of dialogue is within a culture. This is the underpinning of context for the social vision that is experienced through the ongoing formation of community.

Context shapes the styles and conditions for dialogue, producing outcomes that either destroy or restore an authentic sense of community. "The context that restores community is one of possibility, generosity, and gifts, rather than one of problem-solving, fear, and retribution."²⁰

INVITING COMPANIONSHIP AND COMMUNITY

Engaging in the practice and processes of a Gentle Teaching framework repositions our thinking from behavioral demands and conditional acceptance to a relationship-building foundation of mutual respect and unconditional acceptance. This perception shifts the basis for dialogue to one that invites social inclusion and possibilities for learning.

In every moment of our lives, social fabric is created by threads of shared impressions, thoughts, feelings, ideas, commentary, opinions, impressions, and the list goes on. These “threads” are interchangeably woven through human interactions, pinning the roots of culture to a society. The nature, value, and capacity of community life expands or diminishes, according to valuing or devaluing approaches to our interactions. How we come to see the meaning and value of these moments is how we adjust our point of reference and create our social vision.

Social fabric is a self-portrait of collective outlooks and attitudes a community holds toward one another within a culture. A culture of gentleness adds to, mends, and strengthens, directly, the social fabric of Individual lives, and indirectly, the social fabric and quality of life within the community.

Outcomes created by patterns of human development and social perception, individual discernment of personal value, and what becomes experienced as meaningful and purposeful for one’s life (or as meaningless and void), all contribute to forming the collective and lasting cultural impressions and recollections of a whole society.

Today is tomorrow’s history lesson. Today is a present possibility for making a difference in how our own cultural stories will unfold and become told.

Gentle Teaching shapes a social perspective that values feeling *safe*, feeling *loved*, being *loving*, and becoming *engaged* in companionship and community, offering a sustainable vision for the future and, at the same time, creating a culture of hope.

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Creating a culture of hope develops a social formation for moving in the direction of unconditional acceptance, a compassion toward humanity.

“Our gift in the act of care giving is the creation of companionship and the formation of community.” -Dr. John McGee

The Four Pillars: What We Need to Know

As we practice the Four Pillars of Gentle Teaching, we demonstrate, for this person, unconditional acceptance of *who (s)he is*, teaching him/her how to feel *safe and loved, loving, and engaged*.

The premise for understanding how to teach and develop companionship is found in these four lessons that indicate the objectives for our interactions. These pillars support social-emotional awareness and growth by cultivating meaning and value, essentially creating new moral memory with the Individual.

We focus on present and future possibilities; how to bring one’s awareness of their feelings into present experience and quality of life, identifying and developing the dialogue that explores possibilities for their engagement. Mentoring gentleness brings together the principle, practice, and promise of Gentle Teaching, by cultivating a meaningful direction for quality of life, which unfolds through the discovery and development of self-determination.

The four lessons of Gentle Teaching are learned through *elements of companionship*, the relationship-building material that explores possibilities for meaningful moments to become created through social interaction.

*Feeling **safe*** means teaching the person to feel safe with us.

*Feeling **loved*** and supported means teaching the person to be unconditionally loved and supported by us.

*Feelings that are **loving*** and receptive teach the person to feel

loving and receptive toward us and also toward themselves and becoming able to express this.

*Feelings that intrinsically motivate an Individual to become **engaged*** teach the person to feel the value of engaging with us and with the community.

The Four Pillars establish the context of value and meaning for relationship-building dialogue. Mentoring processes cultivate companionship and community with others, addressing and valuing one's intrinsic motivation for social-emotional learning. This awareness of 'self' engaged in learning processes is an essential component of social-emotional development. Intrinsic motivation integrates learning with self-determination, creating and reconstructing social fabric.

What is "Community"?

"Community is a gathering of gifts." -Dr. John McGee

Companionship serves as an inclusive, collaborative centering of each person's gifts within the community. Gentle Teaching demonstrates the loving nature of our humanity that serves to create a "new context that gives greater impact to the ways we work to make our communities better," Peter Block teaches, considering how "the history, buildings, economy, infrastructure, and culture are products of the conversations and social fabric of any community."²¹

Community is about mutually dependent relationships between objects or subjects of a group that exist on common ground, sharing equal value or footing. This fits the premise for Gentle Teaching with an understanding that, regardless of cultural, political, social, biological, or economic background, we remain together in the common ground of being members of one, inclusive human race. Each "unit" or person is a whole "part" of the community; each one represents an aspect of every one, existing in unity. As a community and society, we remain interdependent

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in our potentially transformative nature which, through community life, substantiates and ingrains the cultural fabric and invites the social vision.

At the community level, there are abuses of protection. Sometimes our rights are violated by others who claim their action was necessary to protect us. But the most common abuse occurs when we claim we are protecting vulnerable people, especially children, and people who are disabled or mentally ill. The consequence of this protection is usually isolation or segregation – too often justified as protecting them from dangers within the community.

The paradox of isolation or segregation is that vulnerability lends itself to victimization and abuse in worse ways than one might have experienced outside of the protective system. We are possibly creating segregation if we designate a special place for Individuals that is away from the community, even though our intent may only be to protect them. All of the elements and differing aspects of environment need to be carefully weighed out, considering how each aspect will support an Individual's life with companionship and a sense of community. These decisions impact the coherence and dynamics of a person's life, and we must be vigilant with our presence in ensuring that each person can exercise their freedoms and cultivate companionships, feeling the welcome and invitation to interact with others.

Granted, there are some physical dangers and social threats outside of the protected space. However, the cost of life in a protected space is the absence of many of the relationships and opportunities that make life worth living for most of us. Indeed, it is being able to go outside this protected space that many people feel is the meaning of freedom.

There is a genuine dilemma. We all need protection as well as community and freedom. However, to be vulnerable often means we are led to accept protection rather than community and freedom – a choice no one should have to make.

In his writings that include *Becoming Human, Community and Growth*, and *An Ark for the Poor: The Story of L'Arche*, Jean Vanier, takes a practical look at this dilemma. Vanier draws from his own experiences of sharing life with and advocating for people with developmental disability.

“When we love and respect people, revealing to them their value, they can begin to come out from behind the walls that protect them.”²² -Jean Vanier

“To work for community is to work for humanity.”²³ Jean Vanier

A psychology of interdependence affirms that human beings are social beings and each needs to perceive and experience belonging to a safe and caring community.

How is this sense of belonging created for a person? By creating meaningful dialogue and activities that provide encouragement and invite community engagement. These positive experiences support feeling safe and loved.

Being able to learn about feelings, and how to feel safe and loved through the social interaction of companionship, can potentially and most likely lead one to feel a sense of belonging and experience the feeling of being unconditionally accepted.

Al Condeluci, author of *Interdependence: The Route to Community*, and a leader in teaching and speaking about human services and community issues, reflects on what creates a sense of belonging:

“What is it that signals inclusion? How do you know when you belong to a group or culture? What happens in those experiences when you really feel included? For me inclusion and belonging boil down to three major themes. These are:

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1. Being Acknowledged – This is when people reach out to you and acknowledge you as a person. Being acknowledged is to be seen as having something to offer, to be relevant.
2. Being Appreciated – Here is when we feel valued to the point that others care about what we bring to the community
3. Being Accepted – To be accepted is to become a part of the community in a formal way; to be a player."²⁴

In social-emotional development, a person's sense of belonging can develop over the course of time as one interacts with others. A taste of this can also be experienced in a single, momentary human encounter with one another. The works of Mother Teresa left us with many examples of this.

What is or becomes meaningful (or meaningless) in a person's life is what leads a person to conclusions about who (s)he is in relation to society. A person perceives from the scope of their experiential learning. How does one identify with the community? Does one's perception of community point to ways that are validating and promising (being acknowledged, appreciated, accepted)? What kind of culture is perceived for community? A culture of helplessness and hopelessness develops when one is *not* being acknowledged, appreciated, accepted.

Renowned American sociologist Herbert Blumer (1900-1987) provides insight for this perspective that links learning with meaning. He developed a concrete approach for analyzing and understanding "symbolic interactionism," the term he gave to the "process of interaction in the formation of meanings for Individuals."²⁵

Blumer lists three basic premises for this perspective, which assumes that degrees of significance or meanings that are formed and interpreted by Individuals through social interaction:

1. "Humans act toward things on the basis of the meanings they ascribe to those things.

2. The meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with others and the society.
3. These meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things encountered."²⁶

Blumer's theory is rooted in three principles: *meaning, language, and thought*, maintaining that: "These core principles lead to conclusions about the creation of a person's self and socialization into a larger community."²⁷

How, then, does "a person's self and socialization" expand into community? *By invitation.*

The Invitation to Community Life, the Structure of Belonging

"Invitation is not only a step in bringing people together. It is also a fundamental way of being in community. It manifests the willingness to live in a collaborative way. This means that a future can be created without having to force it or sell it or barter for it."²⁸

Creating a culture of gentleness begins with unconditional love and acceptance of "who the other is." This is expressed by our presence and the invitation we create for this person, inviting him/her to interact with us and feel a safe and loving connection.

The invitation plants a seed of hope. Our presence encourages trust to take root and establish the relationship-building foundation for mentoring gentleness.

Creating an invitation is about creating a sense of welcome, wonder, and space for another's presence and engagement, recognizing the

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present moment as one filled with a diversity of gifts that is holding the space for our possible selves, in solidarity with one another.

The intention for the invitation is to expand the foundation of safe and loved, to grow in awareness and cultivate possibilities that expand the structure of belonging with a sense of community.

In returning to gentleness, the mentor's reflection is: "How am I using my tools (hands, eyes, words, presence)?" And the question we continue asking of ourselves is: "How am I saying, doing, creating dialogue with this person to cultivate the awakening of unconditional love? How am I cultivating the conditions (using elements of companionship) that can invite them and create space for them to grow and learn, to be and *to feel*, safe and loved?"

Gentle Teaching is about creating meaning with others, about conveying unconditional acceptance and inviting curiosity, inquiry, experience, and response; about shared exploration and discovery that imparts knowledge and nurtures awareness and the blossoming of human existence, through the stirring of imagination and the return to a culture of gentleness.

A framework of Gentle Teaching structures social-emotional pathways that support one's awareness and growth. Mentoring creates accessibility to opportunities for interactive learning through social engagement. Social-emotional awareness and growth can occur as one begins to learn *how to feel safe and how to feel loved*. The journey begins with the invitation to trust and become present to the possibilities of developing companionship. Creating meaningful moments develops new moral memory, new reference points for creating connections of value and meaning; bridges of companionship that invite, encourage, and unconditionally support an Individual's self-discovery and social-emotional development.

LOOKING AT OURSELVES, *increasing our capacity for servant leadership with a personal teaching planner, deepening our own, loving nature with elements of companionship*

“If a better society is to be built, one that is more just and loving, one that provides greater creative opportunity for its people, then the most open course is to raise both **the capacity to serve** and the very performance as servant of existing major institutions by new regenerative forces operating within them.”²⁹ (Robert Greenleaf, 1970)

To “regenerate” means *to bring into renewed existence; to replace what is lost or injured*.³⁰ In a moral sense, this can be thought of as reclaiming the nature of our greatest human capacity: to love without conditions. This is the nature of Gentle Teaching, renewing the conditions and expanding the capacity of service, perceiving our intrinsic nature and that of others that can blossom in a trusted, loving environment that is a culture of gentleness.

Author Robert Greenleaf speaks of this approach as *servant leadership*. In providing service, looking at ourselves and our role through this lens sees the needs of others as central to our own growth, and as adding value to the community as a whole.

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Self-determination is not being supported for a person's development and quality of life unless they feel safe and loved. In a role of servant leadership, we need to pay close attention to this, to not "rush" the unfolding of awareness and growth. Like the growing of a garden, nurturing of the foundation (companionship and community) must be ongoing for continued growth, providing accessibility for one's engagement with developmental processes. The Four Pillars are supported by this foundation and learned through relationship-building (aka *mentoring a culture of gentleness*). We make one's path accessible as we take the steps, the journey of learning, together.

We can increase our mentoring capacity through self-reflection. "What am I learning about this person? What is being valued and learned by the person I am serving?" How am I developing meaningful moments and meaningful narrative? How am I connecting, with them, the threads of their unfolding, authentic story? In what ways can the fabric of our lives, being created by our journeying with Gentle Teaching, be woven into community, the structure of belonging?"

Gentle Teaching strives to perceive the heart of what holds value and meaning. The path for a *return to gentleness* regenerates the source of our interdependent structure and formation of community, re-centering awareness within a unified, social formation; to reconnect with our intrinsic culture of gentleness and become able to experience a sense of belonging with others. With the teaching of the Four Pillars, we are cultivating these paths toward interdependence. In a practice of Gentle Teaching, *interdependence* defines the roots of relationship-building, as well as the scope of mentoring, educational, and vocational goals for quality-of-life outcomes.

Continuing to enrich our own learning and living, especially as we work toward increasing our capacity to develop empathy in our work, can sometimes mean *un-learning* some adapted styles of communication and approaches to interactions.

Looking inward at the source of our own reference points can deepen our understanding of how certain views and attitudes influence our awareness, perception, and interactions. From here we can take advantage of being able to take in more detailed views, discovering aspects of our nature where there is always room to grow and explore new possibilities.

Whether our cup³¹ is half-empty or half-full, we carry the constant flow of our energies and attitudes, bringing them with us to social settings and to the table of our interactions. If our cup is brimming with personal judgment, frustrations, and/or discontent, this energy spills over into our interactions with others, and seeps into the flow of our work and our lives.

Looking at ourselves is the first task of caregiving. It begins with us and our willingness to be aware of who we are in the formation of community and in our approach to interactions with others. Self-reflecting on who we are, how we are, and how we communicate and teach is important preparation for a practice of Gentle Teaching.

“The act of care giving starts by concentrating our efforts on two initial tasks: (1) eliminating in ourselves whatever the person might see as domineering, and (2) elevating our expression of unconditional love to the highest level possible.”³² (Dr. John McGee)

Elements of Companionship

On a continuum ranging from *connected* to *disconnected*, we can observe our personal style of incorporating elements of companionship into our interactions with others. Identifying and recognizing our own style of how we incorporate these elements and communicate, using our tools, often leads to our being able to notice things in new ways and become receptive, attuning the language of feelings.

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Without sufficient protection for their emotions or feelings, social beings become especially vulnerable when it comes to interactions of any kind. *Elements of Companionship* create connections and teach a person about trusting the companion; This dynamic cultivates the foundation and awareness and supports one's learning about social-emotional aspects of processing emotions. Through companionship, one finds direction for navigating the world of feelings. Using a framework of Gentle Teaching for developing dialogue, elements of companionship lay the foundation for awareness and for teaching how to name, tame, and befriend emotions.

Elements of Companionship cultivate companionship and a sense of community for relationship-building				
In Interactions cold → warm	Di Dialogue talking → listening	Pr Protection restraint → warm protection	Re Rewards earned → unconditional	Co Companionship poor → good
En Engagement self → together	Pu Purpose modify behavior → build relationship	Fo Focus rigid → flexible	Me Memories old → new	La Language abstract → concrete

In our practice, we focus on the relationship and one's quality of life by identifying (naming) what has value and what gives meaning. Through positive experiences of the mentoring journey, value and meaning for one's life is created and cultivated together, developing companionship and supporting one's sense of community with the framework of Gentle Teaching.

For our dialogue (verbal and non-verbal), the framework incorporates ten elements of companionship for the creating of dialogue and for connecting successful aspects of relationship-building with meaning and value.

As we learn to incorporate elements of companionship into our practice, we grow in our own self-awareness and look more objectively at ourselves and our role in facilitating the mentoring relationship. These elements of companionship keep our sails set in the direction of Gentle Teaching and add value to our navigational skills as we:

- 1) Reflect on how we use our tools and see how, with practice, this becomes second nature.
- 2) Learn about how to “read” the person; this is about both listening and interpreting their body language.
- 3) Respond with meaningful dialogue when made aware of concerns.
- 4) Better understand how and why love is unconditional and not attached to rewards.
- 5) Acknowledge that the value of human existence is not based on being a client or a professional, but on being and becoming human, learning and developing through engagement and interactions of companionship and community.
- 6) Building the relationship by cultivating and engaging in meaningful dialogue.
- 7) Understand that the purpose is not to modify one’s behavior, but to build and expand the foundation of companionship and community.
- 8) Realize the focus is to be flexible within the mentoring processes (not rigid).
- 9) Understand the critical importance of creating new moral memories that invite one’s awareness to expand and form inner feelings of self-worth.
- 10) Learn to communicate clearly with concrete words, instead of being abstract or unclear with our words.

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Learning “how” to feel safe requires learning how to trust another’s presence and intent. “Feeling” safe is to feel unconditional acceptance, right where you are and as you are. Feeling safe leads to learning how to feel loved, then loving and engaged. “Unless educators engineer the [individual’s] environment in ways that are meaningful for the [individual], the [individual] is likely to withdraw emotionally and physically to the security of ... [his or her] own internal sensation.”³³

Feeling safe speaks to our most basic, instinctive nature. In mentoring a spirit of gentleness, this is addressed as the first pillar of Gentle Teaching for the relationship-building foundation.

Once the person *feels safe* and can begin to trust the mentoring process, the ground for relationship-building can absorb and cultivate one’s learning of *feeling loved*, the second pillar.

Feeling “safe and loved” must take root in one’s experience for this foundation to be set for social-emotional growth. These first two pillars of “safe and loved” establish the essential foundation for social-emotional growth and development. The integration of these two pillars with the relationship-building processes supports the direction and pattern for the continuous unfolding of one’s awareness and experience of companionship and community.

In the practice of Gentle Teaching, the role of mentoring is a lot about understanding the context of our language and how it must always lead to destinations of safe and loved. A Gentle Teaching framework maps out how a mentor can value, teach, protect, and reciprocate, using their skills and learning-teaching processes. Self-assessment and self-reflection reveal insights that help to “translate” the expressive language of feelings and emotions, aligning with the framework and bringing into view how elements of companionship give direction to the dialogue.

(See: Addendum 01-Elements of Companionship Reference Sheet)

A *Personal Teaching Planner* is a teacher-centered tool that helps us in accomplishing the ‘two initial tasks’ John McGee identifies for true caregiving: ‘(1) *eliminating in ourselves whatever the person might see as domineering, and (2) elevating our expression of Unconditional love to the highest level possible.*’ As with every good teaching model, there needs to be a method for objectively inspecting and aligning the path and processes of our work. A *Personal Teaching Planner* partially serves this purpose, prompting self-reflection and self-assessment to provide insight for creating acts of gentleness that support our teaching. It helps to identify our mentoring role with others, through the learning processes that teach what is “safe and loved, loving and engaged.” In using a *planner*, we can map out the goals and destinations for navigating through a framework of Gentle Teaching, mentoring a spirit of gentleness and teaching the four main lessons.

Looking at ourselves is a path for self-awareness that supports effective, collaborative teaching and cultivates accountability in our role that engages in facilitating mentoring processes.

A *Personal Teaching Planner* is a valuable tool for planning and navigating a course of Gentle Teaching with a single Individual or with a group of Individuals. As we reflect on our approaches to caregiving and our own style of interacting with others, insights can surface in our awareness that give us different perspectives, providing us with alternative choices and possibilities.

In this chapter, ***Looking at Ourselves*** works with the first task of “eliminating in ourselves whatever the person might see as domineering,” by becoming aware of our mindset and worldview. We become familiar with elements of companionship and reflect on the value of our interactions.

Chapter 3, ***Who the Other Is***, focuses on what we learn about our own capacity to serve, and moves us on to the second task of “elevating

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our expression of unconditional love to the highest level possible.” With a deepening of self-awareness and identifying where and how we place value in our interactions, we use our tools (hands, eyes, words, presence) to create new meaning and renewed purpose about ourselves and our work of getting to know who the other is and developing, with them, their narrative.

Elements of companionship cultivate inclusion and a sense of belonging. Weaving these elements into the social fabric of our communications is acknowledging and valuing one another, teaching unconditional love. These elements are qualities of our own human nature and well-being, drawn from our capacity to be a loving presence and reflection as we interact with others.

As we incorporate elements of human companionship into our interactions, we become effective in creating acts of gentleness that acknowledge and appreciate others, and in teaching others how to *feel safe* and to *feel loved, loving, and engaged*.

How does a Personal Teaching Planner provide support for the role of the mentor? This tool can be functional and customizable to meet the unique needs of an Individual or group, supporting the mentor’s own plan for interacting. This planning tool lays out the Four Pillars of Gentle Teaching and prompts the mentor in visualizing and writing out the steps a mentor plans to take for cultivating and connecting the relationship-building foundation with mentoring a spirit of gentleness.

A mentor’s written plan for relationship-building and teaching the Four Pillars provides a clear focus, allowing for flexibility, when needed, without losing sight of the bigger picture that unfolds the steps of the journey in the direction of Gentle Teaching. We are able to stay true to the mission and value of where we’re going, while honoring the Individual’s needs over assigned schedules and tasks.

Some things can shift, especially as new awareness unfolds and things are being learned, and that's to be expected. The mentor's Personal Teaching Plan serves as a navigational guide and mapped course for their teaching of the Four Pillars. Together, with your Individual or group, continued self-reflection and planning as the journey unfolds, develops narrative and deepens the value and meaning of your mentoring and teaching.

Here is an idea of the meaningful notes we write in our Personal Teaching Planner:

- Outlined steps for how we will teach the four main lessons of Gentle Teaching (safe, loved, loving, engaged). For anyone introducing or implementing Gentle Teaching practices, for an Individual or for a group, this is a mapping tool that engages the facilitator in navigating a course of Gentle Teaching.
- Guides the alignment of our practice and objectives with the pillars of the framework, grounded in interdependence, mutual respect, and unconditional acceptance.
- Centers the social vision of Gentle Teaching, keeping the focus on valuing, teaching, and protecting the Individual in his/her present choices; guides the developing of the dialogue for quality-of-life outcomes that include a future, *possible* self.
- Creates a written document that adds value to your personal work as a facilitator.
- Indicates and easily references the facilitator's personal goals for protecting this person (or group), and for identifying how you plan to incorporate practical steps that can be followed for mentoring the four life lessons of Gentle Teaching.
- Guides the developing of dialogue and one's narrative as social fabric, woven through the framework of Gentle Teaching. These things remain abstract until we write them out as concrete steps for how we can make this happen. These pictures

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become navigational goals (destinations) for the journey of gentleness.

Introspection becomes valuable for the processes that shape our perceptions and shift our perspectives. Navigational guidance of The Planner serves as an ongoing and present support for the Gentle Teaching companion, guiding their own vessel or body of knowledge with mindful presence, relaying the clear message of unconditional acceptance/love, as elements of companionship become integral to their practice.

“How our interactions are expressed is a very subjective experience for us and for the vulnerable person. We not only have to determine how we see them, but also how someone else interprets them. Our self-examination has to interpret how the vulnerable person sees us, not just how we see ourselves.”³⁴

-Dr. John McGee

Self-reflection and self-assessment cultivate mindfulness in mentoring a spirit of gentleness, helping us to *re-view* our interactions more objectively and better understand the other person’s feelings and vulnerability. More than this, being able to clearly convey to the other person that we are present for them and accept them without conditions having to be met, is what brings about a connection and the other person’s sense of trust with this connection.

We can ask ourselves: How does the scope of my work include and impact others in the community? In my service profession, what standards for communication and tools for dialogue do I use that contribute to increasing my capacity as a member of the community, or do they perpetuate aspects of a social vision that aren’t serving the human capacity to love without conditions? Do my beliefs and perceptions have room for the plight of humankind and help me in creating a place for collaborative conversation and the voices of others? Am I interacting with others in ways that build mutually beneficial

relationships and cultivate well-being among members of the community? Essentially, do my actions work in accordance with my natural inclination to live and to serve in a loving capacity?

