I'm often disappointed, when I visit some of the allegedly sophisticated schools of education, to recognize how very little of the magic and the incandescent chemistry that forms between a truly gifted teacher and her children is conveyed to those who are about to come into our classrooms.

I simply wanted to begin by teaching things I knew and loved and felt that I could talk about with genuine excitement, since I thought – and this turned out to be the case – that my own enthusiasm might well prove to be contagious.

Establishing a chemistry of trust between the children and ourselves is a great deal more important than to charge into the next three chapters of the social studies text or packaged reading system . . .

. . . the best defense is to be very good at certain other practices that matter greatly to the school authorities.

That bond of trust and tenderness comes first.

. . . build a good relationship with parents. It's one of the most important challenges a teacher faces, and I think this is particularly so when racial issues are at stake within a school.

. . . their children’s principals, who were not always open with them about serious problems in a school and often spoke to them in pedagogic jargon that was not informative but functioned as a barrier to real communication.

I got to know a lot about my students in these visits (home visits).

Chapter 04: Teaching the Young, but Learning from the Old

I did not pick out a specific quote from this chapter, but Kozol talks about seeking out veteran teachers and letting them know that their years of experience amount to something worthwhile. Veteran teachers are the survivors and have seen many, many fads come and go. They know the community and may have had the parents of current students when they were students at that same school. He warns us not to assume that veteran teachers have nothing to offer beginning teachers. Even those teachers who have burned out long ago have a perspective that can prove extremely valuable in our deliberations. Learn to separate out the forgotten from the begotten.
Chapter 05: Wild Flowers

Fred Rogers . . . “At quiet times,” he told me once, “young children give us glimpses of some things that are eternal.”

... “product” (one of a number of such terms imported into inner-city education from the business world) . . . “on task”

Once a child writes down something that she actually cares about, it’s easy enough to go back through it with her, word by word, to show her things that she left out.

Chapter 06: The Little Piper: A Few Reflections on the Kids Who Make It Clear That They’re Determined Not to Like Us

None of us should make the error of assuming that a child who is hostile to us at the start, or who retreats into a sullenness and silence or sarcastic disregard for everything that’s going on around him in the room, does not have the will to learn, and plenty of interesting stuff to teach us too, if we are willing to invest the time and the inventiveness to penetrate his seemingly implacable belief that grownups do not mean him well and that, if he trusts us, we will probably betray or disappoint him.

. . . teachers need to be as patient as they can, and rely on every bit of ingenuity that they command, before they assign these kids to categories out of which, as they move from grade to grade, they sometimes never can escape.

But many of these children do have gifts to bring us if we grant ourselves, and if our schools allow us, time enough to listen them carefully, . . . time to forge the subtle bond that will permit them to reveal themselves.

Chapter 07: The Uses of “Diversity”

. . . stories but they also fail to give our kids the slightest indication that most of the victories they celebrate have, since that time, been cancelled out by more polite, but no less implacable, arrangements for the isolation of black children like themselves.

What is disturbing, nonetheless, is the apparent ease with which they use these memories to blind them to the more sophisticated system of apartheid in which they are, willingly or not, participating now.

Teachers learn to choose which battles are worth fighting.
Chapter 08: Beware the Jargon Factory

88  It was her insistence that you did not realize what you had perceived that seems so grandiose and ignorant. In reference to a consultant who used gibberish when describing an interaction between child and teacher as a “text-to-self” connection suddenly fashionable phrases . . .

89  This kind of jargon, which relies upon the pumping up of any simple notion by tacking on a fancy-sounding prefix or needless extra syllable, infests the dialogue of public education nowadays like a strange syntactic illness that induces many educators to believe they have to imitate this language if they want to have a place in the discussion.


93  . . . Paul Goodman’s books . . . “lively children brought to a pause,”

95  To say that “school restructuring” means “implementing changes” for low-income children “in relation to their cohorts” by “insistence upon higher standards” comes to sound as if it tells us something we have never thought about before.

Chapter 09: Aesthetic Merriment (“Wiggly” and “Wobbly” and “Out!”)

103  The wiggly and wobbly and out refers to a chart in her classroom on which students can move a tooth along a graph when they have a tooth that is wiggly. They move the tooth along the graph when it turns to wobbly and then move it to the “out” part of the graph when the appropriate time comes.

I’ve watched other teachers use their own inventive ways to spice the school day for their children with brief words and moments that are like their evanescent tributes to the need for impulse and for beauty in the classroom.

