A SMALL FLOCK OF POEMS FOR TEACHERS

Ronald F. Ferguson, Ph.D.

Faculty Co-Chair and Director, Achievement Gap Initiative at Harvard University and Founder, the Tripod Project for School Improvement

www.agi.harvard.edu
www.tripodproject.org

Last Updated February 2012
TRANSFORMATION

I started kindergarten
Two or three big steps behind.
Some classmates understood things
That had never crossed my mind.

The kids who looked real different
Seemed so smart (I can recall).
Kids who looked and spoke like I did
Didn’t seem so smart at all.

Of course there were exceptions,
But on mostly any day,
It was clear those kids were doing best
And we were just okay.

Our teachers liked them better
‘Cause they always knew the answers,
So kids like me just tried to be
Good athletes and great dancers.

The years went by quite slowly
And most things just stayed the same,
Until our principal decided
It was time to change the game.

She hinted that the reason
When those other kids did best
Was that many knew already
More of what was on the tests.

They learned it from their parents
And from things they did at home.
Much that I and my companions
Never had the chance to know.

That had always been the pattern.
Yes for years it was the same.
But the standards movement came along
To finally change the game.

Now that there’s a new prescription
For the way our school is run,
Everybody’s got new goals to reach.
It’s getting to be fun!

We’re learning to get smarter
‘Cause our teachers show us how.
They’re all serious about it.
Everyone’s important now!

Time in class is so exciting
That we seldom fool around.
We might make a joke in passing,
But we quickly settle down.

After school we do our homework.
Often in our study groups.
When we need them we have tutors
And they give us all the “scoops.”

If there’s something that’s confusing,
It’s a temporary thing
‘Cause the teachers love to answer
All the questions that we bring.

All the counselors and teachers
Work with parents as team
‘Cause they share the same commitment
To connect us with our dreams.

I love the way things are now.
It all just seems so right!
We still play sports and we’re still cool,
But now we’re also “bright.”

That first day of kindergarten
Some of us were way behind.
But today I’m graduating
In a truly different time.

© Ronald F. Ferguson, June 2000.
My Hero

My teacher is my hero.
She’s the captain of our team.
My classmates all adore her.
She taught us all to dream.

It’s a dream of overcoming
All the challenges we’ll face.
She helps us build our confidence—
Prepares us for the race.

It’s a race into the future
To a place we don’t yet know.
We’ve got to be quite versatile—
Prepared for any foe.

My teacher looks for excellence.
She says she’ll take no less.
Now when a challenge faces us
We’ve learned to do our best.

I really love my teacher
And I’m sure that she loves me.
When I get to be a grownup
She’s the kind I want to be.

© Ronald F. Ferguson, April 2000.
HARDSHIPS AND DISTRACTIONS

I'm going to have my dinner
At my grandma's house today.
My mom is stayin' late for work
To make some extra pay.

I've got a lot’ a homework
But I'm worried 'bout my mom.
So that makes it hard to concentrate.
My mind feels like a bomb!

I've also got to make sure
That I wash some clothes to wear
And I've got to get the stuff I need
To tame my crazy hair.

And while I'm doin' that,
I'll use the phone to make some calls
To tell my friends the time and place
For Friday at the mall.

And sometime between now and then
I've got to get some dough($).
'Cause I ain't going to the mall
All destitute and po'.

I know that I should focus
On that test I've got in math,
But my English paper's due soon too.
I need some help real bad!

Some teachers think I just don't care
And some think I'm not tryin'.
I think I'm caught in a trap –
Sometimes I just start cryin'.

But no one ever sees my tears.
'Cause I just show the tough side.
I like to seem real in control –
If not book-smart, then street-wise.

I wish my teachers understood
What it's like to be me.
To see my life the way I do –
The whole complexity.

They'd see how hard it is to keep
So many things in focus.
They'd see how blurry things can get –
How stuff can seem so hopeless.

My teacher said I best be ready
When I take that test in math.
But I ain't got no help at home.
I never knew my dad.

I want to go to college.
But for that I need good grades,
Based on what my grades are now,
There may not be a way.

I don't know what I'm gonna do.
I need someone who's wise
To help me figure out which way to turn –
To empathize.

But let me stop daydreamin’.
'Cause I got a lot to do.
If I don't start my homework soon,
I never will get through.

If I try and still can't do it
Then I just won't hand it in.
But if I don't try, I'll never know.
So here goes, I'll begin.

Everyday I pray
To find someone to guide me and to care.
Is there any chance that you could be
An answer to my prayer?

© Ronald F. Ferguson, April 2004.
Searching for the Stairs

I grew up pretty sure
That someday I would go to college.
But I tried and college didn’t work for me.

I tried to make it work,
But did so poorly in my studies
That I had to leave the university.

Now I don’t know what to do
And time is passing by so quickly
I despair to contemplate my destiny.

What am I supposed to do
When everybody in my family
Went to college and has got a big degree?

What am I supposed to do
When everybody says that college
Is the only way to get where I should be?

I’m asking you these things
Because I really need to know
If there’s some hope that I can find my own career.

I’m asking you these things
Because they say that you’re somebody
Who can help me push myself and persevere.

Please help me find a way
To keep believing I’m somebody
Other people can respect [pause] instead of fear.

Please help me find a way
To get invited to the party [pause]
Instead of being told to disappear.

I thank you in advance
For helping me to find a pathway
People say that you’re someone who really cares.

I thank you in advance
For letting people in high places know
That kids like me are searching for the stairs.

© Ronald F. Ferguson, December 2011