The Planner is a useful tool for expanding the mentor's social vision for nurturing companionship and community. As unseen factors and variables become visible through self-reflection and assessments, a broader picture can be ascertained. These findings increase our capacity to identify strengths and vulnerabilities, both in ourselves and with others, expanding possibilities. Navigating with a Planner gives a vertical hold for the navigation, indicating routes that can be taken, particularly if we find ourselves needing to adjust or shift our course.

A leading expert on collaborative and proactive solutions and advocate for relationship-building interventions, Ross Greene³⁵ teaches about "changing the lens." Exercising self-reflection invites us to see ourselves in a future or greater capacity, and to reframe views of others by *un*-seeing them as obstacles or behavior problems. Only then can we truly begin to focus on the scope of problem-solving and valuing the person (building community) as we provide new meaning, guidance, and support for alternative outcomes.

In his writings, McGee discusses some of the conflict that may arise in changing the lens and concentrating our efforts toward "eliminating in ourselves whatever the person might see as domineering." Gentle Teaching offers a response for working through these moments with compassion toward ourselves and our greater capacity for relating to others.

McGee suggests that we think about the types of questions that we will be confronted with, and that they generally relate to questions of power and domination. This is simply because it's an area of vulnerability in relationship-building, especially if one is providing social services.

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“Our responses to these questions,” McGee says, “ask us to focus on human interdependence.”³⁶

Focusing on one’s behavior presents a central challenge to move away from the habit of teaching through reward and punishment, to develop a deeper understanding of the human condition and how to recognize and cultivate feelings of companionship and community. While we have responsibilities and a free will for making decisions, moral development evolves from a deeper dimension.

“Without feelings of being safe, being loved, loving others, and engagement, the question of choice is very secondary. The Individual cannot make valid decisions without a sense of love toward self and others.”³⁷

Before we embark on a journey of gentleness, we initiate the invitation for another, offering something of *meaning* and *value*, identifying or creating something relatable to the person we are serving.

Looking at ourselves cultivates insight for creating the invitation, because it lets us *see with the heart*. Becoming aware of how we use our tools and how we actually communicate meaning and value, we can ask ourselves: how do I use my tools to teach someone to feel safe and loved? In what ways am I able to convey value that cultivates self-worth and a sense of belonging, to feel safe and loved?

By becoming aware of our own mindset, attitudes, and feelings about our work, and whether we portray our presence as “warm” or “cold” in our interactions with others, we become able to identify the subtle elements that influence our communications. We learn to recognize opportunities for effective mentoring and professional growth. Throughout the processes, a mentor’s commitment to self-reflection affects the connections that hold relations together within a community. Self-awareness evolves into servant leadership and being able to

focus on the needs of others in a way that truly reflects an inclusive social vision.

Gentle Teaching proposes a new way of seeing ourselves in our work and of looking at ourselves from a different vantage point. Applying a framework of Gentle Teaching to our interactions creates a lens for perceiving others with whom we work and for whom we provide services, as being “safe and loved” in an environment of companionship and community that bears our presence, mentoring a spirit of gentleness.

What images and opportunities do we, as a culture, create for the vulnerable Individual who can see and know who they are and who they might become, only through our eyes? In the global mission of advocating for better solutions and enriched quality of life for marginalized Individuals, we ask the questions and invite compassion and imagination to walk with us on the journey into gentleness, that we may offer a humane response to the suffering of the world and better meet the needs of those who are vulnerable and unable to advocate for themselves.

Self-reflection is a skill we develop for our mentoring practice. This “key” to self-awareness expands perception, often with the removal of judgment, assumptions, and other attachments that tend to create blind spots. Meaningful connections and new possibilities to consider come into view more readily with this mindful engagement. Self-awareness expands the mentor’s vision for creating personal goals for learning and growing, so that *they* too, can feel valued and loved, while also planning for how to teach and mentor.

Developing resilience for ourselves is a personal journey. The tool of a Personal Teaching Planner supports the mapping out of this journey, especially for our role of teaching and mentoring. In many locations around the world, there are mentors, consultants, and resources

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available to support your practice of Gentle Teaching. The Planner will support you in developing skills for relationship-building and problem-solving, as you make use of the planning processes and applications. As the steps for teaching and mentoring are planned out, you position yourself in the direction that will support you in navigating the journey.

Looking at ourselves and *who we are* in serving and teaching others, requires our own awareness (and adaptability) for seeing and understanding how we can effectively think, plan, and act.

“Learning how people want to live is just the beginning, the foundation. Helping people have their own lives requires that we also change —how we think; how we are organized; and how we act.”³⁸ -Michael Smull

WHO THE OTHER IS

“To teach companionship is to help a person learn about his/her identity— to learn who ‘I’ am by learning who ‘we’ are.”³⁹
-Dr. John McGee

A return to gentleness centers interactions on *who the other is*, discovering a path of inquiry, together, for dialogue (verbal and non-verbal). Discovering, developing, and establishing an accessible framework for communication/interaction, supports the building of trust and creating a sense of structure for the journey of learning and growing together. A sense of structure that is based on unconditional acceptance of *who one is*, builds a foundational step for being able to develop a sense of belonging and community.

The journey of gentleness represents the universal search for meaning in one’s life. We learn how to become human from observing and interacting with other human beings. In human development, the social/emotional “growing room” for this unfolding begins with unconditional acceptance; with *feeling safe and loved*.

The process of developing companionship engages one’s social-emotional awareness and sense of self, inviting trust by assuring unconditional acceptance as the given value; nothing needs to be proven or earned. In applying a framework of Gentle Teaching, the mentor/

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companion communicates this and creates an invitation that is reassuring of unconditional acceptance and that invites engagement. As one can experience and awaken to unconditional acceptance of who (s)he is with mutual support/solidarity, awareness can shift and connect in the varied ways it seeks to find a valued and meaningful sense of self, and then an expanded sense of self that exists as an interdependent unity—in community with others. As the sense of self evolves through companionship and community, genuine forms of expression become reciprocated (self-determination).

The foundation of the Four Pillars supports growth in social-emotional awareness. In learning together about who this person is and the integral aspects that define their self-concept and identify how they experience quality of life, unique narrative becomes known and can be developed; one's story can unfold with coherence and a sense of connection with who they feel they are. In writing, one's narrative can become shared, valued, and sustained within the community. Developing and writing an Individual's narrative is a collaborative venture, not only with the person we are serving, but with others in the community; it is an act of social justice for people who cannot do this for themselves without support.

Relationship-building begins with questions: *Who is the Other? What is their life story? What are their strengths, gifts, and vulnerabilities?*

The companion creates the invitation, preceded by a deepening of self-awareness gained through self-reflection and being able to recognize their own gifts and vulnerabilities.

The companion also has an understanding of *elements of companionship*, and how weaving these relationship-building threads through our interactions give cultural form (meaning and value) to the social fabric of our lives.

Like a teacher preparing for a class, the companion prepares for teaching the four life lessons (safe, loved, loving, engaged), creates the invitation, and cultivates the conditions for collaborative learning and growth. As the foundation becomes established and the relationship begins to grow, the invitation for engagement continues to unfold.

The companion serves as a role model for how interactions, based on the philosophy of Gentle Teaching, can be replicated with others; how connections can continue being made within one's immediate circle of influence and then expanded into the broader circle of family, friends, and community.

Connections that stem from unconditional acceptance of our interdependent, unified selves strengthen and mend the heart and the social fabric of our communities.

With an understanding of the principle, practice, and promise of Gentle Teaching, we construct the framework of relationship-building. We use our tools to communicate valuing, teaching, protecting, and reciprocating. We interact with language and dialogue that affirms and teaches the Four Pillars throughout the mentoring journey, exploring, discovering, and celebrating *who the other is*.

In practicing mindfulness, we habitually become receptive to intrinsic learning and self-realization. This begins with knowing there are things we don't know. A Personal Teaching Planner helps to identify and plan how we will navigate the course with this person, connecting the lessons with what they value and with what has meaning for them. Every thread and fragment of a person's life story has value for learning about *who the other is*, about their story and how they connect with it—*about the story they tell themselves about who they are*. This is the self-talk/script, inscribed by the social-emotional self through experiential learning throughout human development. Through our interaction, this is the narrative we hope to discover with the person.

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We learn their story as we navigate through the framework, mentoring a spirit of gentleness. Throughout the journey, we continue to learn, together, what has value and what gives meaning to one's experience of life. In the fabric of life, *value and meaning* are the golden threads, piecing together one's story. Like panning for gold, a framework of Gentle Teaching helps to sift through all of the sometimes-hardened memories and jagged edges of storied experience, to reveal what is intrinsically precious and valued about this person as a human being. And then, step by step, we discover and create meaning and new moral memory that invites their engagement and, through dialogue, provides collaborative access to the development of their narrative.

Each Individual grows and develops at their own pace from their own place of understanding—and this requires dedication and patience in a role of mentoring. Having the structural foundation of companionship maintains what is needed for awareness and awakening, for curiosity to maybe move a little closer to discovering learning about a sense of companionship and community, for learning how to feel safe and loved—and that there is a place where one can feel a sense of belonging and be supported in continuing to trust the relationship-building processes.

As we facilitate dialogue, we learn more about what has value and how one perceives this value. In moving toward safe and loved destinations, one's narrative script and quality-of-life plan, along with our personal teaching plan, give direction for creating meaningful moments with this person. We also observe and identify where meaning and value are blocked or diminished in an Individual's life. Through companionship, we become more familiar and confident with the processes of the journey, and increasingly competent and relaxed in learning *who the other is*.

There is no order of sequence in an Individual's narrative. It is a story of value and meaning that becomes known by heart. It may begin

with blessedness, or it may begin with brokenness. The companion listens, learns, and loves unconditionally, accepting every aspect of who this person is. Value and meaning in our lives emerge through stories; stories that reveal who we are and *who the other is*. Like containers that draw water from a well, stories are often drawn from the depths of our experienced lives; once told, these stories take on a new formation with the expanding of our *shared* lives. This is the formation of community that cultivates well-being and holds the collective heart of our humanity, moving forward, with imagination and celebration of new meaning and moral memory.

Identifying what has true meaning for an Individual and nurturing new moral memory is a critical aspect of journeying with Gentle Teaching. As was mentioned in the Introduction, Dr. John McGee cautioned that “*self-determination is only meaningful when it is grounded on the feeling of companionship and feeling connected with a safe and caring community.*” Again, without these feelings, the choices a person makes can easily be based on fear instead of on inner strength and the desire to develop potentials.

Creating meaningful moments and cultivating social awareness is integral to the social vision of Gentle Teaching. Sometimes it is challenging, especially during times when extrinsic worth becomes the focus. *Elements of companionship* cultivate awareness about feeling loved and *feeling at home*—having a sense of belonging.

Growing together in awareness can begin to shift the lens of self-perception and increase opportunities for creating a connection. Mentoring a spirit of gentleness cultivates mutual awareness and the discovery and learning of *who the other is*. The companion focuses on cultivating the person’s unique voice, facilitating their choices, learning the nature of their unique *signature* for describing and developing the narrative that is their story. Awareness expands each one’s view and capacity to notice what is obscured by *unknowing*.

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In becoming receptive to learning about *who the other is*, the companion's role is to mentor a spirit of gentleness, being aware of how *our tools* are communicating unconditional acceptance and being mindful of the four life lessons we want to teach: how to feel safe and loved, then how to become loving and engaged. The central role of the companion in learning about *who the other is* and creating the invitation, is to establish the conditions/surroundings/dynamics for a loving environment that can nurture the human longing to feel at home, while cultivating the feeling of being valued and discovering a sense of belonging.

Quality-of-Life Values are eight basic areas of need that are universally acknowledged as essential for growth in social-emotional human development. With Gentle Teaching, these eight values comprise a lens through which we can assess quality of life. Working within each area, we identify one's strengths and vulnerabilities for weaving together the social fabric for one's life. These are the finely spun threads for the narrative script.

As we weave these threads into meaningful dialogue and narrative script, *meaning and value* strengthen the foundation of relationship-building. Are we building on this foundation, or can we expand, with others? It's important to understand the narrative script that is unfolding, and the privilege we have to write this, to walk this journey together.

"Caregivers need to be very tuned into the life-story of the person and the significance and impact of inner vulnerabilities."⁴⁰

-Dr. John McGee

Storytelling is basic to our human nature. It is through elements of narrative that an Individual is able to construct the image and understanding of who they are and who we are, together, in companionship and community.

Defining quality of life begins with learning the story of an Individual's life and looking at the common threads that structure and influence their present life, particularly in terms of social-emotional learning. These are the threads that connect an Individual with their sense of self (who they are) and with others (a sense of community). What are their vulnerabilities and gifts? Where is the value and meaning? What tears in the social fabric of their experience can be mended or become experienced as whole with a new moral memory?

Developing a narrative script is not produced by a system or theory, but by mindful engagement in the mentoring practices and processes, as a loving companion, mentoring a spirit of gentleness.

A framework of Gentle Teaching guides the mentoring journey in exploring and discovering how a person's authentic sense of *self* can be characterized by a narrative "knowing" of this person. This written narrative is beyond more formal documentation, such as what is written for a school, state, or agency.

Discovering one's authentic voice for the structuring and developing of "true" narrative, transposes mundane movements of daily existence into more meaningful, purposeful living. Through the shaping of narrative, a relational structure for a person's life can be shared and developed, illustrating a person's connections with meaningful moments and rituals, with the things that are valued in their life and in the experiences that enrich their quality of life.

"Generally speaking, one's ability to perceive and share their life story is generally taken on by the person themselves, beyond one's parents and family. However, there are those with disabilities for whom this development can only be achieved with another's engagement in their processes for discovery and narration, and with the development of open communication, whereby others are able to contribute to the telling

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of their story and participate in the unfolding of their lifelong narrative... “[these children] will never wholly become the writer of their biography and in the case of a severe disability not at all.”⁴¹

“A narrative script” is different from “a story” that has a beginning and an end and that is narrated (or read) by one person. A narrative is a shareable script, constructed as an open-ended, unfolding story that invites the participation and interpretation of many; it invites companionship and community. A narrative ethic is interested in *the history of the future*—the possibilities of where the story can go and how it can unfold, identifying guideposts on the present path, informing dreams and forming goals for sustainable, quality-of-life outcomes.

A narrative ethic establishes groundwork for choices, based on the person’s preferences and what becomes known about their gifts and vulnerabilities.

A return to gentleness is a journey of reclamation, an awakening of one’s inherent sense of belonging and the discovery of “feeling at home” with others. The companion relationship with *the other* serves as a bridge for rewriting and reworking an Individual’s script as it relates to quality-of-life values. New moral memory redirects the story, so it can be told according to what is learned together about what has *value and meaning for this person*.

A Personal Teaching Planner is a mapping tool for navigating the journey of learning more about who we are in our mentoring role and reflecting on *who the other is*. Referring to one’s quality-of-life plan, we are writing our own *personal plan* for how we will interact, teach, and protect. This brings our work into focus and promotes our awareness of the mentoring processes that lead our shared discovery of what has value and what can have more meaning in this person’s life.

“One’s destination is never a place, but rather a new way of looking at things.” -Henry Miller, 1957

We can reflect on the goals indicated in one’s quality-of-life plan and expand on these as we write our personal teaching plan, developing the narrative script. Navigating each destination includes creating objectives for teaching and an overview for relationship-building dialogue. The dialogue is determined by whatever lessons are being focused on with this person that teach about safe, loved, loving, and engaged. Mentoring gentleness is valuing, teaching, protecting, and reciprocating with the Individual.

The tool of a teaching planner supports the caregiver’s part of the learning processes for navigating the mentoring journey with the Individual. The caregiver is creating, with elements of companionship, the conditions that cultivate and “set” the learning environment for teaching the Four Pillars of Gentle Teaching. Planning (including self-reflection) and preparing interactions for mentoring gentleness and teaching the four lessons, assist the caregiver in staying on course with basic mentoring goals for the learning processes: *valuing* (how we use our tools and incorporate elements of companionship), with our plans for *teaching and protecting*, and with keeping long-term goals in sight for reciprocal relationship-building.

Mentoring a spirit of gentleness is the heart of our work to teach the Four Pillars of Gentle Teaching. Learning processes and interactions invite the caregiver to see “who the other is” and invite the Individual to see themselves as they are, being and becoming human by learning how to feel safe, loved, loving, and engaged.

How do we discover what we don’t know? By identifying the eight quality-of-life values and paying attention to disconnected values within the human story.

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An Individual's narrative script relays their story about value: what is influential, memorable, and significant about this person and to this person—what (s)he likes and dislikes; what are their dreams and what are their goals? Who can they become and how can they participate in meaningful ways for their own life?

Creating a narrative for the telling of their story creates “a wave” for their future self. We can plan for the future in the same way that we might plant and cultivate a garden. How we *think, act, and plan*⁴² today gives direction and momentum to tomorrow's quality-of-life outcomes.

In addition to developing a quality-of-life plan for the Individual, a Quality-of-Life Model provides a Personal Teaching Planner for the mentor. This planning tool is integral to the mentoring process for mapping out dialogue and details for quality-of-life destinations, essentially creating a navigational plan that utilizes imagination, creates structure for integrating the social vision, and possibilities for meaningful engagement and expansion in quality-of-life planning.

Quality of Life (QOL) refers to the overall quality of daily experiences that are defined, according to the World Health Organization, in terms of happiness and contentment, health and well-being. While these experiences are subjective and assimilated differently from person to person, each Individual can be supported and encouraged to develop a recognition and sense of awareness about their own inherent and legally protected right to determine and have access to supports that provide meaning and value for human health and well-being.

Quality of Life Assessments are helpful in identifying, with a person, the significant events and patterns that have shaped their feelings and defined their life experience, and the functioning elements (including *lagging skills*⁴³) of their underlying social-emotional dynamics. These assessments provide “clues” for discovering and connecting what has

(or has lost) value and meaning. These indicators begin to tell the story and help us in uncovering and developing a narrative, as we relate and contemplate what is learned about the person, to specific areas of human value.

Quality-of-Life values are universal, human values that are recognized as essential areas of need for the dignified preservation and potential development of human lives.



In mentoring a *spirit of gentleness* with a Quality-of-life Model, we work with eight universal quality-of-life values for creating a foundation of feeling safe and loved and for discovering and developing, with the person, their potential for *community life*, *work life*, and *mentoring life*. These eight values are: bodily integrity, feeling safe, feeling self-worth, a life with structure, sense of belonging, social participation, meaningful daily activities, and inner contentment. These values reflect human interdependence and address the necessary areas of social-emotional growth for independence.

A Quality-of-life Model of services begins with assessing an Individual's quality-of-life values, both past and present elements

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and conditions of one's quality of life, and then assessing the roles of those who are supporting and interacting with this person who is the recipient of support and/or services.

The *Quality-of-Life Values Assessment* provides the foundation for a support plan (aka a *Quality-of-Life Plan*). It provides indicators and a direction to take for improving quality of life. This is a daily plan that will be followed with the person for whom we are providing support and/or services. Acts of Gentleness cultivate unconditional valuing for supporting the four primary goals that are the pillars of Gentle Teaching. First, teaching the person to feel safe with us; second, teaching the person to feel engaged with us; third, teaching the person to feel unconditionally valued by us; and finally, teaching the person to reciprocate unconditional valuing to us. It is these four outcomes that will nurture a sense of companionship and community. As we teach these four goals, we document the Individual's experiences for the development of their narrative.

Services based on a Quality-of-life Model mentor a *spirit of gentleness* and guide others in personal growth and in achieving a quality of life (with help or necessary supports) that cultivates companionship, contentment, interdependence, and a sense of community.

A Quality-of-life Model applies the principles and practices of Gentle Teaching and supports each person's right to define and integrate personal and cultural values into their daily life. These values become evident in the curating of an Individual's narrative script.

Incorporating these quality-of-life values within a framework of Gentle Teaching establishes the contextual structure of language for creating teaching plans, meaningful interactions, and writing narrative. For the mentor, this practice guides their learning and understanding of "who is the other." Identity and self-determination unfold through the mentoring processes that let us learn, alongside

the other, what matters to them and why it matters, and how it is meaningful.

Mentoring a culture of gentleness works with and through the exploring and restructuring of social-emotional patterns; assimilated tendencies that weave one's foundational fabric for clothing the self in all its aspects. Before any true learning can occur, a person's sense of self, *the very foundation of who one conceives and perceives themselves to be*, must feel safe and loved!

This is a return to gentleness, a return to the heart of our humanity. It is learning about companionship through relationship-building that models and mirrors this foundational, unified (interconnected) structure from which interdependency can manifest. Social-emotional awareness and growth is rooted in social interconnectivity—the weaving of social fabric, in ourselves, in our lives, and in our communities.

With *self-awareness*, one becomes receptive to *other-awareness* and experiencing a sense of community. With the expansion of one's self-concept, new possibilities for creating value and meaning can unfold through processes that *mentor a spirit of gentleness*.

As one becomes aware of the different aspects of the self (i.e., self-worth, self-esteem, self-determination), one becomes more receptive to new connections being made, allowing for the cultivating of meaningful moments and the blossoming of the "self." Through relationship-building, *mentoring a spirit of gentleness* invites the Individual to become connected and rooted in a "safe and loved" foundation, grounded in social-emotional growth. This growth in self-awareness naturally creates, too, a culture of hope, allowing one to perceive possibilities and potentials for what Jean Vanier describes as being and *becoming human*.⁴⁴

BECOMING CONNECTED, *a sense of belonging, feeling “at home”*

Each Individual’s longing to “feel at home” within themselves and within the world is the universal, human hunger for connectedness, for a sense of belonging. This is basic to the human condition, driving internal dialogue that influences self-perception and the structuring or rebuilding of one’s foundation for social-emotional wellness and well-being, from which true learning springs. One draws perspective from the cultivating of this foundation that develops impressions and images for one’s inner landscape of companionship, seeking coherence with one’s outer landscape that represents a sense of community.

Current research informs us how social-emotional development is dependent upon social interaction and primarily influenced through relationships. Before this concept became scientifically understood, it was perceived by Gentle Teaching and integrated into the foundation of its practice.

In a culture of gentleness, *the companion relationship* is the context for connectedness. It is the vehicle for each one’s learning to feel safe and loved, loving and engaged. *Companionship* creates and cultivates “the space between” for growing; *community* expands this

space, giving one a place of solidarity, centering and celebrating each Individual's unfolding story.

The steps for engagement in the companion relationship journey are learned together, for how each person can feel valued, find meaning, discover and come to know a sense of belonging and learn how to “feel at home” in him/herself and within the community.

After self-reflecting and self-assessing where we are in our own understanding of our role for this journey—looking at what knowledge we can apply, what skills we can learn, and what gifts we can recognize in ourselves and offer—we begin seeing the other through a broader lens and establish the foundation of companionship, from which we can build with a framework of Gentle Teaching and develop the relationship.

Throughout the journey, we reflect on the purpose of our engagement with this person and observe how each of us is shaped by a social culture and how a culture of gentleness perpetuates an inclusive environment of value and meaning.

With our engagement, we offer unconditional acceptance with our presence; with companionship and a sense of community, we create a culture of gentleness. A framework of Gentle Teaching is a framework for social justice as we engage with others in moments and processes of social change.

When we use our hands, eyes, words, and presence as “tools,” we recognize that it is not what we are teaching that is important, but *how* we are teaching. This is especially critical during times of crisis that we'll discuss more in the chapter, *Mentoring a Spirit of Gentleness*.

Feeling connected cultivates the sense of belonging, the primary building block for social-emotional development, which is why developing

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companionship is so important. The person learns (s)he is safe with you and that it is good to be with you and trusts that no matter what, (s)he will be valued by you. Establishing this pattern of trust for learning and growth is a developmental milestone for each life journey, indicating the foundation is prepared for creating *new moral memory*.

Understanding *moral memory* and how it shapes social-emotional development: when choosing how to act (or react) voluntarily, an Individual's inclination is guided by what is called *moral memory*. This is deeply embedded memory, carried by feelings or social-emotional connections to projected or anticipated feelings that pull at the center for social direction. Learned responses in adverse or oppressive situations can become internalized, creating *moral memory* that veers awareness and responses off course. This can cause a person to feel adrift, isolated, and fearful of interacting with others.