Chapter 10: High-Stakes Tests and Other Modern Miseries

120  These are testing gains, not learning gains. If they were learning gains, they would persist into the secondary grades.
Chapter 11: The Single Worst, Most Dangerous Idea: Education Vouchers and the Privatization of Our Public Schools

It appears that Kozol feels that vouchers are not a good idea due to hidden, not often disclosed negative features of such a system. Of particular concern is the ability of private schools to pick and choose who is eligible even if a lottery system is used.

Chapter 12: It Is Evil To Tell Lies To Children

151 Yevtushenko poem: “Forgive no error you recognize. It will repeat itself, increase, and afterwards our pupils will not forgive in us what we forgave.”

James Loewen: Lies My Teacher Told Me

154 Courts do not grant children reparations for the loss of childhood.

160 “The Hortatory Lie,” . . . example of “If it is to be, it’s up to me,” . . . chants.

162 “The Ultimate Lie” . . . lie of equal opportunity.

165 . . . at age thirteen when they apply to high school, ought to be induced to set their sights not on the open-ended and unlimited objectives for their academic futures you and I enjoyed but instead upon specific choices of careers.

Chapter 13: Loss of Innocence: More Reflections on the Middle Schools and High Schools

177 I believe aesthetics count a great deal in the education of our children.

186 . . . the poet Rilke There is a specific poem by Rilke that contains a reference to the Willow tree. If I find it I will include it in my notes for the next session.

Chapter 14: Teachers as Witnesses

193 Virtually every teacher I have known who’s lost a job over a point of moral principle has ended up with a better job within less than a year.

195 “A Dream Deferred,” I have used this poem by Langston Hughes in my presentations about person centered planning and dreaming for a possible future.

197 “curriculum deviation,” a term used when teachers opt to include subject content other than that prescribed by the school district.

198 . . . teachers like myself were commonly dismissed . . . “unsuitable in training, personality, or character,” Any individual “who lacks the personal discipline to abide by rules and regulations, as we all must in our civilized society, is obviously unsuited for the highly responsible profession of teaching,”
Even if they see that we are inexperienced or, as in my case, almost wholly unprepared, most of the parents I have come to know throughout these years are quick to recognize when teachers, of whatever racial background we may be, are committed to their children.

The point is not to lose your job! It is to find a way to navigate the contradictions it presents without entirely forfeiting one’s personality or undermining the ideals that make our work with children “a vocation” in the truest sense rather than a slotted role within a spiritless career.

... many teachers learn to camouflage their deviations with sufficient ingenuity as to protect themselves from getting more attention than they’d like.

... future teachers... When they begin to teach, they come into their classrooms with a sense of affirmation of the goodness and the fullness of existence, with a sense of satisfaction in discovering the unexpected in their students, and with a longing to surprise the world, their kids, even themselves, with their capacity to leave each place they’ve been (a school, a classroom, a community of learning) a better and more joyful place than it was when they entered it.

Chapter 15: Seeds of Hope, Sources of Resilience

... with the exhilaration that I get out of my day-to-day immersion in the lives of certain glowingly resilient children who, no matter what the painful things they may experience at school or in their homes, are able somehow to retain their faith in the essential goodness of the grown-up world and to keep their little lights of hope alive.

When it comes to courage, my best teachers have been children.

Epilogue: Goodbye for Now

He (Mister Rogers) questioned them about their lives, or objects on their desks or in the room that were of interest to them, and he listened to their answers with his usual respectfulness and did not try to hurry them.

Francesca, I’ve mentioned the emphasis Mr. Rogers used to place on leaving open space and open time for children to express themselves and, when they do, the need for us to listen to them carefully.

An unfinished poem by Mr. Rogers: The Child Who’s in Me Still, and Sometimes Not so Still!

I pray you’ll never lose the sense of joy and tenderness that brings good people to the task of teaching in the first place.
And, when it is needed, I also wish you rightful anger, vigorous denunciation, and the saving grace of sly irreverence and the skillful uses of ironical detachment from the soul-destroying practices and terminologies of experts who are positive they know “what works” within the unjust and unequal system they no longer choose to challenge or denounce but who seem to know only too little of the hearts of children. Resist the deadwood of predictability, Embrace the unexpected. Revel in the run-on sentences. Celebrate silliness. Dig deep into the world of whim. Sprinkle your children’s lives, no matter how difficult many of those lives may be, with hundreds of brightly colored seeds of jubilation. Enjoy the world flowers!