

The Way of Oz and Lifelong Learning

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Akin to many other Americans, you may love the movie or the original book portraying the story of the Wizard of Oz. Indeed, perhaps you have read one or more of the thirteen Oz sequels written by L. Frank Baum (1856-1919). But, relatively few devotees of Oz recognize that there are a set of lessons for learning and lifelong learning that can be distilled from the story's content along with the history, life, and times of the story's intriguing author—a man, who in his lifetime became an actor, breeder of rare chickens, director, gardener, lyricist, merchant, movie producer, philatelist, photographer, playwright, printer and newspaper publisher, salesman, theater manager, window dresser, and, of course, celebrated author. Enter *The Way of Oz: A Guide for Wisdom, Heart, and Courage* and its roadmap for traveling life's yellow brick road.

In *The Way of Oz*, the characters of Oz provide metaphors for learning, caring, serving, focusing on the future, and humility. The associations include: the Scarecrow for wisdom and learning, the Tin Woodman for heart or loving, the Cowardly Lion for courage and service, Dorothy for leadership and a focus on the future, and the Wizard for humility and related virtues. For the purposes of this short essay, we focus on the Scarecrow and his character as a symbol for wisdom and learning. At end we'll see how wisdom and learning relate to the additional elements in the lifelong learning quest and the traits of the other major characters of Oz.

Learning can be envisioned through an expansion of Miles's aphorism: *Where you stand is where you sit*. In other words, your position on policies and perspectives relate to the position you hold in an institution, organization, or corporation. To encompass all aspects of learning, Miles's aphorism in *The Way of Oz* is expanded to wit: Where you stand is not only shaped by where you sit, but also where and how you experience travel, what you read, what you write, how you communicate, and how you integrate your learning efforts with other personal and professional elements of your life.

Knowing the landscape—broadly defined—influences the concept of “where you stand” economically, geographically, personally, professionally, and socially. Thus, your understanding of the landscape is shaped by activities in your professional and personal lives. For students, volunteer work, service learning, and study abroad experiences can be integral parts of an early emerging “landscape.”

As you expand the “where you stand” aphorism to include reading, writing, and communicating, you are offered opportunities to persuade students as to their benefits. Borrowing from an English professor (and later provost) at St. John’s University (New York)—Blaise Opulente—we may consider one of his “prescriptions for an informed life” regarding the reading of seminal books (*e.g.*, Dante’s *The Divine Comedy*, Plato’s *Republic*, Thoreau’s *Walden*)—initially and repeatedly—but as recommended in *The Way of Oz*—informed by modern masterpieces (*e.g.*, Campbell’s *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, Wilson’s *Consilience*). Also, the reading dictum comes alive with the suggestion that thoughtful reading—embellished by systems for note taking and the orderly retrieval of information—leads to ideas for writing and communicating.

Veteran teachers know that learning comes not only from thoughtful reading but also writing to organize thinking and communicating through writing and speaking—to share and test ideas, to seek the views of others, and experience life through human relationships and reflection. And, when the elements of experiencing the landscape, reading, writing, and communicating are integrated with vocational and avocational pursuits, a powerful mosaic results that can serve as a basis for lifetime learning and the development of wisdom.

When linking learning and wisdom, students need to be reminded that wisdom results from the extension of learning to the caring and serving of others. And, the wisdom-caring-serving triad is reinforced and further developed through personal environmental scanning, selective volunteerism, teaching, a love of learning, continuing education, and leadership development, as well as developing and practicing intellectual, emotional, and behavioral integrity, including learning from failures.

In summary, the *Way of Oz* approach to learning, involving landscape understanding, reading, writing, communicating, and participating in active learning, fortified by planning, an understanding of diversity, science and sustainability, and personal responsibility—all with ethics in lead—prepares one for a life of personal and professional fulfillment. And, seeing the coherence among the *Way of Oz* principles and their positive effects on the lives of others—particularly college-aged adolescents—provides a powerful model for living, loving, and serving. These elements of *The Way of Oz* and the new book of the same name—enriched by the intriguing graphic characters created by Dusty Higgins and video content portraying students, teachers, and staff engaged in learning of all types—can make significant differences in the lives of seekers and future leaders of our world community. Many have found—in these thoughts—the true magic of *The Way of Oz*. Perhaps they offer some new perspectives for teachers as we all travel the yellow brick road of life.

To learn more about the Way of Oz, go to thewayofoz.com or consider reading *The Way of Oz: A Guide to Wisdom, Heart, and Courage*, which was published in September 2012 by TTU Press (ttupress.org)