Acknowledging one's perception of where they see themselves on their journey honors one's experience. This validation invites one to become present in the moment with the unconditional invitation together, to seek and explore new possibilities that will nurture their intrinsic longing to belong, to feel safe and loved. This is central to our caregiving role that is mentoring a spirit of gentleness. New moral memory is cultivated and offered for inner growth. This is supported by creating meaningful moments.

How do we respond to universal suffering? *Am I my brother's keeper?* What possibilities exist for a person who is able respond without judgment? What possibilities become present *for* one and *with* one for whom "the space between" is one of unconditional acceptance and invitation? *Relationality*, as suggested by Martin Buber, is "true interaction [that] emerges in the space between...where self and other are inseparable."⁴⁵

To talk about how we can cultivate "the space between" us and create these opportunities for ourselves and for one another, we need to talk

about congruency for quality of life... the harmonizing of one's inner (social-emotional) world with their external environment, and the place and purpose of *value* and *meaning* for human lives. Do we recognize the added value given to one's life that is experienced as meaningful?

In the first three chapters, we discussed what it means to value and how we demonstrate value in relationship-building (using *our tools*), how we uphold value (with the Four Pillars of Gentle Teaching, *safe, loved, loving, engaged*), how we sustain value (with a framework of Gentle Teaching (*value, teach, protect, reciprocate*), how we weave value into the social fabric of our interactions (elements of companionship), and how we integrate value into one's quality of life (with the eight quality-of-life values).

In developing human potentials, "valuing" cultivates receptivity and a safe and loving space and invitation for an Individual to venture on an inner journey of "the self." The companionship-relationship serves as the vehicle for shifting one's awareness and guiding their curiosity and exploration of self-worth, inner contentment, and a sense of belonging.

In becoming connected, we see the Individual considering a change of heart, engaging more in the outer journey of "the self," and the paths for social-emotional development that are paved through relationship-building and the creating of meaning. One's sense of belonging is augmented through social participation and having meaningful, daily activities.

Here we have the foundation of "safe and loved" expanding, a sense of community being experienced, and one's narrative unfolding.

The invitation to participate as a meaningful member of the community does much to draw a person into a picture of greater value for the "self" ... a growing self, a loving self, a valued self, a person who can respond and reciprocate with others, in a "safe and loved" community that is a culture of gentleness.

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As a person gains awareness, new ways of learning (through companionship) and new ways of feeling (feeling safe and loved) bring insight and new light to old ways. Mentoring and learning processes integrate the pillars of “safe and loved” to create and cultivate new moral memory. Feeling unconditionally accepted and loved allows the light of awareness to dim shadows of brokenness or fearfulness that can keep the heart hidden or held captive by an ingrained, neural path, prompting a known or familiar path of interpretation and reaction.

As awareness expands with new ways of learning (through companionship) and new ways of feeling (feeling safe and unconditionally accepted), old ways become outgrown, like fading shadows and memories. Mentoring processes cultivate new moral memory; seeds of hope that becomes integrated as self-worth, self-value, and a sense of belonging.

Creating Meaningful Moments

As we create meaningful moments with this person, we become engaged in the reworking and reweaving of moral memory. New moral memory pulls awareness and growth into a new way of being able to perceive the self in a light of unconditional acceptance. New moral memory weaves *the why* into the fibers of social fabric; meaning and value cultivate the social vision, connecting with the ability to perceive and meaningfully experience companionship and community; through dialogue and interaction with others, threads of human development are interwoven with how an Individual acts, thinks, feels, does, and believes who they are and who they can become. The foundation of the relationship provides the key for composing dialogue (verbal and non-verbal) for our interactions.

A Gentle Teaching framework gives structure and form to our interactions that are shaped by mentoring a spirit of gentleness, engaging the companion in self-assessment and self-reflection:

- How do I value?

- How do I teach?
- How am I protecting?
- How am I modeling/mirroring the Four Pillars, inviting the Individual to receive and reciprocate?

Essentially, it is the dialogue we communicate with our tools (hands, eyes, words, presence) that constructs the relationship-building environment. The contextual structure of language is formed through both verbal and non-verbal communication. With the foundation of “safe and loved,” we step into the space between us and invite collaboration in creating meaningful moments. See the following diagram, **Creating Meaningful Moments** (CMM) that maps out how we can utilize the framework of Gentle Teaching for creating this dialogue that speaks to the Individual’s awareness and experience, while inviting an interactive learning relationship. The four pillars are validated by elements of companionship and support the framework for mentoring Gentle Teaching by valuing, teaching, protecting, and reciprocating. For example, by communicating unconditional acceptance, we teach that we will not judge. This gives one hope and deepens trust as they learn that they will not be judged.

Personal reflections offer insight and guidance for relationship-building as we learn how to observe, understand what to look for, and begin to recognize value and meaning through the social lens of Gentle Teaching.

We notice new possibilities for an Individual’s story, a better story with more useful narrative. By looking at the past and present elements of a person’s story, the companion/mentor can begin to identify the paradigms and places of the journey that have shaped this person’s self-perception and experience. These “threads” that create the fabric of lives provide an understanding of who the other is. These are the threads we begin to identify, incorporating value and meaning into quality-of-life material. We do this together, with the person, through dialogue (verbal and non-verbal).

Now we can navigate this journey of gentleness, with a vision that allows for a future with possibilities that we can plan for in the present.



This is about new memories for lives that can have new meaning, with hearts that can have new moral memory.

Focusing with a Personal Teaching Planner, so you can keep going!

A Personal Teaching Planner provides a focus for how we will interact with this person; how we will mentor, and what and how we will teach. The mentor-centered planner guides our steps for navigating the course and integrating the learning processes with how we will mentor a spirit of gentleness with this person. It is a template for constructing a Gentle Teaching framework and developing the relationship-building dialogue, based on the foundational lessons of the Four Pillars of Gentle Teaching.

Every framework of Gentle Teaching applies the same principles and practices for building the relationship, but the content of value and meaning differs for each Individual, as this is based on the unique needs and goals for each Individual or group with whom we are *mentoring a spirit of gentleness*.

A *Personal Teaching Planner* sets the sails in the direction of Gentle Teaching, charting the course with goals and destinations that are reached with the dialogue we develop and the meaningful moments we create with the Individual. Connecting narrative can be written out from planned, concrete steps for the role of relational support and care.

In developing human potentials, “valuing” cultivates receptivity for learning, and a safe and loving space and invitation for one to venture on an inner journey of “the self.”

The relation dynamic is at the heart of a Gentle Teaching practice, building relationships that accelerate awareness, generate transformation, and create a culture of hope.

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For mentoring a spirit of gentleness, self-reflective processes with a *Personal Teaching Planner* provide us with a two-sided view, like the inside and outside of a window. Navigating change for one's narrative and quality of life can occur when an Individual's capacity and accessibility for self-determination is supported. The Planner is a navigational tool for mapping out quality of life destinations together, through relationship-building dialogue. Mentoring a spirit of gentleness implements learning processes that engage exploration, discovery, and the cultivation of one's unique voice and narrative. When this is recognized and supported, the Individual is given responsibility for their own life, with the invitation to grow and move beyond limitations.

Developing the Dialogue and Narrative with a Personal Teaching Planner

The Planner is a tool for the mentor. Self-reflective insights cultivate mindfulness for the development of narrative. The planning processes that prepare our teaching and mentoring with this person, work toward authenticating the migration of *the self*, essentially re-routing one's experience, from forms of isolation to community formation. By their side, we witness the journey of awareness and growth in companionship and community, and we narrate the documenting of their story.

The mentor or facilitator takes on the role of "narrator." This requires the mentor or facilitator to be an observer who pays attention to the developing dynamics and details of the unfolding story. As we are led to incorporate the narrative ethic of Gentle Teaching into our practice, we become a keeper of stories, developing the narrative script with the Individual.

"Narrative is not a panacea for change or a substitute for necessary programs, strategies, or budgets. It is a management

tool that can assist in implementing change and facilitating communication on every level."⁴⁶ -David Brauer

Assessments can provide insight and guidance for what can be observed and what is being observed for creating meaningful moments and developing the narrative. A Personal Teaching Planner is a helpful tool for cultivating mindfulness and guiding the companion/mentor in *mentoring a spirit of gentleness* with a particular person (or group). It becomes important to identify with your mentoring role by using concrete terms for how you will incorporate a framework of Gentle Teaching into your practice of mentoring gentleness—valuing, teaching, and protecting the Individual(s), planting seeds of hope that invite engagement and reciprocation?

Narrative is a way to use language and explore connections. With a narrative story structure, focused on the Individual, we can explore and discover what we don't know, *but what we can discover and learn* by unpacking and taking in all the varied aspects of their story.

Planning and self-reflective practices are essential for any teaching practice and contribute to professionalism and engagement in the learning processes and effective outcomes.

A Personal Teaching Planner helps in preparing individualized, relationship-building dialogue for navigating the person's story and narrating meaningful script. With our tools (hands, eyes, words, presence), we initiate awareness for ourselves and with others. With each tool, we identify how we can mentor by asking: (1) what can we see as we apply principles of Gentle Teaching that see with the heart (imagination) (2) what can we learn as we integrate our practice that forms connections (structure) and (3) what do we know as we plant seeds of hope, so one can know (s)he belongs to him/herself, with others in companionship and community (expansion)?

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Developing the Narrative: *Nine Different Destinations for social-emotional development / cultivating new moral memory*

Nine different destinations are “goal” areas for social-emotional development. After assessing *where we are* with this person and identifying the area of human development that most needs to feel safe and loved, we can discern *where we need to be* and focus on a destination.

Unique elements of one’s story can be reframed with renewed meaning and new moral memory. The destinations prompt visualization, cultivate imagination, and provide focus for the mentoring processes, doing much toward grounding the Individual in the broader context of their life story.

Becoming familiar and resourceful with the social-emotional terrain of the nine destinations expands our view, allowing deeper questions to surface and taking our observations closer to the foundational structure, social-emotional positioning, and relational value of one’s self-concept and sense of belonging with their quality of life.

Mentoring with the nine destinations gives definition and expanded form to “self-concept.” In the previous chapter, we can look at how each destination is a “goal” area, centering on a path of ‘safe and loved’ that is paved by the cultivation of social-emotional developmental processes. The destinations address relational, foundational “keys” that open up the full range of developmental factors inherently designed for “well-being” in social-emotional awareness and growth.

NINE DESTINATIONS *of safe and loved:*

Destinations 1, 2, and 3 lay the foundation of companionship, of feeling safe and unconditionally accepted/loved. Active participation in daily activities fosters self-worth. Quality of life is viewed in

proportion to eight, foundational human values that are universally recognized and considered essential for meaningful human existence.

This first group of destinations that are cultivating the foundation of social-emotional development are characterized by dependency, overlapping with independence. Here, we are doing more for the Individual, providing much support. For mentoring one's awareness and growth toward interdependence, we begin to establish daily rituals with the Individual. Engagement in the value and meaning of daily rituals nurtures one's ability to feel safe and loved, becoming grounded in a culture of gentleness and beginning to trust companionship.

Destinations 4, 5, and 6 build on the foundation that becomes grounded in the first three through the growing of mutual trust. With the eight values, one can build to engage with others and to communicate in shared activities to give a sense of belonging. Once this foundation is in place, skills can be applied to new settings.

This second group of destinations that are cultivating the foundation of social-emotional development are characterized by independence, overlapping with interdependence. Here, mentoring one's awareness and growth toward integration and interdependence, we deepen the value of daily rituals and increase meaningful engagement and dialogue with the Individual. Here, we are doing more *together*, as they are learning to feel the value of who they are and of the mentoring relationship.

Destinations 7, 8, and 9 expand the foundation as we learn, together, to doing things with and for others. These destinations support growth, based on one's ability to problem-solve, to connect ideas together, and to take initiative with ideas.

This third and last group of destinations that are cultivating the foundation of social-emotional development are characterized by interdependence and growth in an awareness of solidarity. Here, mentoring

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continued growth in interdependence, we are doing things *with and for others* as the value of these nine destinations continues to unfold in meaningful, enriching ways.

Destination 1, Structured Life Plan and Activities with Value: Through this journey, we help to identify that each Individual has a purpose, through meaningful activities and a life of structure.

Destination 2, Sense of Self-Worth: We continuously help the Individual to engage in meaningful activities while maintaining a foundation of valuing, so the Individual can begin to feel self-worth. Without this foundation, an Individual might do the task, but will learn to seek other activities that have no value or purpose to quality of life.

Destination 3, Sense of Belonging: The Individual begins to see themselves as being connected as we continue to engage or focus on building the relationship with a true sense of companionship. We teach the importance of doing things together and for others. Learning the skill *only* creates a sense of self without any sense of doing things with others.

Destination 4: Feeling Safe and Loved: Here, the Individual feels safe and loved, through meaningful rituals that laid the foundation of unconditional love. At this destination, the Individual recognizes that he/she is safe with the caregiver and unconditionally loved by the caregiver. This destination is about feeling connected.

Destination 5: Laying the Foundation for Inner Contentment: Many interactions with meaningful rituals that focus on building the relationship, as opposed to compliance or simply accomplishing the task, create the moral memory that is needed for the Individual to feel free of traumatic stress. At this destination, what the Individual desires most is inner contentment.

Destination 6: Opening the Door: This destination is the turning point toward inner peace and resolution. As the Individual seeks companionship, it is the caregiver's role to be receptive to this developing stage and try to connect. This moment of change is the beginning of a new moral memory, reflecting inner harmony and acceptance of each other.

Destination 7: Being Present to Build on the Foundation: As the Individual spends time with us, (s)he begins to understand that *I am because you exist*. The caregiver's role is to be present and to create teachable moments to support growth and development. This engagement lays the foundation for mutual valuing.

Destination 8: Valuing: This is a primary goal of our relationship, valuing each other as we teach each other that it is good to be together and it is good to do things together. Valuing does not mean that we focus on changing the Individual's behavior, but rather on nurturing the relationship as a foundation for learning.

Destination 9: Safe and Loved with Meaningful Activities to Expand the Foundation: This is what we strive for in our relationship, creating companionship and a sense of community that deepen through meaningful rituals.

We can now expand into new and different areas of doing things together and drawing others in to expand the Individual's community.

Gentle Teaching not only shifts our own lens of how we can effectively engage with an Individual; it also shifts this person's experience toward the opening up of new chapters for their story as we set meaningful goals for quality-of-life outcomes.

Throughout our navigating of the journey, not only are we valuing social services, but also the social-emotional development of Individuals that can be valued through the providing of these services. Our engagement explores possibilities that continue to invite interaction but

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does not define the steps for creating meaningful moments and new moral memory. The steps unfold along the path of applied practices within the framework of Gentle Teaching. As we are nurturing the relationship and navigating the destinations, a personal teaching plan connects meaning and value with the Four Pillars. When a Planner is used for this “map” work, a picture is created for how we will use our tools for mentoring, planning some clear and concrete steps for connecting through dialogue, supporting our role in effectively valuing, teaching, protecting, and reciprocating with our Individual.

Change and transformation begin with a connection or a disruption of one. When an Individual can “feel at home,” they are able to feel safe and loved. With companionship and a sense of community, Gentle Teaching feeds the universal hunger for connectedness by valuing, creating meaning, and cultivating awareness and discovery, by returning gentleness to one’s naturally progressive state of being and becoming human.

It is within the heart that one can begin to understand the moral messages of “the stories” we are teaching. We give meaning and value to these moments but remain focused and engaged in the integrative processes of the framework through which we can illustrate the “3 P’s,” the principle, practice, and promise of Gentle Teaching. With this social vision, the Individual sees they are not alone in the world, but with others; interconnected, belonging, and able to develop human potential and well-being for the “self” and with others in the community.

A PERSONAL REFLECTION, *integrating a practice of Gentle Teaching within the legislative structure of human health services and systems, and how foundational principles of a Gentle Teaching philosophy relate to the governing foundation for a socially just society*

Beyond planning, the essential support that a Gentle Teaching practitioner provides is with **presence**; maintaining an environment of unconditional love and acceptance; modeling a culture of gentleness through interactions; cultivating the social vision of companionship and community through the mentoring processes of the framework; creating solidarity.

Our engagement with the framework adds value to the structure of human services and social systems.

A narrative structure is essential for well-being in social-emotional development. It engages one's awareness with the neuro pathways that IN-form a self-concept as one internalizes existence. The storied self evolves throughout one's lifetime, recounting and integrating how life is perceived and experienced. A framework of Gentle Teaching provides the structure for cultivating, through dialogue, one's authentic voice.

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Providing mentoring support for the cultivation of narrative nurtures awareness of “self-sense.” This is central to creating connections for authentic expression through the relationship-building interactions that are supporting one’s self-determination and autonomy.

What are the important aspects of one’s story, and how are the socially woven threads relating to an Individual’s ability to feel loved? What is disconnecting, obstructing, or interfering with the intrinsic inclination for wholeness in social-emotional development? How are we protecting and teaching? Where are we identifying value that can be incorporated with the creating of meaningful moments and new moral memory?

New moral memory develops when a new pattern or template is given for the social-emotional processing of information. Much like practice of a new skill, the repetition of the new pattern is what allows for its integration, from which new narrative can be developed.

WORKING WITH GOALS, formal and Informal

When an Individual seeks services, the selections are made accordingly from three different paths of mentoring support for fulfilling one’s goals: *Quality of Community Life*, *Quality of Mentoring Life*, and *Quality of Work/School Life*. Each path provides mentoring support with a primary focus of cultivating/integrating one’s awareness and growth for success with community life (social interaction and opportunity), mentoring life (areas of difficulty and lagging skills), or work/school life (exploring employment or classroom environments, opportunities and barriers). These paths can overlap, depending on the Individual’s needs.

The focus for each path combines the Individual’s formal goals with informal goals. Formal goals typically evolve with a Person-Centered Individualized Support Plan (PCISP) or Person-Centered Plan (PCP) and an Individual Support Plan (ISP) that is recognized/documented by the state. Most likely, but not always, a person will already have this

in hand when they inquire about our services. Their PCISP tells us the formal goals that we need to work on with the Individual.

The first thing we do with the formal goals is plan how we will *create meaningful moments* that will engage one in the relationship-building processes and support their learning of the Four Pillars. The steps for creating the meaningful moments with the Individual are written in a “CMM” form with one’s prior experience in working on the goal(s), our proposed strategy, and identifying who is responsible for mentoring the Individual and teaching the goals. A Quality-of-Life Model incorporates this formal goal sheet called *Creating Meaningful Moments* (CMM) that is used to facilitate the teaching, while *The Planner* (as introduced in Chapter 4), is used for creating the invitation for one’s engagement with the relationship-building aspects of the learning environment. We would also refer to *The Planner* under the action of ‘protection’ if there is a moment of difficulty that needs mentoring support.

Informal goals don’t need to be documented but are included in one’s narrative script for their quality-of-life plan. The integration and articulation of both formal and informal goals becomes narrative script for one’s QOL plan for full integration.

Our friend, Terry, was an Individual who moved into a house on his own, but no one explained to the new service providers about his informal goals, and this created some challenges. With a QOL Model, the informal goals are a part of our dialogue and relationship-building support as we mentor with a framework of Gentle Teaching. For example, ‘brushing teeth’ could be an informal goal. We might need to remind the Individual to brush their teeth, or re-model, with them, *how* to brush teeth, or talk again about the importance of this daily task (value and meaning). A framework of Gentle Teaching attributes “brushing teeth” to one of the eight values (bodily integrity) that are addressed in mentoring a spirit of gentleness.

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The PCISP gives the structure but doesn't give us the methodology for where we are we going, how we will be moving forward with the teaching and learning of the goals. For this, a Quality-of-Life Model writes out how meaningful moments will be created with the Individual for the Quality-of-Life Plan. We are cultivating learning environments, laying the foundation of *safe and loved*. What we know is that if we take the time to be with someone, *safe and loved* will be learned. Then how do we apply this and develop skills? The Quality-of-Life Model methodology for working with goals works together with the ISP (Individual Support Plan) and our Creating Meaningful Moments sheet (CMM) to identify how each individual goal should be implemented. This helps in noting and documenting daily quality of life.

The *Personal Teaching Planner* identifies how we will communicate and interact, using our tools (presence, eyes, words, and hands) to teach one how to feel safe and loved, and how we will incorporate elements of companionship into our interactions.

As we teach, we should be able to refer to the framework for each goal that we write out in our teaching plan. This framework of mentoring--valuing, teaching, protecting, and reciprocating --- is referred to by the State of Indiana as "task analysis," and we are required by our State to be knowledgeable about these aspects of our interactions as we work with the Individual's formal goals.

Your teaching plan includes (1) the setting for teaching moments for both formal and informal goals, (2) identifying challenges/barriers and protecting the person from disruptive factors, (3) support to be given, meaningful activities, and (4) reciprocation goals for yourself and for one's learning.

The raw structure of narrative formation can be viewed as four steps: (1) the setting or situation (2) the challenge or problem (3) the resolution or discovery (4) the conclusion or solution. The narrative form serves

as a template for mapping out, restructuring and redirecting new information in the direction of Gentle Teaching. When mentoring the Four Pillars of with a Quality-of-Life Model, particular attention is given to these four steps of narrative development in each of the four lessons. A Personal Teaching Planner and four assessments help in breaking down the processes, aligning the goals, and writing out the plan and the narrative script as it is being learned and unfolding through the dialogue.

Following are two views of a group encounter:

VIEW A illustrates the basic, underlying narrative structure, as outlined above. It's a simple understanding of how we can quickly change the narrative with a format and outcome we can easily relate to with today's increased social awareness and great strides made in solutions that demonstrate mainstream inclusion practices.

This view, however, is only the tip of the iceberg.

VIEW B reframes the interactions with the same, basic narrative structure we have with a framework of Gentle Teaching, expanding our view with a Quality-of-Life Model by zooming in with the nine *safe and loved* destinations for mentoring. View B questions the interrelated areas of social-emotional coherence by considering lagging skills to identify and areas of vulnerability. What we assess benefits our plan for building on the foundation one has presently developed for learning.

The different learning settings create connections that support one's core foundation of social-emotional awareness and growth. Again, the foundation for 'true,' intrinsically motivated learning begins here, with the need for unconditional acceptance being met, not something easily accomplished by external validation, because how one experiences learning is default-driven by 'self-sense' and who the person feels they are. With a genuine affirmation and connection, one's receptivity and capacity for awareness and growth leads to engaged learning. A 'safe

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and loved' environment opens up the 'space between us' that invites one's interest and curiosity in learning together. The Four Pillars or life lessons mentor the genuineness, acceptance and empathy that Carl Rogers talks about for true learning, and the primal sense of belonging one needs to feel that Al Condeluci indicates as being acknowledged, being appreciated and being accepted.

Each destination supports both formal and informal goals. Each area develops the social-emotional foundation with self-confidence, bridged by belonging. In cultivating and strengthening one's sense of identity, we avoid labels and take the time to look at internal assets. We need to question and identify what internal assets one has. What playability™⁴⁷ factors can be utilized for prompting visualization, cultivating imagination, and creating focus for mentoring specialized goals?

VIEW A: I was with a group where the children would start to play the game of Twister (#1, the setting). One of the children in the group was a little girl who couldn't get onto the floor to play the game with the others. It was clear that she felt left out, because she would always bite herself while she watched the others play. This was segregation (#2, the problem). I worked with the group as they recognized the problem and discussed how they might include the girl in the game. Together, we saw that it wasn't a problem for the little girl, but that the challenge was with us. We discussed ideas for how to support her in feeling safe and feeling included rather than feeling limited and excluded; we talked about ideas for how she might play the game with the others and how we could create the invitation for her to participate (#3, the discovery). The group worked together in creating a tabletop version of the game so that all could play (#4, the solution).

VIEW B: After the initial observation of View A, I would use the kaleidoscopic valuing of the nine destinations to begin questioning and connecting what was going on for the little girl in terms of how she perceived herself and experiencing who she was (emotional self), and

how she was able to experience who she was with others (social self).

Looking at the 2nd destination that is about self-worth, I notice from her lack of meaning that this activity did not provide a connection with her sense of self, especially with her sense of self-worth. Going back to the first destination, having a life of structure with meaning, we can observe how the Twister game was not a meaningful ritual for her, although there was structure. Overall, the activity created a negative reaction and a disconnectedness in her life of structure, as observed with the biting of her hand.

Looking at the 3rd destination, having a sense of belongingness, we can note the disconnection response and be aware of the importance of integrating her in the activity for a true sense of companionship and community.

The 4th destination of safe and loved is about being aware of creating the life of structure, self-worth and a sense of belonging that allows one to feel safe and loved. I often remind people that when something goes wrong, don't look at the behavior, but ask: *what are the rituals in in the person's life?* It helps us define who they are. Once again, it's knowing where we are within the learning environment, and walking **with** the person.

We need to re-think our own position and ask ourselves how we are providing that invitation, or how we are giving someone the tools to communicate. Following the form of narrative structure, we can create meaningful concepts that give us the opportunity to step back and reframe what we are seeing and ask ourselves *where can I be* in this picture? How can I serve this situation with a framework of Gentle Teaching, creating companionship and community?

Learning to feel safe; Learning to feel loved; Learning how to feel and be loving; Learning how to be engaged. With each one of these lessons,

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learned, a small story within a larger context develops through narrative formation, adding the value of social-emotional coherence to the larger story of one's life.

With a practice of Gentle Teaching, we move toward destinations that fulfill a social vision that values not only social services, but also the social-emotional development of Individuals that can be valued through the providing of these services.

This vision encompasses a greater value being assigned to the providers of social services, adding meaning to the social fabric being created by the interactions that become the means for social services, between the direct and indirect service provider(s) and the Individual(s).

On a social-emotional level of well-being, when a person can begin to feel "at home" in themselves and with others and within their environment, they become more receptive to social-emotional awareness and growth, but most importantly, to feeling loved.

Developing companionship and a sense of community with another invites the Individual into a space of gentleness. Valuing and creating meaning cultivate connectedness for awareness and discovery.

The Individual will need to feel safe and loved before becoming able to sense the moral messages of "the stories" unfolding through the mentoring processes of valuing, teaching, protecting, and engaging in reciprocation. We give meaning and value to these moments but remain focused and engaged in the integrative processes of the framework through which we can illustrate the principle, practice, and promise of Gentle Teaching ("3 P's"). With this social vision, one sees that (s)he is not alone in the world, but with others; interconnected, belonging, and able to develop human potential and well-being for the "self" within one's own community.

To learn about the importance of using our tools and how our perception and practice of this critically affects our interactions is to understand the foundation of Gentle Teaching. This foundation is unconditional love/acceptance, diverse and inclusive, representing not only that we are without bias in our practice and interactions, but also ensuring that the message and meaning of being unconditionally valued and accepted is consistently experienced by the person.

Another aspect is understanding how we are using our tools and being aware of self-reflection and the valuable feedback it gives us as we continue teaching and planning to teach the Four Pillars.

Self-reflection opens up our view with insight that lets us become aware of this person's sense of self, aspects of which we can then acknowledge with them. Mutual acknowledgment leads toward possibilities creating meaningful moments for cultivating companionship and community with this person.

Centuries ago, philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel identified three areas for socially just interactions (specifically with regard to improvement of education) when he stressed the importance of (1) the acknowledgment of the relationship with the primary caregiver as the person's primary source for developing self-confidence, (2) the acknowledgment of the society for providing equal opportunities for persons to achieve a sense of self-esteem, and (3) the acknowledgment of the Individual to nurture self-worth.⁴⁸

In looking more closely at these three areas and how a positive sense of self-worth is formed, we must consider how an acknowledgement of identity and being valued does not necessarily equate with one's experience of feeling valued. This happens when one's self-perception is strongly influenced by cultural views such as labeling and stereotyping.

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Confidence and self-esteem build one's foundation of self-worth. We need to understand that each step for this social-emotional development is necessary and needs to be worked through, before one can feel valued and become more aware of their identity.

At times we might see our role as the "teacher" to improve one's Individual functional ability to be independent, who then points out our needs to be corrected, or the supervisor to make us work and live more effectively within the structure of our environment to comply with these rules. These two roles are conditioned to give consequences if we are unable to comply and continually need to be corrected. *This is not Gentle Teaching.* Gentle Teaching creates an interdependent relationship that provides meaning and value, by breaking down the walls of segregation and building up a foundation of companionship and community.

Present-day philosopher Aksel Honneth⁴⁹ identifies this as the means through which our own interdependence is a way to be seen, recognized, and respected, and contends that at the center of all social conflict is the struggle for recognition.

Bringing elements of companionship to our interactions will provide this recognition, then expand it further by cultivating a sense of self-worth and a sense of belonging and developing self-awareness (relating to the three areas that Hegel identified for educational reform).

In our work of mentoring, interactions align with the Four Pillars of Gentle Teaching (safe, loved, loving, engaged). These pillars arise from a psychology of interdependence and address "the struggle for recognition" (Honneth) and achieve the "socially just" interactions that invite engagement and provide opportunities for achievement (Hegel).

Gentle Teaching expands this social vision by recognizing and relating one's social-emotional development with quality of life, that

begins, primarily, with teaching a person how to feel safe and how to feel loved. Cultivating this “feeling” aspect of being and becoming human makes the critical difference for the social-emotional development of the self (beyond what the self can “achieve” with recognition) that Gentle Teaching nurtures and navigates.

In the context of human health systems, a social well-being approach brings into focus the important aspects of social interaction that Hegel and Honneth discuss and looks at outcomes in these areas for measuring and determining quality of life.

A framework of Gentle Teaching accomplishes this, too, but also introduces an additional dimension of social development *by inclusion of the emotional self*, the sense of self that lays the foundation for the social development of the “self.” One must be able to feel, to sense and identify feelings by relating them to experience (i.e., sense of belonging), before a social connection can authentically be made that creates the capacity for experiencing a meaningful sense of self and of belonging with others, with community.

The purpose of Gentle Teaching is to cultivate connections with the social-emotional self that improve quality of life. These outcomes are created by adding value and meaning to the dialogue and integrating elements of companionship into relationship-building.

This added value and meaning increase an Individual’s possibilities. Beyond the social well-being of a person, being “seen, recognized and respected,” Gentle Teaching incorporates the moral compass of companionship and community with an ethic for dialogue and narrative.

In working within human health services and systems, how can we integrate “valuing” in our interactions with caregivers, co-workers, case managers, et al? Communication styles that acknowledge the

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person and provide recognition and mutual respect is a strong place to begin, and there are mindful practices a professional can integrate for developing meaningful interactions, such as reflecting on how we can promote and teach a person to value, and how we can assess a person's sense of being valued.

In his book *The Evolving Self*, Robert Kegan expresses what I feel to be a concise and concrete definition of *valuing*: "Getting behind the self-constructed nature of a system of valuing, generates a protective tolerance for difference and is the beginning of a sense of Individual rights."⁵⁰

Doesn't each of us want others to have tolerance—or a "protective tolerance," for who we are? It is within this sense of tolerance that a foundation of being safe and loved can coexist in the structure of relationships.

Kegan goes on to illustrate how this degree of tolerance is the "beginning of a sense of Individual rights."⁵¹ How true and vital it is that we reflect on our purpose for creating meaningful interactions.

We engage in the collaborative journey, not only with our tools and elements of companionship, but with continued growth in self-awareness as we reflect on (1) our own need to feel supported, (2) the barriers created from our past and present perceptions that will influence our interactions, and (3) the anticipation of our desired outcomes.

For this level of engagement, our focus become threefold, encompassing a set of **principles** (points of knowledge), a **practice** (navigating and nurturing safe and loved), and a **promise** (that ensures tolerance and working toward outcomes that reflect a culture of gentleness).

These "3 P's" (principles, practice, promise) create a flow of engagement and interaction within the framework, where mentoring a spirit

of gentleness continues to surface and deepen connections, enriching experiences of value and meaning for quality of life.

The nature of our engagement that creates this flow and opens up possibilities continues to invite interaction but does not define the steps for creating meaningful and positive moral memories. This task of engagement is mapped out in our practice that nurtures and navigates the course of our journey with an Individual, using our tools to convey elements of companionship and create meaningful moments with the person.

It is in this flow that we begin to see how important our tools are for navigating and for an Individual to feel safe and loved, especially as we weather the storms when the person desperately needs validation and guidance. The continuous journey of these meaningful interactions defines our relationship, rooted in the presence of unconditional love.

Navigating with a Gentle Teaching framework provides many opportunities for examining this relationship. In our self-assessing and reflecting, the point is not be disappointed or to be discouraged or to label ourselves with faults or shortcomings, but to gain insight and to take the wisdom and inspiration of these moments and to simply “value” these moments, to feel blessed in the “presence” of these moments that, through acceptance and understanding of our own possibilities and vulnerabilities, empower us with choices that call on our best selves.

COMMUNITY-CENTERED CELEBRATIONS, *crossing a bridge*

“The foundation of all decision-making has to be based on feeling safe, loved, and engaged. Without this foundation, there is nothing. Independence is empty without others. Self-determination cannot be just left to the self; it needs community to have meaning. Self-reliance will cave into loneliness without others to lean upon, celebrate, and share joys as well as sorrows.”

John McGee, *Mending Broken Hearts: Cultural Impact*

Community-centered celebrations arise along the path of mentoring a spirit of gentleness, through the dynamic that is cultivating companionship and a sense of community with others. These arcs create significant intervals of time and space that connect where we’ve been on this journey together with where we are going. Reflecting back and looking forward, these shared moments form a pause in the present to look around at *how* we are and *where* we are *now*, reconnecting with and honoring the role and person-centered commitment of each participant who collectively recognizes and supports this person and their needs, i.e., what supports them in feeling safe, loved, loving, and engaged.

COMMUNITY-CENTERED CELEBRATIONS

There are intentions for the structure, but it is flexible, with the person engaging and participating as much as possible. The invitation is from a friend, talking, sharing, and being together as companions with shared values, and a deepening connection with one another. It is a celebration of companionship and community within one's meaningful circle of support and social relationships.

As part of the quality of life-building processes that mentor a spirit of gentleness, a community-centered celebration is an event created by a close community of support, for recognizing and celebrating the Individual; the challenges, the learning and growth; the unfolding and sharing of one's narrative with the community.

As seedlings naturally lean toward sunlight, these times invite each member of the community to reflect on how the growing needs of the Individual can be honored, served, supported, and integrated into a deepening sense and ever-widening circle of companionship and community. *The community* is on this journey with us, and as a whole, is being served and blessed by the Individual who is becoming *loving and engaged*.

For the companion-caregiver, community-centered celebrations create outward, shared experiences for staying connected with ourselves, with our purpose of cultivating companionship with the other, and with how we are expanding a sense of community.

Throughout our journey of gentleness with the Individual, community-centered celebrations build bridges that support and connect, in meaningful and concrete ways, the navigating of our course over time and through various elements of social and physical environments.

This time together supports growth in awareness, inviting one to explore and experience a sense of being valued and celebrated, in community with others. Each one has a role in shaping the unique path

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for this journey and in supporting and participating in the developing narrative, exploring possibilities for an Individual's dreams, and working together to create the steps for integrating today's dreams into planning for tomorrow.

The Hero's Journey is described by author Joseph Campbell⁵² as a universal path of narrative that shapes social-emotional growth throughout one's journey of human development, or, as Jean Vanier puts it, of *becoming human*.⁵³ A community-centered celebration is about honoring this person's journey as they engage in becoming *the hero* of their own life, paving an inner path for self-determination on the road of interdependence. We are building a bridge, connecting a path for "the hero" of the evolving narrative we are developing together, within the larger circle of community.

A community-centered celebration creates a memory for this person's journey of courage and social-emotional growth. Our presence with the Individual and their group is celebrating the growth in awareness and collected memories like this one, marking a milestone on the journey. By expanding a full circle moment of companionship with a growing sense of community, those present are collectively acknowledging, supporting and celebrating this person's presence, possibilities, and potentials with an *if you can dream it, begin it* attitude.⁵⁴

Campbell's "HERO" characterizes awareness and experiential growth, representing the social-emotional self. *Inner conflict* surfaces in every hero's journey, and the journey of gentleness is no different. Someone in the group guides the discussing, sharing, and deepening of companionship and community. With every step, developing companionship and community with the person is the focus, correlating actions and interactions with the Four Pillars of Gentle Teaching: with the person feeling safe, feeling loved, feeling and becoming loving, feeling and becoming engaged.

COMMUNITY-CENTERED CELEBRATIONS

In studies and stories about creating personal narrative, foundational patterns of social-emotional growth and development, including *dreaming*, are seen as indigenous to processes of being and becoming true to oneself. *Dreaming* invites the person to imagine becoming a future version of him/herself in a culture of gentleness, as can be experienced now in this time and space of a community-centered celebration. As one participates and engages in the celebration, one's sense of belonging is strengthened by *feeling at home* with others; feeling safe and loved; returning one's journey to gentleness with the blessing of companionship and community.

Dr. John McGee wrote out an eight-step guide for planning community-centered celebrations. Again, the sequence, duration, and times for when how these steps come together is based on the Individual and their needs. Each step is related to the naturally occurring growth of companionship and community that develops through relationship-building in mentoring a spirit of gentleness.

There is a book, *The Blessing*,⁵⁵ where the authors suggest a list of five areas of human interaction that benefit or bless relationship-building. I like to use this list for reference in preparing and participating in community-centered celebrations, because each one inspires an act of gentleness and specifically demonstrates a message of unconditional love. The five elements of "the blessing" are: (1) meaningful touch (2) a spoken message of love and acceptance (3) attaching *high value* to the person being blessed (4) picturing a special future for that person (5) an active commitment to fulfill the blessing.

Regardless of how things appear or are interpreted ("positive" or "negative"), we honor the journey in all of its aspects, without judgment. Remember, we are often working with areas of the self that may seem brokenhearted or discordant with quality of life, but we find our path in the direction of Gentle Teaching, creating meaning and value and being true to the framework. In this way, the relationship-building

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journey navigates the heart of Gentle Teaching through a social-emotional body, creating accessibility for movement toward destinations of “safe and loved” and towards transformation. This is working towards unity and solidarity, not just for the Individual, but for ourselves, for each one of us who is working toward integration of the self that begins right where we are, in community with one another.

Dreaming is a main theme of the celebration, but it is also an ongoing process of relationship-building: being able to imagine and see oneself in new ways, doing new things, or doing things differently. This is part of creating new moral memory and rewiring social-emotional connections that can begin to replace brokenness with a wholeness of value and meaning.

At our community-centered celebration, we cultivate a culture of hope and celebrate the unity between us and the journey that has been taken, of what can be and has been learned; what has become known and what is not yet known but can be explored and learned, together; looking at the past, present, and future within the framework of Gentle Teaching; how we are valuing, teaching, and protecting, and how we are mirroring unconditional love for one’s reciprocal reflecting of Love’s unconditional, ever-presence.

In his book *Always Looking Up*,⁵⁶ actor Michael J. Fox shares his persistent journey that seeks a cure for Parkinson’s, and passionately instills his quest for better quality of life for those who suffer with this disease. While being optimistic lets us hope that things in life will unfold favorably, he feels that greater than optimism and *hope* (something Fox claims is the project of knowledge and projection of where that knowledge can take us) is the vision one cultivates by *faith*, because faith informs us that we are not alone.

In a community-centered celebration, it is evident in the dialogue that engages families, Individuals, and caregivers who are all celebrating

their vision and love for the Individual, that seeds of *hope*, *optimism*, and *faith* are unfolding. This is an invitation to celebrate being a part of this journey; to be present, to be engaged, and to create meaning with each other as companions.

It is like Robert Frost shared in his poem, “Home”: “a home is a place that when you go there, they have to take you in.” *Faith* provides the invitation to lay the emotional foundation to teach. When an Individual looks into our eyes, we want them to see and feel that it won’t cost them anything. Returning to gentleness begins to mend brokenness and build bridges of relationship. This becomes the blessing, our sense of companionship, doing things together and navigating the heart toward “safe and loved,” where one can feel at home.

By understanding and accommodating the rotational nature of social-emotional learning and development, we can support the person with “growing room” for greater challenge, inviting and imagining how potentials can unfold while cultivating self-determination, a growing dynamic for a life less fragmented and more whole.

As companionship is created and as a sense of community is cultivated, particularly with community-centered celebrations, each community member holds the opportunity to bless and uplift the journey, to discover, recognize, and celebrate congruent paths emerging for the Individual, for the mentor, and for the community as a whole. The underlying principle for this social vision and growth relates to *interconnectedness* and *interdependence*, the foundational concepts for a philosophy of Gentle Teaching.

A community-centered celebration is a meaningful ritual for relationship-building, commemorating for the mentor and community, too, the foundational purpose of our journey, which is to create companionship and a sense of community with the Individual.

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Let's reflect for a moment on how the gift of Gentle Teaching opens up through relationship-building and brings us into the formation of community. To briefly summarize, the blessing of companionship and community is laid out in the first two chapters. Chapter Three begins to look at *who* this person, this "other" is, and how we can begin to bring value and meaning into this person's experience, relating quality-of-life values to social-emotional processes for learning and growth. In Chapter Four, we learn more about how to create meaningful moments; how to identify and cultivate possibilities for building on the foundation of the mentoring relationship, weaving value and meaning into the social fabric created through our interactions, reflecting and visualizing how to navigate quality-of-life outcomes and develop one's narrative, alongside planning for quality of life.

Now, in Chapter Five, we begin expanding this foundation with this moment of celebration, when all areas of awareness and growth are being brought together, along with recognizing the attributes of hope and faith that are at work in our relationship-building. Meaningful memory is being created, culminating in the ritual of a community-centered celebration. The celebrated moment is also a transitional one, hinged on a culture of hope that, in social-emotional development, connects with new moral memory. While we acknowledge social-emotional growth and quality-of-life outcomes, we also honor our own commitment to this journey, and, with the Individual, continue to develop their script, dreaming, imagining, and planning for their sustainable future.

COMMUNITY-CENTERED FORMATION, *expanding the social vision by shaping the social fabric with circle leadership, “kitchen table” dialogue, and daily planning*

All the while we are cultivating companionship, the groundwork for a sense of community is becoming centered and formed through our relationship-building with others. As each step of the journey connects meaning and value with the Four Pillars (*safe, loved, loving, engaged*), a foundation for mentoring a spirit of gentleness is upheld. How do we mentor? *Valuing, teaching, protecting, and reciprocating.*

A framework of Gentle Teaching cultivates a relationship-building approach for our interactions, creating the lens for mentoring value and meaning. Actions and interactions, arising from the principles, practice, and promise of Gentle Teaching, weave a foundational, social fabric of companionship and community. These underlying threads, spun with our *hands, eyes, words, and presence*, can be mindfully prepared with the process of writing a personal teaching plan. Our interactions can be “thought forward” in the same way that we might, as a chaperone, map out an itinerary for an Individual or group of Individuals we will accompany as we travel, together, to various destinations. The plan supports mentoring a spirit of gentleness and teaching the Four Pillars.

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With the formation of community, we are exploring and expanding the horizon of our reach into the world. It begins with how we are able to see ourselves and our role in terms of *leadership*, and then how we integrate the universal language of the heart (unconditional love/acceptance) by being present on a path of solidarity with others, inviting engagement and deepening connections.

Especially as we increase competence in mentoring gentleness, we increase our capacity for supporting the social well-being of the community as a whole. We see more opportunities for our engagement, for integrating elements of companionship into conversations and dialogue with others.

In the study of relationship-building dynamics, four approaches to the role of research can be identified. With varying degrees of value given to service-providing goals, each dynamic differs in its relevance to the providing of goods or services. In summary, the four approaches as introduced in Chapter One are: a *client* approach, a *functional* approach, an *ecological* approach, and a social well-being approach. Each approach centers the focus on differing elements and degrees of engagement. The value set for each approach establishes a standard for the delivery of goods or services and is maintained by its respective support system.

Each support system represents a cultural dynamic, a social vision for community formation. Each support system establishes a paradigm, or a model for the expected outcomes of interactions within the community. Each set of values creates a “lens” or perception of how (professional) persons must act/interact with others, as these transactions of dialogue are related to the delivering of goods or providing of services. The outcomes reflect the system’s mission or primary purpose, which may or may not be aligned with a path for growth in social-emotional awareness or of unconditional valuing and meaning for being and becoming human.

In the sharing of worldviews, not only do we “agree” to cultural standards when we work with others, we also bring in the influence of our own ways of perceiving the world.

A social well-being approach is evident in Gentle Teaching, with value increased by a relationship-building framework based on eight quality-of-life domains. Implementing this framework strengthens the dynamics of interactions with a broader social vision, to include what is otherwise often marginalized within the focus for community formation.

Integrating a framework of Gentle Teaching into a practice of interacting with others adds value to the social well-being approach. This practice cultivates gentleness by planting seeds for growth in awareness, and mentoring processes of discovery and learning that invite each of us into being *the hero* of our respective journeys with one another; into *becoming human*, as Jean Vanier speaks of:

“My point is that a human being is more than the power or capacity to think and to perform.” “The heart is the place where we meet others, suffer, and rejoice with them. It is the place where we can identify and be in solidarity with them.” “The heart is the place of our oneness with others. The way of the heart implies a choice.”⁵⁷ -Jean Vanier

In becoming aware of some basic patterns for how people and organizations grow and how communities and cultures are formed, we begin to see how these paths are universal roads for *the processes* of intrinsic learning and growth. It is at the crossroads of community that we can choose the path of the heart that leads to intercultural sensitivity. It is here, in these spaces *between us*, that we choose how to act and can begin to adapt to cultural organization and its community formation.

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Standing in solidarity with another at a cultural crossroads is a critical point of meeting. This mutual support turns interactions toward meaningful dialogue and quality-of-life outcomes. Solidarity paves a “safe and loved” road for processes of full integration to unfold, returning to a space of gentleness in our lives and in our relationships. We hold true to this in our dialogue. This is the promise of Gentle Teaching.

Choosing solidarity is a way of the heart that seeks the far reaches of community formation with collaborative potential and possibility. This is an important stand and step in the direction of Gentle Teaching. It’s a solid building block in the formation of community and establishes a vantage point for viewing the role of leadership.

“The central aspect of giving care revolves around the quality of our relationships with those whom we serve.”⁵⁸

These relationships include every level of interaction, as every person’s part or role serves the whole of an agency, group, or organization providing services.

“Circleship” is a concept and image I refer to in the design and formation of community, for centering and offering the invitation and challenge for each Individual’s meditation and participation. The concept of *circleship* is unifying, as our role and collective purpose can be reimaged for adjusting the lenses that influence our shared social vision for how we view and practice leadership.

Working with the structural concept of “circleship” in the formation of community is based on a psychology of interdependence. The principles of interdependence that are rooted in a practice of Gentle Teaching unify an understanding of our place and solidarity in community (rather than in conflict) with one another. These patterns of relationship-building and community formation more clearly identify

and challenge assumptions and beliefs of bureaucratic structures that create having power *over* rather than *with* others.

Within the circular, spiraling paths of relationship-building in a culture of gentleness, we are forming mentoring communities and creating a culture of hope.

Unconditional acceptance without judgment of others is what cultivates inclusive communities. This is easier said than done. It requires watchfulness in our daily practice and a commitment to the community that is being influenced and formed through our interactions. With every encounter and conversation, a place of gentleness exists for planting seeds of hope and cultivating today's and tomorrow's in which quality-of-life outcomes can be anticipated.

As we return our attention to the foundational structure of how we engage in the social patterns of dialogue (verbal and non-verbal), we position ourselves in leadership roles for community formation. Like dropping pebbles into a pond, today's acts of gentleness create value and meaning for tomorrow's outcomes. The dynamics created in our approach to interactions give direction to the formation of waves for the future.

“The strategy for an alternative future is to focus on ways a shift in conversation can shift the context and thereby create an intentional future.”-Peter Block

In his research and writing on the development of community, author Peter Block emphasizes how shifts in dialogue and structural formation of power are needed in the formation of healthy communities. He writes, “Reconciliation of community, or a future different and not determined by the past, occurs through a shift in language. Operationally, this means engaging in conversations we have not had before.”⁵⁹

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Block makes a clear distinction between conversations that invite connection and dialogue that invites transformation. “Transformation occurs through a different way of convening and holding powerful conversations that are the embodiment of accountability and commitment.”⁶⁰

This is not to suggest that every conversation we have with another needs to reach depths of transformation. It is to bear in mind and know with one’s heart that a broader horizon for collaborative meeting and mutual understanding exists in the space of our interactions; that we, at least, hold this vision in our awareness, knowing it is within our reach and our role of servant leadership; becoming present to this and offering value that deepens what might be meaningful for quality of life.

In a return to gentleness, we go back to the what is most basic for human, social-emotional development: *a sense of belonging*. The recurring themes of the social story that create this sense of belonging were outlined in Chapter One, summarized by Al Condeluci as (1) being acknowledged; (2) being appreciated; (3) being accepted.⁶¹

A sense of belonging can develop over time as an Individual interacts with others, but it can also be experienced in a single moment of human encounter with another.

The dynamic of “servant leadership,” which was developed by Robert Greenleaf,⁶² identifies characteristics of person-centered, community leadership, assuming a commitment to serving others as most essential. Certain values are attributed by Greenleaf to *servant leadership*, and his legacy of research and teachings describe approaches for interactions that impact the strength and formation of community ties. He says, “All that is needed to rebuild community as a viable life form for large numbers of people is for enough servant-leaders to show the way, not by mass movements, but by each servant-leader

demonstrating his or her unlimited liability for a quite specific community-related group.”⁶³

The construction and implementation of dialogue is a critical aspect of building relations and community formations. A servant leader is committed to the growth of human beings, engaging others in dialogue that is relatable to mentoring processes and the formation of community. “Relationality,” as suggested by Martin Buber, is “true interaction [that] emerges in ‘the space between’ where self and other are inseparable.”⁶⁴

Viewing each role within an organizational structure as one of daily striving to understand and demonstrate servant leadership acknowledges each one’s intrinsic value within a community. This valuing promotes shared learning and mentoring. This approach to interacting with others brings levels of communication, tolerance, inclusion, and justice back to the heart of human existence and how we are connected with rather than separated from one another; engaging others in conversation and dialogue that informs with life-giving and life-sustaining value and meaning; collaborating in a shared mission to return to gentleness, to the intrinsic value of being and becoming human.

We discover the gifts, together, along with the vulnerabilities. Raising awareness and adding value with this approach to our interactions invites a broader view of possibilities and creative solutions for *a return to gentleness*. Moving in the direction of Gentle Teaching turns the navigating of interactions toward a broader horizon of community, for growing and for sowing seeds of change and transformation that create a culture of hope.

“Our challenge is to move toward forming a community that gives hope, encourages relationships, responds lovingly to needs, and promotes human interdependence.”⁶⁵

-Dr. John McGee

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The idea of *circleship* can help us picture our role and response-ability that nurtures a return to gentleness. As we are cultivating value and creating meaningful connections within the spiraling, evolving, universal path of social-emotional development, we discover there are progressive stages for this development. Jean Vanier speaks of this lifelong development as “becoming human.”⁶⁶ The process unfolds through awareness and can shift from a place of exclusion or loneliness to a place of inclusion and a sense of belonging, transforming the Individual’s path with a new road to freedom, and then integrating the heart with what he explains as *the power of forgiveness*. He connects the full integration of the self with three *forgiveness* principles: “(1) there can be no forgiveness of ourselves or of others without understanding that we are all in this together, sharing a common humanity; (2) forgiving means believing each one can evolve; (3) to be forgiving means to yearn for unity and peace.”⁶⁷

As discussed in the previous chapter, Joseph Campbell broadened our understanding of social-emotional growth with a portrayal of this developmental path as *the hero’s journey*, with its various steps and stages described in relation to recurring themes that are universally emergent throughout the journey of a human life, and with each one’s “adventure” creating a unique narrative, relative to personal and cultural value and meaning. As a person’s journey enters transformational and collaborative processes, one’s voice and accompanying narrative become coherent and resonant with community formation.

The Dialogue of Unconditional Love (Acceptance Without Judgment)

The processes of dialogue begin with our own awareness and looking at *who we are*, so we can better understand *who the other is*. Beginning with self-reflection and self-assessment is our own invitation to prepare for our role; to become receptive to the journey and to our own development as a servant leader. How ready and willing

are we to identify our role and response-ability in implementing a framework of Gentle Teaching? This practice of self-assessment and point of departure provides insight and a meaningful and practical perception for viewing ourselves and our work with others; a *social vision* that turns possibilities toward relationship-building.

A Personal Teaching Planner is an invaluable, navigational tool for the mentor/caregiver/provider of services, prompting self-reflection and the planning of concrete steps for engaging and guiding the mentoring processes. How will I value? What/how will I teach? How will I protect? How will this person be able to reciprocate the value of what is being taught, discovered, and learned together?

Taking into consideration past and present quality of life conditions and narrative, we can realistically view where we want to go and how we can arrive at destinations for a culture of gentleness.

Planning the mentoring course prepares our interactions. With our focus on value and meaning, a plan is facilitated by the mentor/caregiver for the journey of dialogue. The language for dialogue speaks to the heart of community formation, because it's rooted in a sense of belonging; of being included in processes of social-emotional development that tend to the unconditional acceptance, learning, and growing of human beings.

The language of *table dialogue* cultivates awareness in the direction of Gentle Teaching, toward destinations of safe and loved, loving and engaged. Through reflection and writing, a personal teaching plan connects a servant leader's role and response-ability with the foundation of these Four Pillars, inviting visualization and preparation for mentoring possibilities. Practical steps are logged into the mentoring plan and the course becomes mapped out, allowing the servant leader to envision clear goals for creating dialogue and developing one's narrative script. Working with a Personal Teaching Planner supports

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our role in unlocking value and meaning in relationship-building, opening doors to possibilities that can mutually benefit outcomes of the journey.

Essentially, a mentoring plan extends a personal invitation for the deepening of our own engagement and practice in developing meaningful dialogue and interactions. The building blocks for a framework of Gentle Teaching require transparency and accountability, and this planning tool helps in clearing a path for our view and forming the steps for the direction we will take.

Additionally, a tool for planning keeps track of where we've been, where we are, and where we are going, ensuring relevance and usefulness of the dialogue and narrative being developed. It also serves as a GPS-style indicator for guiding necessary, navigational adjustments to mentoring processes, especially as new ways of being in the environment and forming community are explored.

“In community formation, the guiding rule is unconditional love, and the ongoing task of the care giving community is to promote and deepen it.”⁶⁸ – Dr. John McGee

In mentoring roles of servant leadership, the work cannot be effective without accountability. When we are accountable, we become watchful. In building relationships with a framework of Gentle Teaching, it is this *watchfulness* that alerts us to possibilities for growth and integration of value and meaning into the dialogue and narrative. Working with a Personal Teaching Planner can assist in creating valuable feedback for integrity and empowerment in effectiveness of planned goals and intentions; it inscribes/puts into writing a concrete approach for our interactions, and this supports overall integration of what is being learned. The steps toward integration become critical for transformative growth (self-awareness) and collaborative growth (self-with-other awareness).



With the unfolding development of narrative, one becomes connected with the self. With the forming of community, one becomes connected with others. Together in formation and direction, social fabric is woven from exchanges between the inner and outer journey of being and becoming human. Meaningful dialogue (verbal and non-verbal) laterally shifts the structure of conversations within a community (or within one's personal *hero's* journey). The power is with each one in a transformative and collaborative community formation.

Without the benefit of a mentor or system of support, a caregiver would begin this dialogue on their own. A Personal Teaching Planner serves as an invaluable tool for a caregiver/mentor, especially one in this solo position. But no matter how many or few the numbers are, creating a daily discipline of planning is an important aspect of community formation.

In Chapter Five, we discussed the open, written dialogue that is created with the Individual for the planning of a *community-centered celebration*. Now, with the *formation of community*, this planning

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becomes personal for the caregiver/mentor, reflecting on their roles and how they are seeking to grow as they come to know this other person. They begin to think about the possibilities and planning for how they can begin seeking out other members within the community to grow with and engage with the Individual being served.

Dr. John McGee gave us images of “a kitchen table” and “kitchen table dialogue” to symbolize the forming of these communities. The image gives a clear picture for how the space should be thought of and how it should feel: relaxed and inviting. With conditions created for a learning environment and some knowledge applied to developmental processes, people, like gardens, can grow and flourish. But the processes do take time and patience. In the role of a servant leader, there is commitment, and the effort is given.

We work with the “kitchen table” idea as a structure that holds a “safe and loved” *space* for processes of dialogue to take place. This picture comes to life as we implement a relationship-building framework of Gentle Teaching: how we use our tools, how we value our role of mentoring gentleness, building community, creating community-centered celebrations, developing quality-of-life plans, and developing narrative through dynamics of dialogue. And with a Personal Teaching Planner, we can plan and prepare.

Kitchen table dialogue incorporates the symbolic significance of a kitchen table, an everyday object that often creates a relaxed atmosphere and invites dialogue. With a framework of Gentle Teaching, kitchen table dialogue is how we are using our tools for mentoring processes related to a *sense of belonging*. Kitchen table dialogue speaks to the inherent, human longing to *feel at home*, in the world, in community with others. We create a *kitchen table environment* for dialogue, whether it is a real table that we often do sit at with others, or simply using our tools for establishing this kind of environment as the social-emotional space that we hold for our conversations. It

is the safe and loving space we offer for centering the processes of dialogue.

If we dismiss or overlook a mindful centering of our dialogue with an effective approach to relationship-building, we lend ourselves to the confusion and chaos of *shadows* (compliance, correction, and consequence) that create oppression and obstruction in relationships and, ultimately, within community formation.

A return to gentleness is about cultivating a social vision that is inter-dependently inclusive in its community formation. We use our tools (*hands, eyes, words, presence*) for creating dialogue. When practiced as a philosophy and integrated as a framework, the dialogue of Gentle Teaching is aligned with what is relatable to universal processes of *becoming human*, or with what is relatable to the metaphor of *the hero's journey*, respective to one's place of awareness.

A daily commitment to the practice of Gentle Teaching can strengthen the mentoring presence of non-judgment and inclusion. This presence bears the gifts of servant leadership that is offered in an approach to interactions, for navigating with a social vision that returns gentleness to dialogue and to community formation.

RECIPROCAL VALUE, *a personal essay on processes, patterns, and preparations for mentoring with Gentle Teaching*

Valuing is at the heart of mentoring work that begins with the valuing of ourselves and our own possibilities for learning and growth. Mentoring another or a group of others involves deep listening, setting goals, and creating plans that provide forms and flows of imagination, structure, and expansion. As servant leaders, we can engage as role models by demonstrating, with others, how to create dialogue and interactions that give direction and momentum to community formation. When this mentoring model is reciprocated and replicated with others, collaborative connections grow within the community.

A social well-being approach to relationship-building aligns with a Gentle Teaching framework. I find that the implementation of Gentle Teaching *adds reciprocal value* to this approach. How? With the direction of dialogue and the developing of narrative script, unfolding in real time relationship-building through successive cycles of mentoring. When the voice of one's story develops as their own, applications for authentic integration bring added dimension and meaning to one's life. Whether in the form of meaningful script, the direction of dialogue, or the shape of community-centered celebrations, the transformative and collaborative power of developing narrative seeks

the formation of community, adding reciprocal value to quality of life for its members.

The value and meaning of mentoring moments unfold through (1) dialogue (verbal and non-verbal), (2) the facilitator's personal planning and consideration of social and sensory elements and how these might invite, influence, or impact one's ability to process social-emotional information within a living/learning environment, and most importantly, (3) the learner's awareness and sense of belonging that is rooted in feeling safe and loved. This foundational aspect nurtures one's capability and level of engagement.

The dialogue begins with how we use our tools; how we make ourselves present and how we communicate with our hands, eyes, and words to engage with this person. We can observe patterns of growth throughout the mentoring processes that are cultivating awareness with meaningful connections. One's journey of social-emotional awareness and growth courses through four, successive flows of mentoring activity: awareness, cultivation, transformation, and collaboration. The mentoring/teaching plan for each course provides appropriate levels of (1) imagination and dreaming: forming new ideas and concepts for self-awareness); (2) structure: providing a positive, relationship-building dynamic and any anticipated support(s) for one's ease of engagement within the learning environment; and (3) expansion: stretching the imagination; creating opportunities for cultivating self-determination and intrinsic motivation for personal growth by offering levels of differentiation; authenticating one's voice and expanding one's narrative.

In systems of actual navigation at sea, ocean currents are identifiable and predictable patterns of directed movement, generated by various conditions and forces acting within and upon the water. We can identify a parallel pattern of interconnected motion that is present in processes of social-emotional learning and development in human beings.

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Throughout the mentoring journey, continuing cycles of learning direct the formation, inclination, and outcomes of these processes. Within each cycle are four predictable markers of growth, or, as mentioned above, four successive flows of mentoring activity that are distinguishable as overlapping patterns of intrinsic learning: awareness, cultivation, transformation, and collaboration.

Consider, for a moment, that the subtle, social-emotional “body” is comprised of energetic layers, overlapping to create an interconnected field for processing connections with external environments. Any environment such as a home environment, an emotional atmosphere, natural or constructed surroundings, or social settings where we are interacting with others, produces ‘learning’ on some level, because as one experiences an environment, one is gathering information as sensory impressions (including overload from emotionally charged or adverse environments). Outcomes are influenced by how one is able to view and assimilate received information and by how information becomes interpreted through patterns of perception. Social vision is predicated upon core assumptions and intercultural structures that form a framework for one’s awareness and growth. This framework that forms self-perception and engages one’s social-emotional awareness and presence for relating to their surroundings and interacting with others, is influenced by the heart-brain connection; how certain neurons are trained to fire and travel paths of processing that order the information and create connections (synapses) within the energetic field where one’s sense of self, is mirrored.⁶⁹

A social-emotional framework supports the ‘processing center’ that acquires information and signals its direction. A return to gentleness is a discovery or recovery of the juncture between oneself and one’s interacting with and experiencing of various environments, signaling the direction of Gentle Teaching. I find a practice of Gentle Teaching to be most instrumental and practical for inviting engagement and the gift of reciprocal value, working with each one’s reach for a sense of

belonging, and for learning, together, how to navigate and cultivate one's social-emotional growth. For this journey to be genuine and meaningful, '*we make the road by walking*' a path that develops individuality, self-determination and interdependence.

Feeling safe and loved sets the foundation for awareness and for learning about naming, taming, and befriending emotions. We are teaching one about how to embody the subtle nature of their being and how to regulate the "flow" of emotions within various environments. Modeling the framework and moving in the direction of Gentle Teaching, we learn to navigate, together, processes that serve one's authentic self and autonomous nature.

Through mentoring processes, one is supported for potentially learning how to become present to the value and meaning of their feelings/emotions. Through dialogue (verbal and non-verbal), relationship-building opportunities cultivate unknowable degrees of awareness for one's sense and ability to relate to fine distinctions of their genuine nature, bringing into to light both their gifts and vulnerabilities.

As each marker of social-emotional development becomes evident, we can apply some knowledge and understanding about the main characteristics of these developmental aspects or dominant markers that cycle through learning processes, and also prepare ourselves for engaging in mentoring moments that can avert one's becoming completely engulfed in conflicting or turbulent states of emotion. Ideally, we want to ensure that our presence creates a connection as we implement a way, together, to rebalance the foundation for learning [feeling (safe + loved) = a sense of belonging] and be able to ride out each opportunity that presents itself, each wave we encounter, together, engaging in dialogue and quality-of-life outcomes.

The integration of one's learning has begun when transformative and collaborative cycles of the mentoring processes begin to emerge. With

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a sense of belonging, one can experience being acknowledged. This awareness is the foundation for dialogue that paves the path for the integration of one's story, for one's voice that becomes unified with a sense of community.

Sustainability for one's quality of life depends upon the accessibility, accommodation and integration of their narrative script within their circle of community. Quality of life refers to how one experiences daily life. A "good" quality of life indicates one is engaged in meaningful activities with others and having positive experiences. This has to include social and educational systems. With acts of gentleness, reciprocal value is gained for an Individual's quality of life and returned in the formation of community.

In studying the processes and patterns of social-emotional development, we find four basic learning pillars for human awareness and development: knowing, doing, sharing, being. The Four Pillars of Gentle Teaching relate all of this learning to a sense of belonging that is experienced in proportion to one's learning that they are safe and loved.

A Gentle Teaching framework cultivates these themes by focusing on how we use our tools. Value and meaning unfold through dialogue. These are the threads and patterns we re-frame, adding value for one's quality of life and developing meaningful script for one's narrative. A kitchen table environment is established for dialogue and the developing of narrative. This is a mentoring approach that creates quality-of-life outcomes. This approach supports the basic social conditions needed for awareness and growth and cultivates the foundational emotional environment necessary for developing a sense of belonging.

Interactions with others give form to social space. Where are we in this formation? A Gentle Teaching practice cultivates an environment that holds an interdependent valuing of each person, regardless of human conditions. This is a path of dialogue in the direction of Gentle Teaching.

The dialogue keeps the mentoring environment moving toward destinations that cultivate awareness and growth. We meet others in various aspects and patterns of formation on their own path. In conversation and self-reflection, I strive to cultivate mindfulness about how each one, in their own time, must endure processes of learning and growth for social-emotional development. I feel this outlook supports our journey together and also the journey between us, as one is processing emotions, and looking at opportunities and new concepts, alongside familiar patterns. We can help one feel that ‘all is well’ between us and that we are in this together, and that being present in this moment with you is a gift that matters to me. Together, we expand possibilities for discovering transformative elements that add value and meaning to the equation. This equation sets a foundation of social equality for the unfolding of narrative and is preparation for developing quality-of-life values.

To see ourselves and others through the lens of servant leadership, we find our own invitation for creating a culture of gentleness through dialogue. The “kitchen table” is a space and place for dialogue that invites the mentoring of gentleness with the universal language of the heart. In this formation, we become present on a path of solidarity with others. Dialogue invites engagement in a formation that sets our course in the direction of Gentle Teaching, creating momentum toward quality-of-life outcomes.

A social vision shapes the formation of thought and perspective that influences the direction and dynamics of actions and interactions. The social vision of Gentle Teaching creates a lens through which we can envision a framework that mutually benefits our interactions with others. Mentoring is certainly something we can do “in the moment,” as demonstrated so beautifully, for example, by Mother Teresa, but mentoring, itself, is typically a longer-term commitment. It is a journey we take with a person or group, with themes and purposes of exploration, discovery, learning and growing, developing and integrating an unfolding narrative over an extended period of time while working with specific goals.

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Using a Personal Teaching Planner helps in facilitating “what’s going to happen next” and in creating wave patterns for the future of one’s quality of life. It helps to pave the path for the mentoring journey, based on connections we have made with what has been learned together, through dialogue. Areas of needed support are identified. This is helpful information for planning interactions that teach and invite engagement.

The beginning of this chapter illustrates the mentoring journey as having four primary patterns of growth that move the relationship through the learning cycles. We can identify and mentor from an understanding of how these interconnecting cycles become apparent within one’s inner learning environment, noticing the differing characteristics by one’s placement of focus and energy in the dialogue, and we can prepare for possible storms (dissent). With some insight of how the learning processes unfold, we can begin to see how the storied self can be viewed (as becoming human or as engaged in the *hero’s journey*), and how, as a structure for the development of narrative, mentoring a return to gentleness cultivates coherence.

Awareness, Cultivation, Transformation, and Collaboration are four patterns or dominant markers of learning dynamics that provide “a table” for mapping out our course of dialogue. An understanding of these naturally occurring cycles for intrinsic learning support the mentoring role in expanding a social well-being approach by viewing this structure of interconnecting learning cycles as a platform for developing narrative. The mentoring role supports the cycles of awareness and growth by incorporating imagination, structure, and expansion into the dialogue and discovery processes. These are three concepts that, when applied in mentoring and teaching, create ‘form’ and ‘flow’ and cultivate continuity for one’s journey of growth and awareness. Within each area, we focus on differing dynamics and implement fluctuating levels of “form and flow” factors to support the learner in their present awareness and ability for engagement.



Growing through a Mentoring Journey with the Relationship-Building Framework of Gentle Teaching



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With IMAGINATION, we apply principles of Gentle Teaching, laying the foundation for the mentoring journey. The presence of unconditional love invites trust and shares the social vision that is a return to gentleness. With imagination, we cultivate connections and are planting seeds of hope. What can we see and what can we dream?

With STRUCTURE, we integrate the practice and tools of the Gentle Teaching framework that build on the foundation and cultivate the relationship, establishing the patterns for dialogue and forming the relationship as the “vehicle” for engaging the flow of awareness for the mentoring journey. What can we build and learn? How can we grow?

With EXPANSION, we implement the promise of Gentle Teaching, using the framework of safe, loved, loving, and engaged for expanding the foundation of one’s learning, offering differentiation. How have we grown? What do we know?

(1) Pattern of AWARENESS is about observing, adjusting, and focusing the lens of Gentle Teaching, centering on unconditional LOVE; the mentoring role provides form and flow factors that initiate imagination and accelerate structure, without any focus on expansion. This beginning part of the mentoring cycle is about cultivating one’s capacity for awareness of who they are; of “seeing” themselves as unconditionally accepted and, for us, “finding” ourselves and “the other” within the full circleship of “safe and loved”; it’s about gaining insight into our approach for interacting with others and learning about this learner’s style of communicating and processing; it’s about creating an invitation for companionship and community (learning and growth). We increase flows of imagination and relationship-forming structure to create social-emotional waves for connecting one’s view with what one can envision through dreaming, role-playing, and storytelling (developing narrative through dialogue). Together, we are creating relationship maps that invite new paths and possibilities for one’s awareness to see and to feel unconditional acceptance and

love; for imagining oneself in the relationship-building picture, arriving at quality-of-life destinations. The perspective we gain through awareness of ourselves and our real work with others is focused away from barriers and behaviors that interfere with service or mentoring. Instead, our presence and awareness are guided toward identifying existing value and possibilities for meaningful interaction with the person we are mentoring.

(Awareness) Meaningful mentoring actions for this marker include creating meaning and value with their narrative script, walking with one's imagination and utilizing role-play by modeling attitudes and actions that reflect the 3P's of Gentle Teaching (principle, practice, promise); sharing inspirational stories that illustrate a culture of gentleness and the social vision that cultivates companionship and community.

(Awareness) Themes and Outcomes of this marker: Begin understanding the four developmental cycles of social-emotional learning and begin to recognize the various indicators of growth and development that shift throughout the mentoring processes.

(2) Pattern of CULTIVATION is about listening and learning about the other person, offering differentiation, and cultivating discovery. Here, the mentoring role provides a reduced flow of imagination and formation of structure and increases the flow and form of expansion by incorporating differentiation. The initial part of this mentoring interval is about exploring possibilities; creating some meaningful moments and cultivating a new understanding about relationships and how we can learn from each other. The latter part of what emerges here is about setting goals and implementing mentoring plans with active engagement, acts of gentleness, and social justice. Social justice isn't just about acceptance and inclusion; it's about making adjustments within the developmental framework to integrate what is being learned, cultivating the vision and allowing the journey to begin moving through barriers of denial, through to minimization, the acceptance, the doing, and then,

finally, true integration.⁷⁰ Policies, our words, our community, and the home environment all provide the platform for full integration.

(Cultivation) Meaningful mentoring actions for this marker include encouraging development of strategies (by looking inward and reflecting on what has been useful and what has been useless); gently challenging the learner to move outside of their comfort zone, learning to befriend their emotions; asking them to embrace behaviors (stop, prevent, or change); asking them to consider and reflect upon the possible negative impacts of their own actions. In this step of mentoring, we are identifying the skills one needs (lagging skills) to grow in awareness and become successful.

(Cultivation) Themes and Outcomes of this marker: Become familiar with tools that assist in communicating and navigating through recurring patterns (assessment tools, the Personal Teaching Planner), becoming mindful of valuing and by learning how to offer support, encourage differentiation, and guide the social vision through dialogue and narrative development.

(3) Pattern of TRANSFORMATION is about changing the lens or fundamentally changing our usual way of perceiving or doing something. The mentoring role at this interval provides a moderate flow of imagination, limited structure, and a moderate flow of expansion. Processes of integration are forming as one is sensing or feeling change and the expansion within him/herself with the “new” self or new knowledge that is taking root, emerging with varying degrees of newfound confidence, competence, self-determination. The mentor observes the learning and the transformative steps being taken, offering guidance while gently stepping back.

(Transformation) Meaningful mentoring actions for this marker include balancing your need to help against the learner’s need to act independently; helping them become more aware; identifying the value of the

narrative script; identifying the support needed to help facilitate this journey (not necessarily the mentor having to take the lead, but for the mentor to be able to rely on resources and others within the community for support of the mentoring processes).

(Transformation) Themes and Outcomes of this marker: Develop an understanding of what constitutes and acknowledges value, and of how meaning is created through interactions that influence an Individual's discovery and potential for development.

A sense of loss or anxiety is part of the transformative processes. Being consistent with value (safe and loved) and presence is important, especially as the Individual can be struggling with their own identity. Consistency in dialogue and presence supports capability, possibilities, and vulnerabilities.

Acknowledge their concerns without taking care of them. Have them befriend their concerns as they learn to do with and for others (without you) but remain present within the space of the relationship.

(4) Pattern of COLLABORATION is about transitioning from previous conditions and limitations to integrating the changed dynamics and new developments. In this fourth interval of learning, the mentoring role provides a limited flow of imagination, limited structure, and no effort toward expansion. This learning peak indicates a unity of goals (inclusion and solidarity) and of working together and celebration. Collaboration can be about setting new goals, creating teamwork, closure, or beginning the process again with new opportunities.

(Collaboration) Meaningful mentoring actions for this marker are to deal openly with new terms of the relationship; acknowledge the learner's concerns without giving solutions; serve as a resource for ideas and to identify suggestions.

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(Collaboration) Themes and Outcomes of this marker: to learn how self-reflection and self-assessment can improve visibility of the underlying processes, clarifying direction and focus.

PERSONAL OPPORTUNITIES AND PERSONAL TEACHING PLANNERS

At an operational level, the personal opportunity I've experienced and one that I most often encounter among parents, students, professionals, or with anyone who is mentoring or learning to work in a mentoring role, is in the daily commitment and support for the Individual's personal growth, where the talk must become the walk.

"We make the road by walking."⁷¹

-Paulo Friere

This commitment is about our willingness to be prepared, to understand the narrative value, and then to concretely form (through writing) steps that envision the possibilities for dialogue and map the course for how, in our role of mentoring, we see ourselves valuing, teaching, protecting, and encouraging reciprocation throughout the journey.

Planning supports our steps and focus for teaching, increasing the capacity of our role in effective mentoring and engagement. A mindful presence adds value and meaning to the direction and purpose of mentoring interactions and supports the preservation of personal resolve to mentor a spirit of gentleness. Mentoring with a framework of Gentle Teaching is a conscious commitment to act and interact within a culture of life.

A Personal Teaching Planner is a writing tool for planning the course of dialogue and how we will teach. Also, this tool helps to anchor a mentor or provider's personal resolve to remain present, cultivating meaning and value throughout the different patterns of awareness and growth. Working with a Personal Teaching Planner prepares and provides the

facilitator with insights, knowledge, and navigational markers for meaningful interaction. For the mentoring role, having these things at the forefront of our interactions, cultivates perspicacity for the collaborative journey of gentleness.

A mentoring role requires self-assessing and learning to expand the view of where we are and where we are going with the person(s) being mentored. This leadership and learning become increasingly important as natural growth processes of social-emotional development inevitably dive into aspects of dissent. In moments of mentoring, the possibility of suddenly finding yourself in uncharted waters is something we can prepare ourselves for. These moments can challenge well-intended commitment and resolve to mentor with Gentle Teaching. Having a plan worked out in advance supports navigating through stormy weather.

We don't necessarily expect stormy weather, but we need be prepared for this as well, because it comes with mentoring territory. With transformative and collaborative phases of growth, there is, without exception, a pulling away; an element of resistance as the Individual now integrates the learning more deeply, as growth in self-determination and realization prepares to take ownership and responsibility.

What has become learned is now being put to the test. The pulling away is from the expanded edge of what has become known. It is actually a leap of awareness, test-driving the relationship vehicle on the Individual's own terms, essentially challenging themselves, much like a person learning to swim or a bird learning to fly.

We are arriving at a familiar place. It is "returning home" with new perspective and new moral memory; it is a return to gentleness. Dissent aspects can appear in subtle or strong ways, and a mentor can become aware of risk factors so mentoring processes don't get misguided. In the transformative phase, dissent is indicating that the Individual is ready or

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not to take ownership of his/her narrative, from a place of belonging; finally seeing/sensing themselves as the adventurer in their life-story; as the hero of their own journey.

IN CONCLUSION, A VALUING OF GIFTS

“Our care is based on unconditional love. Our task is to find ways to express human warmth where there is fear, meaninglessness, neglect, abuse, confusion, anger, frustration, and despair. Our only gift is unconditional love.” -Dr. John McGee

In mentoring gentleness, we are engaging in the social well-being of the community as a whole. With the forming of meaningful narrative, we cultivate connections for companionship and for community, creating the invitation for others to feel safe with us, to feel invited to engage with us, to feel unconditionally valued by us, and to feel encouraged to reciprocate unconditional valuing with us.

A culture of hope springs from a *culture of life*. In working toward quality-of-life outcomes, a servant leader is an agent of change. In the words of Dr. John McGee:

“A culture of life is one in which nonviolence is the focus and gentleness is seen as an act of justice. It recognizes that all change is mutual and is a life-project. It sees each caregiver as a servant leader. It looks for change in the smallest of things.”⁷²

Awareness of differences is only the beginning. In a Gentle Teaching environment, intercultural sensitivity plays a big role in developing sustainable, quality-of-life-centered communities. Assessment checklists are available that help in planning how to transition from “props” or practices that tend to form a “secondary” culture. Aware or not, re-examining the social vision that we hold for community formation

gives us a closer look at the power of perception and its connection with how we perceive ourselves, others, and our shared environment; the heart holds the power of choice and self-determination for how we feel we can act and interact. As it's been said in many ways by others before us, we must first dream it, imagine it, see it, and then plan it.

Throughout my many years of private practice, the Individual's ability to function is primarily assessed for purposes of learning how to increase quality of life value. I also look at the gifts and vulnerabilities—what the person brings into their life experience, so I can implement a mentoring plan that invites growth and the capacity to become aware of opportunities.

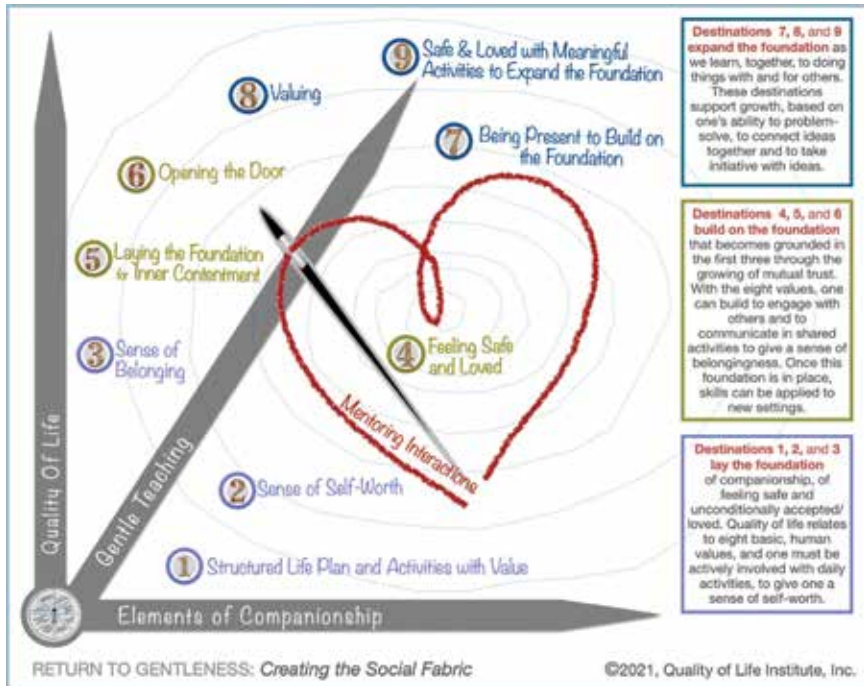
The clinical term for my approach to assessing value is called a *psychosocial model*. With this person-centered approach, the state of physical and mental wellness is viewed in the context of combined influences in an Individual's life that create their living/learning environment. Various dynamics are looked at within the environment, for evaluating the relation of environment with the ability to function. A Gentle Teaching framework helps me to identify needs for accessibility; not just physical needs, but what is needed for social-emotional development.

Research tells us that change requires three things: awareness, the learning of new skills, and being provided with a choice—an opportunity for improved quality of life. In my assessing of an Individual's ability (or lack thereof) to engage, I then look at how social-emotional awareness and learning can be better experienced with support and identify what supports and learning processes can be made accessible.

My prescribed treatment plans are based on the expansion of the eight quality-of-life values and on the elements of companionship within

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a relationship-building framework. This is a framework of Gentle Teaching; the framework I recommend for mentoring gentleness and for creating the relationship-building vessel for navigating nine, quality of life destinations that naturally correlate to social-emotional patterns of learning and growth; *to being and becoming human*.



From my own observations and years of professional experience in working with others, I can say wholeheartedly that *how* the space of our interactions is prepared affects how dialogue can take place. A ***kitchen table*** environment is a perfect concept for this space that we prepare and protect as a place that is *safe and loved*, because it is a vessel for experiences of feeling loved and for trusting the mentoring processes that become accessible through dialogue.

With each pattern of learning and growth, a Gentle Teaching framework invites each person to glimpse a social vision that is inclusive

and relatable to awareness of self (through companionship) and a sense of belonging (community). The Four Pillars of Gentle Teaching support the development and integration of the learning processes with meaningful narrative. Mentoring gentleness cultivates value and meaning for the spaces and places of the inner and outer journey, the Individual journey of “the hero” taking ownership of their life-story and the collective journey of inclusive community formation. Relationship-building with a framework of Gentle Teaching is a return to gentleness, adding reciprocal value to a social well-being approach with a narrative structure for the development of dialogue.

In human development, freedom and the genuine feel of self-determination are only concepts, until they can naturally unfold and become told through an Individual’s narrative story. This is a quality-of-life goal and outcome of Gentle Teaching, produced through relationship-building processes that mentor a return to gentleness.

A culture of gentleness creates an inclusive environment, with respect for intercultural sensitivity. Our commitment to the mentoring processes invites us to be present with unconditional acceptance. In the space of our interactions, *unconditional acceptance* nourishes the roots of social justice. With the unfolding of companionship, the developing narrative holds value and meaning for the Individual’s life. How does the meaningful narrative become useful, *relatable data*? How is the value for quality of life sustained within social structures? The answers weigh in on the scale of social justice, as full integration validates and provides accessibility, through dialogue, for inclusion in community formation.

MENTORING A SPIRIT OF GENTLENESS, *navigating change and developing narrative with the momentum of “safe and loved”; shifting dialogue toward destinations that return one to a culture of gentleness; adding value to a service model with Gentle Teaching*

A framework of Gentle Teaching adds value to a social well-being approach by cultivating dialogue and integrating a narrative structure for quality of life and for creating meaningful information with others in the community. Relationship-building interactions of dialogue relate to principles of inclusion, respect, and social justice. While these ideas may have a place of importance or moral value in systems and services that support social well-being, assumptions, inferences and/or a lack of more practical/meaningful consideration at the level of dialogue and delivery of services can leave unresolved marginalization.

Relationship-building dialogue centers on inclusion and mutual respect. Acts of gentleness address marginalization and its deeper dimensions of social justice that, today, are not without segregation.

Since 1996, I have been serving as executive director of an agency, mentoring staff and training others in a *Quality-of-Life Model of Services*. This model incorporates a Gentle Teaching platform for reconciling these concepts, with definitive measures for community formation, and social change that begins with our role in providing services. Our role extends accountability into the community of support for the Individual and/or to those overseeing the delivery of services, and is conscientious about developing shareable, sustainable narrative. Shareable narrative is meaningful information, with directives for dialogue that can inform others in the community about how to value an Individual's self-determination and best support their quality of life. Having an open-ended structure for life planning, an Individual's narrative can continue to develop as their life continues to unfold.

With a relationship-building vehicle for mentoring, the social vision of Gentle Teaching looks at social formation and its recurring themes⁷³ in relation to each one's intrinsic voice and path of dialogue for social-emotional development.

Cultivating companionship and community with others instills the invitation and nurtures growth for social-emotional awareness. One can feel acknowledged, appreciated, and unconditionally accepted when this social foundation is positively established through relationship-building. Humans are social beings. On the universally recognized path of becoming human, these recurring themes seek the social conditions for one's self-awareness and other-awareness to unfold.

To the unknowable degree that an Individual is able to experience this for him/herself, a framework of Gentle Teaching cultivates dialogue that creates accessibility and invites engagement. As this inter-related field of social factors is explored and becomes known through values of relationship-building, intrinsic learning becomes possible with what most foundationally and essentially benefits the overcoming of social-emotional barriers to self-actualization.

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Intrinsic learning is what Carl Rogers refers to as *true learning* that cultivates human potential.⁷⁴ He associates the term *insatiable curiosity* synonymously with *learning*, theorizing and demonstrating how this core of curiosity shifts attention and receptivity toward integrated learning, because, he claims, curiosity springs from human nature and enables discovery processes to move along unobstructed paths.

“Over the years, the research evidence keeps piling up, and it points strongly to the conclusion that a high degree of empathy in a relationship is possibly the most potent and certainly one of the most potent factors in bringing about change and learning.”⁷⁵ -Carl Rogers

For mentoring processes, enriching a social well-being approach with the social vision of Gentle Teaching cultivates engagement and challenge for social-emotional awareness and growth, with needed imagination, structure, and expansion. The narrative ethic of the framework leads with intrinsic curiosity that becomes discoverable through the relationship-building dialogue. Within the context (meaning and value) of the Four Pillars, the dialogue expands a sense of wonder, deepens experience, and adds value to quality of life as the Individual’s narrative develops through the collaboration of learning and growing together.

As a social vision, Gentle Teaching shifts our professional opportunity toward a broader perception of our role and responsibility in providing services, and also in the mentoring of others who are also providing services.

A mentor is more than a caregiver. A mentor models for and with others, teaching and cultivating companionship and community. Mentoring processes teach caregivers how to mentor a spirit of gentleness with Individuals, and how to pursue non-violence and social justice in their practice as they move in the direction of Gentle

Teaching. This is the value, the gift of Gentle Teaching. This is the direction for all of us, but each of us must walk our own path. This is the journey of gentleness and the road we walk with another, developing, with them, a narrative path of value and meaning, a road that carries their voice into the world.

In mentoring a spirit of gentleness, we learn to listen to the Individual's unique voice (this can be a mode of expression and/or style of communication). Cultivating companionship and community keeps our navigation centered within the framework that is supporting and valuing safe and loving environments as we navigate, together, the destinations. A "safe and loved" environment acknowledges, appreciates, and demonstrates unconditional love and acceptance of the person.

In mentoring a spirit of gentleness, we learn how to navigate destinations for walking through and working through the recurring, universal themes associated with social-emotional learning and growth. We map out our course for developing and writing out a quality-of-life plan, identifying eight basic values or themes for mentoring. Each area of learning, growth, and development is important for the unifying of the whole, i.e., creating coherence for the Individual's story and consistency and value for their quality of life.

When working with an Individual or group of Individuals, a *Personal Teaching Planner* can be used in mapping out our mentoring course and developing the dialogue for navigating the journey. With any of the nine destinations summarized in this chapter, we can, depending on relationship-building conditions, be or navigating the heart. Each destination creates a setting for where we are going on the mentoring journey. We are mindful of how we are using our tools. How we navigate the relationship-building journey, and reach the destinations with an Individual, is through the interaction of dialogue, both verbal and non-verbal.

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A mentor's practice expresses the qualities of servant leadership, and this role, in the words of Dr. John McGee, is *an ever-deepening task*:

"Mentoring is an ever-deepening task that calls for the development of trust among caregivers and the formation of a sense of companionship and community. This trust starts by the mentor entering into the caregiver's space with a deep sense of humility and justice and helping each caregiver feel safe and respected. It is the informal coming together of the mentor and caregiver around the kitchen table and the sharing of the meaning of companionship and community. It is working together and finding ways to teach marginalized people these feelings."⁷⁶

New or broader perspectives can change the meaning or significance of one's narrative, adding dimensions of value and expanding possibilities for quality of life. Dialogue is the foundation for the storied self. Mentoring a spirit of gentleness cultivates a coherent narrative; "becoming human" through the making and mending of social fabric, connecting conversational threads with value and meaning.

With a measuring tool of eight universal values for identifying main areas of social-emotional development, we can identify and view patterns of growth and assess how these inclinations affect an Individual's present quality of life. With this knowledge, we can navigate with the momentum of *safe and loved* that continues to protect and strengthen one's sense of belonging.

When the surface appears turbulent or stormy, we navigate the heart. Now navigation requires a shift; one that is knowledgeable, yet most of all, effective in protecting and nurturing the sense of connection that is experienced through elements of companionship.

A Quality-of-Life Model alternates between two different navigational modes that allow for changing or shifting the focus to stay on the course of safe and loved, depending on whether the need is for teaching or for navigating the heart. Dynamics of awareness and energy continuously move attention, engagement, and experience from one wave to the next. Navigating change is about comprehension strategies for managing how the relationship-building vehicle is moving in the direction of Gentle Teaching, toward destinations of safe and loved, loving and engaged.

Whether we are teaching or navigating the heart during stormy weather, both the narrative ethic (the *how*) and the moral ethic (the *why*) of a Gentle Teaching framework is about *reclaiming the power of the heart* that moves one toward feeling *safe and loved*. Four differing aspects contribute to how one experiences connectedness within the relationship, to how one's social-emotional development processes create the ebb and flow of learning/experiencing "safe and loved" throughout the journey.

With a Quality-of-Life Model, *Navigating the Heart During Stormy Weather*⁷⁷ is the crisis-intervention plan for nurturing and protecting the individual through difficult moments, affected by: (1) the Individual's own intrinsic motivation to feel safe and loved; (2) the Individual's crisis to feel safe and loved; (3) the caregiver's interaction with the Individual to feel safe and loved; and (4) the destination of our teaching to feel safe and loved.

Mentoring is always valuing. **Teaching** is what we do when both the Individual and caregiver are in a state of peace. **Protecting** is what we do during moments of difficulty (*stormy weather*). In moments of difficulty, we protect the Individual who will benefit most with our understanding and companionship. In these moments, the Individual needs a companion. When the moment of difficulty shifts back to a harmonious dynamic, we can reflect together on the moment and talk about what might be learned from the experience.

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When **teaching**, the mentor's role is mainly focused on the course mapped out as their personal teaching plan for reaching destinations that benefit social-emotional experience and growth with this person.

Engaged in the processes that mentor a spirit of gentleness, we are valuing, teaching, protecting, and reciprocating, teaching in moments of peace and protecting in moments of difficulty. When an Individual begins to reciprocate what has been learned, returning the value that has been shared, we come full circle with the teaching.

During a crisis (Navigating the Heart During Stormy Weather), we are not focused on the teaching aspects at all, only mentoring. Our primary role here is to re-center the Individual's connection with us as their caregiver. It begins with understanding what a life of structure means for the Individual. It means security and safety, and this can be re-established by letting the person know that they are valued by you; it is helpful to mirror back to them that their experience matters, i.e., acknowledging that you see they are frustrated or upset. Use your tools to communicate companionship and express valuing that supports self-worth and their sense of belonging. Once their connection returns as a feeling of being safe, we can build on this awareness and continue moving through the storm in the direction of Gentle Teaching.

This is important feedback for the mentoring staff, because all of our commitment, intentions, and interactions are based on creating and adding value and meaning to one's quality of life. This feedback provides staff with the opportunity to review and make adjustments, as needed, for maintaining the delivery standards for a Quality-of-Life Model of service. The assessment also provides clear indicators for navigating the most practical, meaningful destinations with this person. The quality of assurance process keeps us charting the course together, benefitting the individual with services that add value and meaning to their life, and benefitting the mentor in their practical

and concrete planning for teaching and reaching mentoring goals with this person.

We create a non-violent intervention during a crisis by integrating the use of our tools (hands, eyes, words, presence) with the skills of navigating the heart. This intervention engages the mentor in cultivating a harmonious connection with the person in crisis, a therapeutic response described as attunement, 'a kinesthetic and emotional sensing of others.'⁷⁸

Again, *Navigating the Heart During Stormy Weather* is used for crisis intervention in situations of distress or unrest. It is a time to protect and befriend one's moment of difficulty. Conveying and recreating an Individual's unbroken connection with you, their caregiver, is what we focus on to acknowledge, with the person, that they are and can feel protected; safe and loved. We do this with elements of companionship and using our hands, eyes, words, and presence to communicate unconditional love, the value and meaning of our companionship with them.

Navigational skills can improve with an understanding of the root causes of turbulence that can bring on stormy weather. It helps to be attentive to elements of companionship and watchful of conditions that might be affecting or interfering with an Individual's sense of peace or their ability to feel safe and loved.

Reclaiming the Power of the Heart is a process for quality assurance for this service model. Periodically, an assessment is done to identify where an Individual is in terms of their self-perception and how this is connecting with their sense of belonging (feeling safe and loved). This tool constructs an insightful evaluation of the effectiveness of our teaching, and how an Individual is able to perceive what is being taught and how they are experiencing the services being received.

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The four areas we look at for *Navigating the Heart*, as mentioned above (intrinsic motivation, crisis, interactions, destinations) represent the innermost, interrelated chambers of the inner journey, unifying social-emotional awareness with a meaningful, “safe and loved” sense of self.

These are four areas, respectively different but interrelated, that work together as a “processing center” for social-emotional learning and development. How an Individual is experiencing the sum of these and able to make sense of teaching and learning to feel safe and loved stems from a balancing of these four areas. In navigating teaching and in navigating the heart through stormy weather, learning how to assess and navigate through the synergistic elements and workings of this inner, shifting landscape, reclaims the power of the heart.

(1) *Intrinsic Motivation to Feel Safe and Loved.* An Individual may have many reasons for needing to feel safe and loved, and these may appear in some form with their actions. These can include but are not limited to craving attention, escaping the current situation, searching for specific sensory inputs, or even looking for a specific, tangible outcome. While we might be quick to conclude that an Individual is not controlling or regulating his/her actions or behavior according to set expectations, and react or respond from this viewpoint, this approach proves to be counterproductive and ineffective. We can work through these moments more easily when we can identify the motivating factor as it is relating to the root areas for social-emotional development, where an Individual is making connections for how to trust, how to act, how to feel, how to communicate, how the person can learn and how they can reciprocate what is being learned.

With current research that is focused on nervous system structures and functioning and several other aspects of neuroscience, we know that there’s more to understanding how intrinsic motivation becomes developed in human beings.

Intrinsic motivation develops differently with each person. In teaching and navigating the heart, a clear lens of non-judgment is critical in our viewing of this, as we must look closely at our own expectations, assumptions, and cultural beliefs about *challenging behavior*, so we can work more clearly with the structural roots that develop an Individual's foundational learning and motivational responses. Beliefs can be valid, but they are not always relevant in the moment with a person. *Curiosity* and *challenge* play important roles in working with this development. There is no “one size fits all” approach.

When a person is frustrated, we try to identify how (s)he is experiencing feelings in relation to the eight quality-of-life values. What is most important in these moments is not pulling away or reacting in a way that “uproots” where they are, but to begin from where they are planted in this moment and support the foundation of *who* they are in a culture of gentleness, unconditionally loved.

Until a person is able to recognize other possibilities (from our teaching and modeling) and make a connection, a shift can't be made. One isn't able to grow from any other place except from right where they are planted, and this includes how they are feeling connected within their surroundings. The external environment is an integral part of how an Individual experiences “I exist” and where they are, as well as their internal, social-emotional environment. If a person at least feels safe, they might respond with intrinsic curiosity. If they feel at all threatened, attempts to teach will most likely be rejected.

Teaching is effective for social-emotional growth when it is done in moments of peace—that is, when the person feels safe and loved. This invites intrinsic curiosity to wander into the space of relationship-building, but so, too, the social-emotional self can ease into a new awareness and the unfolding discovery of the self in companionship and community with others.

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The way human beings are wired for social-emotional learning shuts down when distress or turbulence is being experienced. An Individual cannot engage in learning processes when experiencing strong feelings of frustration. If a shift is demanded during this time, this is not *learning*, and obstructs and delays the natural processes for unfolding and development. Identifying and working with lagging skills, which we learn about by working with the quality-of-life values, puts us on a path of understanding and being able to create the teachable moments that will help the Individual learn how they can choose differently and successfully engage in challenging moments.

As caregivers, we try to avoid frustrating moments, but in these moments is not a time for teaching, but for cultivating hope and unconditional love. It is a time for reconnecting (returning to gentleness) with the Individual's inherent longing and ability to feel safe and loved. Our role in this moment is to cultivate a connection with this person that can begin to lessen their fears and frustrations, allowing them space, not for learning, but for *experiencing* feeling safe and loved in your presence. It is their experience in this moment that we build upon at a later time when we are teaching; when there is this possibility now created for them to learn from their experience. This is about creating new moral memory with this person.

If you can picture the pivoting movements of a rudder that steers a ship, this illustrates the flexibility we can learn in mentoring a spirit of gentleness. In *navigating the heart*, especially, we find ourselves having to shift from a teaching/mentoring role to one of creating connections and mending, as tears in the social fabric need to be mended. Unconditional love is guiding the navigation.

“If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other.”

-Mother Teresa

It's important to understand that social-emotional learning is a complex process of growing. The pace and innermost path for how this process unfolds for each person, however, is what we can support and learn more about. When someone is frustrated, how are they able to communicate their needs and wants? What are their lagging skills, and how might these be affecting their ability to self-regulate and identify feelings? How can they communicate? "Choice" implies possibilities that the Individual is aware of and can relate to. We want to help the person in making these connections.

On the surface, outward manifestations most often present themselves because of unresolved, social-emotional challenges, indicating that a skill needs to be learned. The person is never "the problem" to fix. Rather, we look at "the process" of how the Individual has internalized or learned his/her path for connecting with others and with the environment. A Quality-of-life Model does an assessment of *lagging skills*.⁷⁹ This lets us look at "the processing" of demands within the environment, so a solution can be determined that doesn't compromise navigating to destinations of safe and loved.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Carl Rogers spoke about intrinsic motivation being a core condition for meaningful learning. Rogers claimed that "attitudinal qualities" (congruence, unconditional acceptance, empathy) are necessary for an effective learning environment. He emphasized the critical importance of cultivating natural curiosity, creating the phrase: "insatiable curiosity," which he used synonymously, with *learning*.⁸⁰

Rogers' experiential work demonstrated how it is the very core of curiosity that drives a person to learn. With a Gentle Teaching framework, cultivating inherent curiosity is at work through the development of our dialogue. This support of social-emotional awareness, engagement, and growth cultivates lifelong learning.

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In the fabric of one's life, lagging skills are (a) loose threads that can be skillfully rewoven and redirected, or (b) tears in the social fabric that need to be mended. The entirety of an Individual's narrative portrays a series of connected, interwoven stories. Through relationship-building, the weaving and reworking of the social-emotional threads is achieved with dialogue, weaving each part of one's story into a unified, cohesive narrative.

Each destination is of no lesser or greater importance. Each supports awareness and growth with a "setting" for dialogue and for mapping out the steps of our navigational course. All destinations benefit the journey of relationship-building, some more than others as specific challenges or possibilities for growth and learning arise, providing the focus for our navigation. Like the spokes of a wheel, each destination connects with one's potential for discovery, an intrinsic hub of curiosity seeking awareness through interaction, participation and engagement.

With insight into how an Individual experiences critical dynamics or environmental factors, we can better understand what holds value for them and how they experience meaning in their life. Together, we can learn from this window of understanding and opportunity. Incorporating *lagging skills* into the picture is a critical piece of the puzzle, allowing us to shift our view and look at adverse situations through the wider scope of navigating change.

- (2) *Crisis*. A crisis can take different forms and is not necessarily dramatic. It can be hidden from the surface and can be something that dialogue with this person reveals to us. A crisis can be developmental, situational, existential, or even environmental for a person who has experienced loss from a natural disaster. We address each crisis differently, but regardless of the crisis, we always can do our best in making the Individual feel safe and loved while we are together. Even through difficulties, we can be aware of the

direction we want to take and do all we can to facilitate and communicate this with the person.

- (3) *Interactions.* The spoken and unspoken dialogue of our interactions is most important for building trust with an Individual. We show more about our love and trust that we share through our actions than we ever would be able to with words alone. Because of this, we must focus much of our attention on the way we speak, play, talk, and experience things with the Individuals we care so much about. Elements of companionship find expression through unconditional love. These elements of relationship-building center our journey upon the current of unconditional love that connects experiential learning with all the destinations.
- (4) *Destinations.* Showing the Individual what it is *to be* and *to feel* safe and loved is the direction and destination of Gentle Teaching. As trust develops the foundation for the framework, we will be able to return to navigating teaching.

A return to gentleness begins with acknowledging our own responsibility for social justice and seeing ourselves in a role of servant leadership with this person. Our ability to act is initiated by our capacity to be unconditionally accepting and present with this person, engaging in dialogue that shifts an Individual's place of experience throughout moments of the journey, toward destinations of *safe and loved*.

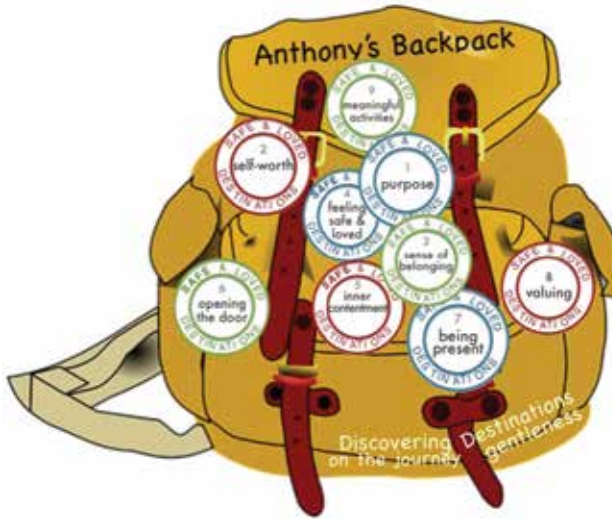
How does relationship-building look when turbulence arises? Where can we go and how do we get there? In these moments, our mentoring goal is not to teach, but to protect. We can teach when the Individual is receptive to learning—which, as has been emphasized in previous chapters, is a process that can occur only when one feels connected, when there a sense of belonging. Otherwise, what becomes learned is fear-based and traumatizing.

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We mentor with acts of gentleness. Gentle Teaching is about our way of seeing and our way of thinking; it is about a way of being with others without any degree of violence in language or actions.

DESTINATIONS

The destination for our journey is teaching others to feel safe and loved; to feel “at home” in the world with companionship and a sense of community. In the direction of Gentle Teaching, we take the roads that lead one home. Nine destinations support this collaborative journey.



Conceptually, each destination is a place or environment for mentoring a spirit of gentleness, with goals that relate more to specific and/or assessed areas of need for valuing, teaching, protecting, reciprocating. Through dialogue, we move toward destinations in the direction of Gentle Teaching.

Once we assess *where we are* with this person and identify the area of human valuing that needs to feel safe and loved, or that can work

with and grow from this foundation, we can discern where we need to be with this person and focus on navigating.

Walking together and working through an Individual's journey with an understanding of these nine destinations, protects the person's vulnerabilities while strengthening the foundation for their learning and growth in social-emotional awareness and engagement. Recurring quality-of-life values are associated with each destination. Each destination "sets the stage" with various checkpoints for teaching and for navigating the heart.

The value and meaning derived from each destination connect with the inner landscape each must travel for "becoming human" or becoming "the hero" of his/her own life. The roads that typically lead the Individual to this inner landscape are discovered through social factors that largely remain inaccessible without the positive experiences of human connection for cultivating companionship and a sense of community. Again, the relationship factor is key for this accessibility.

With the relationship vehicle and value of companionship, these nine destinations expand the potentials and possibilities for growth, weaving and mending social fabric, through dialogue, interrelating the social-emotional ability of human beings with quality-of-life outcomes.

When available, an Individual's Quality-of-Life plan is used in conjunction with a *Personal Teaching Planner*, by the mentor, to identify one's current goals and meaningful narrative. This focus supports the mentor in developing dialogue and relationship-building interactions that move the journey forward.

The first three destinations are laying the foundation of companionship, feeling safe and unconditionally accepted/loved; one can learn to feel *safe and loved*, to understand that *feeling safe* means more than just *being safe*.

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Destinations four, five, and six are building on the foundation, now grounded by the planting and growing of mutual trust in the first three destinations; one can learn to feel *loving*. Relating back to Gentle Teaching's roots in a psychology of interdependence, we are aware of dependency in the journey of the first three destinations and are cultivating the invitation toward independence. Destinations four, five, and six focus on supporting independence and prepare a path of dialogue for one's awareness and receptivity for experiencing interdependence. This invitation toward interdependence is on the horizon while navigating these destinations, bringing the social vision into view -- the unwavering principle and design of our humanity.

Destinations seven, eight, and nine are expanding the foundation as we learn, together, how to do things together, with and for others; *engaging* with others and *reciprocating* what has been learned.

Laying the foundation of companionship

Destination 1_Structured Life Plan and Activities with Value: Our focus is to create companionship. Through this journey, we help to identify that the Individual has a purpose through meaningful activities and a life of structure. Understanding a life plan is an important part of the journey, as is each moment that we are with the Individual. To be truly engaged with the Individual, we must value what they value. Providing structure gives meaning to daily activities and lays the foundation of companionship and community.

To begin, we put ourselves in the moment with the Individual to begin the journey of learning and growing. On the other hand, giving structure through compliance or doing things to pass the time, does not lay this foundation of valuing. It only identifies that we are in control or that the activity

becomes contingent for preferred activities. Creating this type of learning environment devalues the intrinsic motivators of the Individual and tears away at the foundation of building a relationship with the Individual.

We become a part of the Individual's life through *dialogue* (verbal and non-verbal), using *our tools* (hands, eyes, words, presence). As we examine the use of our tools, we reflect on our interactions and how the Individual is reciprocating his understanding. Especially during times of difficulty, we need to look at the person's learning style and the materials that we are using to teach. If we create an environment in which the Individual fears it will cost him/her something if (s)he tries and fails, he will never learn from us.

Destination 2_Sense of Self-Worth: As we support the Individual engagement in meaningful activities while maintaining a foundation of valuing, the person begins to feel self-worth. As we become a part of the Individual's daily life, we must understand how the way we use our tools impacts the Individual. Using daily activities that normally might seem robotic and lacking in meaning, we begin to value and cultivate a sense of self-worth with the Individual. While the importance of the activity won't always be understood, the critical thing is for us to place value on them as we do things together. It is through this engagement that the Individual learns to reciprocate our teaching. It isn't just repeating the task, but the building of companionship and community that is important. Through this process, we lay the foundation to build and expand an Individual's quality of life. Without this foundation, an Individual might do the task but will learn to seek other activities that have no real value or purpose for quality of life.

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Destination 3_Sense of Belongingness: Here, the focus for mentoring is to develop presence and establish trust. As we continue to engage or focus on building the relationship with an authentic sense of companionship, the person begins to see and to feel that they are connected. As we continue the journey with the Individual, we begin to understand that our presence creates a sense of belongingness. It is through this process that the Individual begins to see “I am, because you exist.” It’s as if you bring me into our world because I have value and purpose.

We are teaching the importance of doing things together and for others. Teaching the Individual to be independent is important, but we miss the true purpose if we are only focused on the skill. Learning the skill only creates a sense of self without any sense of doing things with others. Remember that if the Individual learns the skill but is unable to communicate or lacks the social skills, the skill has no meaning, which, in turn creates no sense of belonging.

Building on the foundation

Destination 4_Feeling Safe and Loved: At this destination, meaningful rituals have established the foundation of unconditional love, and the Individual feels safe and loved. With an absence of this feeling, one is very vulnerable to a sense of disconnection. We can nurture this feeling with warm interactions and participation in meaningful rituals. At this destination, the Individual recognizes they are safe with the caregiver and unconditionally loved by the caregiver. From this recognition, the Individual feels a deeper sense of connectedness with the caregiver, and it is the caregiver’s role to be present and non-judgmental, allowing the Individual to explore their feelings.

Destination 5_Laying the Foundation for Inner Contentment: The focus for this destination is to cultivate new moral memory. Many interactions with meaningful rituals that focus on building the relationship, as opposed to compliance or simply accomplishing the task, create the moral memory that is needed for the Individual to feel free of traumatic stress. At this destination, what the Individual desires most is inner contentment. When coming from a state of disconnect and frustration, the Individual seeks inner contentment as a resolution. When growing in the feeling of being safe and loved, the Individual seeks inner contentment as the step of internalizing this feeling. Once the Individual recognizes that he/she is safe with the caregiver, he/she longs for inner harmony and freedom from traumatic stress.

Destination 6_Opening the Door: This is a turning point as one is now taking on new moral memory and adjusting to new ways of being in a culture of gentleness. As an Individual begins looking for their harbor, we must open it with love and with our presence. This destination is the turning point toward peace and resolution. As the Individual seeks companionship, it is the caregiver's job to be receptive to this developing stage and try to connect with the Individual. This moment of change is the beginning of a new moral memory, reflecting inner harmony and acceptance of each other.

Expanding the foundation

Destination 7_Being Present to Build on the Foundation: At this destination we are creating teachable moments and creating, together, new moral memory. As the Individual spends time with us, (s)he begins to understand that *I am because you exist*. The caregiver and Individual are now present together to build collaboratively on the foundation of inner contentment, and to create a genuine companionship. The relationship

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reflects a dynamic of interdependence, where both parties recognize that “I am because you exist.” This reflection of oneself in the other forms a deeper understanding between the caregiver and the Individual.

The caregiver’s role is to be present with the Individual and to create teachable moments that support the Individual’s growth and development. This engagement lays the foundation for mutual valuing.

Destination 8_Valuing: This is a primary goal of our relationship, valuing each other as we teach each other that it is good *to be* together and it is good *to do* things together. This destination is about mutual respect and nurturing the relationship as a foundation for learning. As a caregiver, we re-examine how we are using our tools. Mutual valuing is a culture of respect, with the recognition and acknowledgment of unconditional acceptance between the caregiver and the Individual.

As caregivers, we are committed to the mentoring processes, self-reflecting how we are using our tools to convey valuing with warmth and flexibility. Valuing does not mean that we focus on changing the Individual’s behavior, but rather that we nurture the relationship as a foundation for learning.

Destination 9_Safe and Loved with Meaningful Activities to Expand the Foundation: This is what we strive for in our relationship, creating companionship and a sense of community that deepens through meaningful rituals. Here we can expand into new and different areas of doing things together. This final destination is the goal of our collaborative relationship, creating companionship through meaningful rituals. From the relationship that has been built, we can now expand into new and different areas of doing things together. We draw others in

to expand the Individual's community; we continue to nurture the Individual's possibilities and vulnerabilities as we work toward quality of life, and we continue on the journey toward unconditional love.

Developing dialogue and the writing of the Individual's narrative as it unfolds through these destinations, creates a true and broad context for one's story and quality of life. A deeper dimension and broader context of value and meaning is added to a social well-being approach.

This is the outcome of Gentle Teaching and the return to gentleness. It is giving opportunity and creating accessibility for the Individual to discover their own capacity for social-emotional awareness and growth in experience, and to become acknowledged, appreciated, and accepted.

In shared social space, whether it be a home space, workspace, a school or other place, *inclusion* is not about simply having Individuals among us. Until one is able to intrinsically experience a true sense of *self* and develop a sense of belonging, human beings are unable to learn about the value and meaning of their lives.

It is a *sense of belonging* that makes this connection. This is the root of interdependency that shifts self-perception, from isolation to inclusion. A framework of Gentle Teaching develops this dimension of social justice and provides this accessibility by cultivating companionship and community. *Companionship and community* are outcomes of mentoring. They are permanent destinations for the Four Pillars of Gentle Teaching. This is where we continue to arrive—at a place of companionship and community—through the mentoring work of the nine destinations that add dimensional and qualitative value for one's growth and experience, laying, building, and expanding from the foundation of companionship.

More on navigating change with a Quality-of-Life Model™ of services

The role of mentoring has the responsibility of navigating change. This means knowing where the collaborative journey is heading (destination), but more importantly, understanding how, in real time, the journey is connecting with this person and how the relationship is moving on its course of mentoring (navigation). A Personal Teaching Planner uses a framework of Gentle Teaching for mapping out the navigation, developing the direction of dialogue for creating meaningful moments, and moving toward destinations of safe and loved.

Navigating involves the planning and following of different courses for creating and reaching the destinations for mentoring, but it is also making sure, all along the way, that all are on board. This also means being watchful of the “undercurrents” that can create obstacles. These undercurrents are vulnerabilities that don’t necessarily originate with the Individual but can interfere in their experience due to what exists for this person within the environment and social systems. It might be, for example, their feeling of society’s disapproval of them and feeling accepted, in general, especially as they become integrated within the community. This is about the relationship and the Individual’s connection with you. If this connection is lost, the relationship dynamic will be out of balance and unable to function as a vehicle for teaching.

During moments when the connection is lost, the destination does not matter. Instead, it’s now critical for the companion/mentor to focus entirely on rebuilding the connection. This is a time to adjust the sails for the “stormy weather” and reach a harbor of “safe and loved.”

Stormy weather occurs when a person is drifting away from feeling connected (safe and loved), and it can become severe if the connection is completely lost. Feeling safe and loved will lead one “home,”

to inner contentment and a sense of belonging. These times call on our patience, but most of all, our commitment; to not give up or let go, but to *lift* the cup, as Henri Nouwen says of these moments; to become willing 'to fully drink the cup that has been given to us in the conviction that [this] will lead us to true fulfillment.'⁸¹ This is our invitation for engagement and growth as we find our place of solidarity in the formation of community.

Feeling safe and loved has reciprocal value and goes both ways, for it is in giving that we receive. When you show an Individual that you care about them and want to protect them, they can respond in a similar way and reciprocate that back to you.

Essential Narrative

Relationship-building creates relatability by connecting meaning and value with engagement, whether the focus of engagement is relative to an Individual's parenting or professional role, or with their social well-being for quality of life.

Developing narrative with this person is advocating with them, cultivating their unique voice and expression of self-determination. A *relatable* narrative defines a sense of place in the world, expanding the Individual's sense of being here and belonging with others.

It implies a unique significance and social inclusion when an Individual's narrative script is held together within the social fabric of systems; systems within one's community that bring about discussions or dialogue on behalf of this person. With the implementing of relatable and open-ended narrative, an Individual's self-determination can be protected. When an Individual has access to this recognition and community engagement, they can continue to feel valued and engage in meaningful dialogue that says, to them, *I am here. I am this person. I am significant. I can make choices. I am a member of the community. I am not alone.*

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A Personal Teaching Planner is a working document for charting and navigating the collaborative journey of gentleness and for developing the narrative script. A structural element of narrative development is its invitation to others for imagination and social vision, for working collaboratively to create and navigate paths toward shared destinations.

A quality-of-life plan is a “living” support and navigational path that gives one greater accessibility to what is important and meaningful for their daily life.

What has been learned, together, through collaborative dialogue that one experiences with companionship and a sense of community, is essential narrative that shares the Individual’s preferences and perspectives. One’s voice is included when one’s voice can be heard. This is accomplished when our social vision un-sees separation and segregation and includes narrative communication and competence.

As each Individual engages in the journey with others and within the formation of community, the lens of servant leadership recognizes the value of each one’s presence and gift within the community.

Today’s acts of gentleness mentor meaningful moments that expand in the direction of Gentle Teaching. Not only are we shifting our own lens as we create a culture of gentleness; we also invite others to share in a social vision that sees the need for justice-making and offers a collaborative path for navigating change, with the building of relationships that mutually strengthen quality of life for communities.

These interactions influence tomorrow’s possibilities and outcomes. Acts of gentleness create waves for the future of how life can be lived and how life can be shared, for each of us and all of us.

A philosophy of Gentle Teaching is the foundation for a Quality-of-Life Model of services. This model supports agencies and other

organizations in the delivery of person-centered services that develop the narrative value of one's voice and self-determination. Authentic and meaningful narrative reflects an inclusive social vision. Additionally, it summarizes the needed supports for creating accessibility and continuity throughout one's life, identifying what has been learned about who this person is, and about what is needed and beneficial for their specific social-emotional integration and processing. Narrative development offers written material for cultivating social justice in the writing of quality-of-life plans. The model shifts our focus with the Individual for the long term, creating sustainability for their quality of life, with open-ended narrative that can grow with them as their journey continues to unfold. Not only does this "gift" of narrative enrich one's life and community; it is also a resource for professionals and one's circle of support, providing constructive content for meaningful conversation and dialogue development, and the writing of script for numerous applications for quality of life.

A return to gentleness makes room for one's unique voice, for narrative to develop through the dialogue and shared interactions between the Individual, the caregiver, and with those who participate in the community-centered celebrations. Community-centered celebrations create a broader perspective of value and meaning that is collectively acknowledged, shared, celebrated, and integrated for one's life, with a correlative narrative script.

Community-centered celebrations add a vital dimension of depth to the meaning and value of relationships within the community. This is especially effective as these celebrations revolve around dialogue, with planning that identifies how each of us will be involved in supporting an Individual's possibilities and vulnerabilities, creating a path of continuity for a culture of gentleness.

Quality-of-life outcomes and transformational change are supported by the articulated unfolding and capturing of narrative. The tool

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of dialogue that is implemented for relationship-building with a framework of Gentle Teaching, creates a bridge, an accessible path of nurturing and growth for self-determination. Mentoring a spirit of gentleness implements learning processes that engage exploration, discovery, and the emergence of one's unique voice and narrative.

When this is recognized and integrated into a daily life plan, the Individual is given responsibility for their own life, with the invitation to grow and move beyond limitations.

The principles, practice, and promise of Gentle Teaching add sustainable value to the narrative script with a Quality-of-Life Model of services. This model incorporates a framework of Gentle Teaching for mentoring gentleness, for inviting engagement by supporting intrinsic motivation and ability, and for developing accessibility and opportunity for awareness and learning processes to unfold.

Mentoring a spirit of gentleness is the heart of our work, reflecting "3 P's" of Gentle Teaching:

(1) A clear sense of the **principles** for mentoring a spirit of gentleness: interdependence, unconditional love/acceptance, and mutual respect that are foundational in mentoring a spirit of gentleness. This guides our understanding of what we are looking at and being able to identify what we are seeing. Do we see someone feeling safe? Feeling loved? Do we understand the person's quality of life narrative and their moral memories of the past so that we can work together, with them, in building the bridges that bring them to understand feeling safe and loved?

(2) A **practice** of mentoring a spirit of gentleness with an understanding of what builds companionship and community (elements and values); our ongoing learning of knowledge gained through self-assessment so questions can be formulated that guide our navigation of the journey;

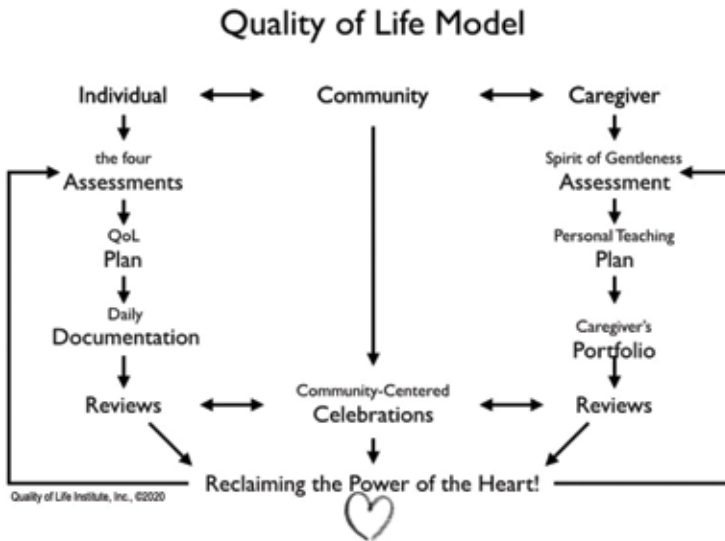
not only must we be able to identify what we are seeing (knowledge), but we also, in our practice, need to be able to identify what we are doing in our movements and interactions, relative to the framework (navigating), and then also be able to understand where we are going (Personal Teaching Planner, mentoring plan, writing goals).

(3) The **promise** of mentoring a spirit of gentleness is planting the seed of hope. As an Individual learns companionship and a sense of community, they learn it is “safe” to anticipate goodness and kindness. When a person feels loved unconditionally and experiences a sense of belonging, there is trust, creative joy and curiosity for learning, and room for growing and expanding possibilities. As with any journey, a mentoring journey can have its setbacks. That is to be expected. Hopefully, in these moments, we can strive to keep a perspective without judging a whole journey by a single moment or unplanned event. Know your resources and community of mentoring support. Stay committed to the processes of learning and growth that are serving others, sharing with others, and simply celebrating one another in being and becoming human.

“Hope is a crucial antidote to fear.”⁸²

MENDING THE SOCIAL FABRIC, *mending the heart with a return to gentleness*

“Our task is to mend hearts that are broken by confusion, despair, poverty, neglect, abuse, racism, segregation, old age, chronic illness, mental illness, and developmental disabilities. There is no single answer, only a direction we need to take. Helping others means that we have to know who we are and who the other is.” -Dr. John McGee⁸³



With humility, we enter the space between us. We relate to the value and meaning of being and becoming human, honoring the path an Individual has taken that now crosses our own. *Who am I and who is the other?* We stand on common ground, uncommonly connected. Do we find ourselves present? Can we recognize the presence of unconditional love that lights this path we are crossing? What might we be communicating with our hands, eyes, and words? Can we initiate building a bridge of dialogue (verbal or non-verbal) between ourselves and another that might make a connection between awareness and the heart? Do we have this connection within ourselves? Here, at the crossing of two paths, “the heart is as a swinging door.”⁸⁴ Can it be opened, or will it be closed off from itself? In this moment, we choose the direction for our interaction. *There is only a direction we need to take.*

“To love is to make of one’s heart a swinging door.”

- Howard Thurman

A framework of Gentle Teaching is a framework for social justice as we regard our own place in the formation of community and begin to experience the privilege of engaging with others in moments and processes of social change, understanding that each person’s sense of existence — the gift of being and becoming human — begins with feeling safe and loved.

Sustaining a culture of gentleness in the midst of brokenness is a path of the heart. Our gift is very much about each Individual’s presence mirroring unconditional love, and each Individual’s willingness to accept the invitation to “lift the cup,”⁸⁵ as Henri Nouwen discusses, using the metaphor of “the cup” that represents one’s life and all that it contains; not only joy, but the whole of our human experience, which includes pain and suffering that can break us apart as Individuals and as a community.

“Drinking the cup of life is fully appropriating and internalizing our own unique existence, with all its sorrows and joys.”⁸⁶ Mentoring

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with a relationship-building framework moves us with acts of gentleness that uplift human experience, deepening value and meaning for the shared moments and for each person's life.

The social vision of Gentle Teaching is a compassionate path of relationship-building. For the marginalized and oppressed, mending the social fabric means reconciling fear with unconditional human valuing that responds to the inherent, human longing to feel safe and to feel loved.

The nature of discord that dwells in adverse conditions is inclined to bend and even twist the mind/body/spirit as it intrinsically reaches toward processes of becoming human, becoming whole.

Renowned German-American scholar, Wolf Wolfensberger (1934-2011), who influenced disability policy and the reform of human services through his development of *Social Role Valorization*, paid particular attention to this deficiency that occurs in social-emotional development. He observed the detrimental effects of this imbalance in marginalized persons in particular, when the internal displacement of mind/body/spirit rhythms become dissipated or lost. His studies clarify three critical messages that must be learned for balancing the innermost core of what constitutes being human (or three recommendations that can be applied in counter-balancing this deficit).

Three messages are given that directly affect the most critical factors of social-emotional development and the balancing of mind/body/spirit. Three responses that are absorbed as generic facts from one's external world that shape the individual and emancipated sense of the Individual's self as distinct from the collective, *social* self, making or breaking the social-emotional patterns that develop a person's intrinsic nature.

Three messages, and they all point to feeling valued, feeling safe, and feeling loved:

“People who have been deeply wounded often function as wounded persons for the rest of their lives, even if they manage to escape from the service system. Very few things seem to have a chance of bringing a measure of inner healing to such persons. Among these few things are a pattern of experience over several years that embodies three messages in a credible way: (a) You are valuable, and hence esteemed; (b) you are no less valuable than any other humans; (c) you are loved by me/us/the server(s), as the case may be. Of course, all humans can benefit from these messages and should receive them in credible ways, but many wounded people will not respond well to any other measures if they do not receive *these* messages, and especially the third one.”⁸⁷

Mentoring a spirit of gentleness communicates these three messages by creating companionship and cultivating community.

Neither abilities nor disabilities can determine a person’s capacity for possibilities or predicate quality-of-life outcomes. A culture of gentleness is created from single, meaningful moments that we navigate in the direction of Gentle Teaching. Every encounter is an opportunity for meaningful interaction and presents a potential crossroad of hope. In a culture of gentleness, hope fuels the heart. In its promise to “lift the cup” of human suffering and circumstances of oppression, a return to gentleness offers a humane and dignified response, advocating for those who are vulnerable, whose voice is not heard, whose heart has been broken.

While there are no answers, there is a direction with Gentle Teaching. How we question ourselves can center dialogue and interaction with the transformative values of social justice and the mending of social fabric. Am I using my tools effectively? How am I showing value for this person? Are they feeling safe and loved? How am I protecting? Teaching? What am I learning with this

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person that will add value to their narrative and deepen meaning for their quality of life?

“Questions that have the power to make a difference are ones that engage people and *invite them to co-create a future possibility.*” -Peter Block

Advocating for better solutions and enriching quality of life, especially for marginalized Individuals, requires raising questions about human valuing and social vision that can mutually benefit the structure of our relationships and systems. We need questions that invite intrinsic curiosity and a sense of wonder; questions that make a difference in how we perceive ourselves, our relationships, our problems; questions that invite compassion and imagination to walk with us on a journey that navigates the heart, guiding a reconciliation of community with its gifts; with a return to gentleness.

With unconditional love, a practice of Gentle Teaching brings light into the shadows of separateness and brokenness that marginalize and distance human beings from one another. In the shifting of our view toward the transforming of our hearts, we will see for ourselves that we are not divisible, any more than the horizon divides the sky and sea.

Author and professor of ethics and mental disability, Hans S. Reinders, describes this shift as a “paradigm shift” that occurs with the acceleration of awareness that moves from a “defect” point of view to one of “potential.” Reinders also talks about the moral self that becomes aware of itself within a network of social relationships, and why only then can this aspect of ourselves be developed, because our moral lives *are* our social lives.⁸⁸

Nobel Peace Prize laureate and civil rights activist Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., had a dream for the soul of a nation, a vision about

non-violent means for navigating transformative change that would shift the prevailing social lens. He called out the enslaved constructs of social fabric that were tearing individuals, families, communities and a country apart. He took a stand against infringement of civil liberties by governments, educational systems, and private groups. His vision was a path of non-violence. His activism was a heartfelt cry for equality and social justice, for a new social vision that would value the rights and dignity of every human being, for connecting and unifying aspects of dialogue within communities, creating solutions, together, *ALL, HERE and NOW*.

“Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. We are made to live together because of the interrelated structure of reality.”⁸⁹ -Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Principles of interdependence provide an underlying system for a framework of Gentle Teaching, centering interactions on the interconnected, relational value of all human beings with one another. In meaningfully created moments, the separateness and marginalization of human existence can dissolve. As one spends time with us in relationship-building and collaborative learning, one begins to understand that “I am because you exist.” *This is hope*, being acknowledged with companionship and *becoming human* with a sense of community. It is valuing the opportunity and possibility of the shared moments that intersect our paths. It is valuing each other as we learn from one another that it is good to be together and it is good to do things together. It is also understanding that, through our interactions, we are, one way or another, engaging in the weaving, mending, or tearing of social fabric.

Using our tools for relationship-building speaks to the deeper dimensions of marginalization. In roles of servant leadership that cultivate social-emotional awareness and potentials for a person’s narrative and quality of life, processes of learning and mentoring directly address a

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rebalancing of social justice for individual lives, and indirectly, within the whole and vital life of our communities. Again, without feeling safe and loved, self-determination cannot develop.

Navigating change is about re-examining our social vision and looking closely at the inner journey (individually and collectively) that leads us to the paths where we encounter one another and meet in community formation.

The social vision for a *return to gentleness* views a path of interdependence, for each one and every one. Potential for awareness, curiosity, and learning revolve around social-emotional development. The relationship constructed with a framework of Gentle Teaching mentors the journey from dependency to independence to interdependence. This social vision is a valuing of gifts and human potentials that, when supported with values of interdependency and relationship-building properties (aka *elements of companionship*), is cultivating meaningful connections and planting seeds of hope.

The Four Pillars of Gentle Teaching create a context for cultivating the conditions necessary for social-emotional learning and development. This foundation nourishes the interrelated roots of learning for an Individual's potential awareness and understanding of who they are and who they can become. In learning, together, who this person is, a narrative can develop; one's story can unfold and become known to this person and become valued and supported within the community.

A framework of value and meaning for an Individual's existence creates an access and invitation for engagement in growth of human awareness, exploration, and discovery. A sense of belonging, a sense of purpose, and the intrinsic motivation for learning are developed through interactions that relate to and cultivate the underlying, interrelated paths that pave the inner landscape for the blossoming and becoming of a human being.

On the spiraling path of one's journey, value and meaning build these bridges and make these mutually beneficial connections. To the extent that we are given the accessible means and opportunity to explore and cultivate the roots of connection to self, to others, to the world within us and around us, we can envision and engage in the unfolding of our own and others' gifts and potentials.

Relationship-building is the integral value that factors into developing interdependence. Our encounters and interactions with others bring the challenge and opportunity of this social vision into our everyday lives. In providing services with a framework of Gentle Teaching, social-emotional development and learned or supported skills strengthen the ability to regulate emotions and interact with others and the world. This aspect of development is critical for social well-being, and it is vital to a Quality-of-Life Model of services that is rooted in the philosophy and framework of Gentle Teaching.

A return to gentleness places value on the relational spaces between us that form an interdependent whole. The interconnected space of our lives that hold potential gifts for encountering one another and for each one's journey.

A return to gentleness imagines and explores ways of reconnecting and expanding our vision with human value and meaning; of building connections that move away from complying or expecting compliance. Community-centered possibilities find the best way, together.

How do we engage in this invitation? How do we navigate these relational spaces, and what direction do our interactions take? As much as we live interdependently within an ecological environment that supplies sun, water, oxygen and food, we also live interdependently within a social environment that we influence and by which we are mutually affected.

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In the direction of Gentle Teaching, a person is met with unconditional acceptance. We move in this direction, cultivating meaningful dialogue and narrative value, and use our tools to teach the Four Pillars and to navigate the heart through stormy weather.

In mentoring a culture of gentleness with a Quality-of-Life Model of services, *Reclaiming the Power of the Heart* implements processes for charting the course together and assuring quality of services. These processes are done in addition to fulfilling state requirements and regulations for quality-of-life services that are intended to cultivate one's *independence*. These processes protect and support Individuals as independent human beings.

A return to gentleness centers our role on navigating social change through our interactions with one another. *Reclaiming the Power of the Heart* adds the value of quality assurance to a Quality-of-Life Model that mentors social-emotional awareness and learning, integrating a practice of Gentle Teaching with relationship-building processes that collaboratively cultivate, with the Individual, self-determination and a sense of *interdependence*.

“If self-determination is to become the norm, we need to recognize that it requires new skills and that learning those skills takes time and support. Learning to listen and act on what is heard is a skill. The teaching strategies most needed are not for those with disabilities, but for the people who assess, plan, and support. They need to have opportunities to learn new ways of listening; understanding what they heard; and communicating it to others.”⁹⁰ -Michael Smull

A Quality-of-Life Model includes (1) assessments, quality of life planning and narrative development for the role of the Individual; (2) self-assessment, personal planning for teaching and navigating the course, writing for narrative development, and continued learning

and competence for the role of direct caregiver; and (3) the mentoring and support role of the community that develops daily narrative and charts specific paths that support the Individual's dreams, developing plans for making their dreams a reality.

The shared journey culminates with community-centered celebrations throughout the year that honor the Individual and reflect on the journey and everyone's role in this person's journey. This time also creates the opportunity for imagining new possibilities and discussing dreams for the future.

To feel safe and loved, to have a sense of belonging, to feel loving and engaged, to find intrinsic motivation and curiosity welcomed with joy for learning and for developing the one's authentic voice, to experience that it is good to do things with and for others, reciprocating value that has been shown for one's existence and life...these are the some of the places we explore with Gentle Teaching, discovering and celebrating the journey together, in companionship and community.

The experiencing of companionship, the development of trust, and the mutual shift of awareness that comes from learning together through mentoring, moves us toward what is most authentic in ourselves: a return to gentleness. This deepening of value and meaning is the sowing and mending of social fabric, beginning with the person we meet, whose path now crosses our own.

A framework of Gentle Teaching is rooted in interdependent principles, adding value and meaning to the most basic of social-emotional needs, to have a sense of belonging. Cultivating companionship and a sense of community with others is relating to *the space between us*; it is responding to the invitation; it is engaging in a transformative, social vision that sets a *return to gentleness* on the horizon of our interactions.

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Acknowledging, appreciating, and unconditionally accepting another is recognizing and honoring the value of *being human*; creating value and meaning with another, through dialogue, is integrating companionship and the social value of community into the just equation for *becoming human*.

“It really boils down to this, that all life is interrelated.
We are all caught in an inescapable network of mutuality,
tied into a single garment of destiny.”
-Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.⁹¹

ADDENDUM 01

Reference Sheet: **Elements of Companionship**

Instruction: Reflect on each element of companionship and become aware of the characteristics that cultivate companionship. Referring to these elements are helpful for the self-assessment of your skills in effective relationship-building.

Element	Characteristics of DISCONNECTEDNESS	Characteristics of COMPANIONSHIP	Reflection Question
INTERACTIONS "how we use our hands, eyes, words, and presence when we are with the individual."	COLD	→ WARM	Are your interactions filled with warmth and compassion?
DIALOGUE "how well we interpret the individual's words, tone, and body language, and how we respond to that message."	TALKING	→ LISTENING	Are you actively listening to the individual, regardless of his/her methods of communication?
PROTECTION "how we prevent crisis situations and how we respond when they occur."	RESTRAINT	→ WARM PROTECTION	When the individual feels unsafe, do you provide comfort with warmth?
REWARDS "how often, and on what occasions, we value the individual."	EARNED	→ UNCONDITIONAL	Do you honor and reward the individual unconditionally despite the areas of difficulty that arise?
COMPANIONSHIP "how well we view and treat the person as a friend instead of a client."	POOR	→ GOOD	Do you view the individual as a client or a friend?
ENGAGEMENT "how well we involve the individual in meaningful activities."	SELF	→ TOGETHER	Do you and the individual engage in activities together?
PURPOSE "how we view and carry out our role as caregivers."	MODIFY BEHAVIORS	→ BUILD A RELATIONSHIP	Is your goal to modify an individual's behavior or to build a relationship?
FOCUS "how flexible we are about honoring the individual's needs over the assigned schedule and tasks."	RIGID	→ FLEXIBLE	Do you account for the individual's preferences by being flexible?
MEMORIES "how well we create opportunities for the individual to form new feelings of self-worth to replace old feelings of worthlessness."	OLD	→ NEW	Does your interaction help build new memories for the individual that companionship is good?
LANGUAGE "how well we communicate with clear and specific language."	ABSTRACT	→ CONCRETE	When communicating, do you give concrete explanations?

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Anthony (Tony) M. McCrovitz, Ph.D., is a clinical psychologist and mental health counselor, with clinical training and specialization in child development and the integration of approaches that are rooted in holistic, bio-psychosocial models.

In 1996, he co-founded Globe Star, an agency that provides accredited quality-of-life services and programs for Individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. He continues to serve as director and as a consultant, mentor, and provider of training in a Quality-of-Life Model™ of services.

His work is grounded in the relationship-building philosophy and practice of *Gentle Teaching*, his source of inspiration for the writing of this book. This social vision is based on mutual respect, unconditional acceptance, and principles of interdependence that demonstrate a universal, inherent unity as being indigenous to our humanity.

He holds a doctorate in I/O Psychology from Walden University, a re-specialization in Clinical Psychology from Adler Professional School of Psychology, an MBA from Indiana Wesleyan University, and a master's degree in pastoral counseling from Loyola University of Chicago.

Anthony is dedicated to the sharing of knowledge and solutions, to the sustainable development of inclusive, learning communities and resources, and to supporting processes of self-awareness and growth

that have value and meaning for life and learning, or for professional development and practice.

Chesterton, Indiana, a midwestern town bordered by Lake Michigan and the Indiana Dunes, is home for Anthony and his wife, Amanda, and their four children.

Endorsement A

When I had the chance to read the book *Return to Gentleness*, I got very excited. I have had opportunities to work with and follow Anthony McCrovitz for many years and have been very inspired by his work and the enthusiasm he has for the people he serves.

On my more than 30-year-long journey of working with people, I have read all the books I was able to find about Gentle Teaching, and definitely, I put *Return to Gentleness* on the top of my favorites list.

In this book I find a very good flow of information about what Gentle Teaching is about, how to put it into practice, and how to follow up in our way of living. It explains very well the core and meaning of what it is about to be serving others.

It is easy reading and very understandable, both for people who are beginning to learn about Gentle Teaching and a great tool for people who have been using it for many years, still digging deeper into the essence of Gentle Teaching while broadening its applications.

I highly recommend this book for everyone who wants to know more about working with people.

Kristinn Már Torfason
Vice President of Gentle Teaching International
Head of residence service center Prastarlundur & Klettaborg
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Endorsement B

I've known Anthony McCrovitz for more than 15 years now. I know him as a person who is very dedicated to Gentle Teaching and to improving the quality of life of people with a disability. He is not only an inspiring leader in his own agency, Globe Star, but also in the international Gentle Teaching movement. We have worked together on deepening the theoretical foundation of Gentle Teaching and the concept of quality of life.

One of the strong qualities of Anthony is that he is able to translate scientific knowledge and insights into the day-to-day practice of serving marginalized people.

Pouwel van de Siepkamp
Chairman, Gentle Teaching Foundation Netherlands

Endorsement C

Return to Gentleness, Journeying with Gentle Teaching is a necessary read if you are ready to put the "Human" back into Human Services. It is essential that we focus on treating the causes of challenging interaction as signs of trauma. A focus on building valued, positive relationships and collaborating with those supported in a person-centered way, is the key to long-term healing and growth. Dr. Anthony McCrovitz has provided a beautiful guide to that process!

Kym Juntti, MORC Training Director
Macomb Oakland Regional Center, Inc.,
Auburn Hills, Michigan, USA

Endorsement D

Return to Gentleness, Journeying with Gentle Teaching reminds us that “we do not need to remove darkness from a room before it can be filled with light.” Dr. McCrovitz has been a longstanding leader in the Gentle Teaching International community, and in this book shares his life’s work while comprehensively explaining Gentle Teaching, his personal journey, and a model for implementation. The reader will be inspired by the positive impact it can have on service delivery systems and all relationships throughout one’s circle of influence. Readers will “regenerate” a vision of what is essential to improving humanity.

Ed Kiefer, MORC Training Supervisor
Macomb Oakland Regional Center, Inc.,
Auburn Hills, Michigan, USA

NOTES

Introduction

- 1 Traditional learning is focused on cognitive, left-brain ability. The concept of “true” or “intrinsic” learning was introduced by psychologist Carl Rogers in the 1950’s, who formulated the premise that for “true learning” to occur, the right-brain must also or *at least* be engaged.
- 2 McLeod, Dr. Saul., *Simply Psychology, Carl Rogers*, updated 2014 <https://www.simplypsychology.org/carl-rogers.html>
- 3 McGee, J. J. (1999). *Mending broken hearts: Companionship and community: a handbook for those who care for and about others*. Abbotsford, BC: Homes Society.
- 4 In his writing of *Mending Broken Hearts*, McGee opens Chapter 3, *Becoming Connected*, with words of philosopher Martin Buber (1878-1965): “But community, growing community . . . is the being no longer side by side but with one another . . . a flowing from I to Thou . . . “(M. Buber). Much of Buber’s philosophy of dialogue is characterized by “the I-Thou relationship,” one of mutuality, presence, and accessibility with a deep acknowledgement of the other’s beingness. In Chapter 4, I refer again to Buber’s philosophy and “the space between” us that is the space of invitation and the space we hold unconditionally for relationship-building possibilities.
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- 6 Bach, M. (1996) “Quality of Life: Questioning the Vantage Points for Research. In: *Disability is not measles: new research paradigms in disability*. Chapter 6. G Allan Roeher Inst Kinsman Publication.
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- 9 Block, P. (2008). *Community, the structure of belonging*. San Francisco, California: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

Chapter 1

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- Valorization (SRV), a comprehensive perspective with analytical accuracy on the development of human relationships in human services.
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Chapter 5

- 47 PLAY-ABILITY™ relates to the degree of receptive 'play' factors for engaged learning with role-modeling. 'Play' factors are the pliable, cognitive resources one exhibits as tools for growth in self-awareness and social-emotional coherence, such as imagination, intrinsic motivation, and the essential learning drive associated with curiosity for exploration and discovery. This word defines a clear concept that exists when observing or assessing potential and capacity for engaged mentoring/learning opportunities. The concept is considerable for both therapeutic and educational goals and will be termed in training and publishing materials relating to social-emotional development, especially with regard for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. This word is useful, in general, when discussing or researching the processes of how human beings genuinely learn, grow in self-awareness, and potentially develop social-emotional coherence. (Quality of Life Institute, Inc., 2021)
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