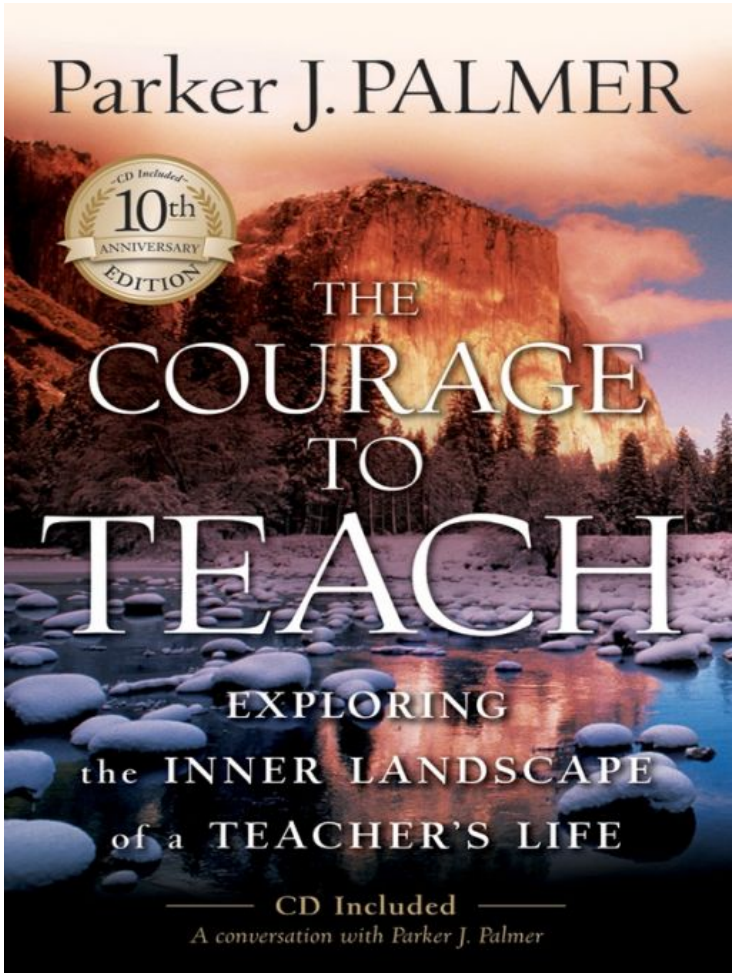
Parker J. PALMER
CD Included
10th
ANNIVERSARY
EDITION
THE
COURAGE
TO
TEACH
EXPLORING
the INNER LANDSCAPE
of a TEACHER'S LIFE
CD Included
A conversation with Parker J. Palmer

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CRITICAL ACCLAIM FOR

The Courage to Teach . . .

"This is the best education book I've read in a long time. Palmer provides a powerful argument for the need to move from our overreliance on technique toward a learning environment that both honors and truly develops the deepest human capacities in children and teachers. It's about time we remember that it's the person within the teacher that matters most in education, and Palmer makes the case eloquently."

—Teacher magazine

"If teaching is just a chore, and you are content to just 'do chores,' this book is not for you. You will be challenged to go beyond the minimum and pursue excellence. But rather than approaching teaching as something we just tolerate, Parker Palmer holds out the promise of it being something we can celebrate."

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"Wisdom literatures have brought us important insight over the years. Who thought more deeply about teaching and learning than Alfred North Whitehead? I reread his short book *The Aims of Education* . . . every two or three years. I think also of the wonderful books on teaching from Gilbert Highet and Kenneth Eble. And, good as any of these, Parker Palmer's *The Courage to Teach*."

—Theodore J. Marchese, vice president, American Association for Higher Education

"Parker Palmer is a teacher's teacher, and it is when he writes as a teacher that this book is a remarkably inspiring, almost religious companion for anyone who has taught or might be thinking of teaching as a vocational journey for life. This book can change your life if you are a teacher."

—Religious Education

“I recommend this book. . . . Just substitute ‘management consultant’ whenever the book says ‘teacher.’ With that, most all of it works and is useful. . . . [T]his is a book of philosophy, a book on character, on the kind of people it takes to be great management consultants. No platitudes; rather, a serious exploration into the heart and soul of teaching by an eloquent and thoughtful master. Serious, yet completely understandable and engrossing.”

—Journal of Management Consulting

“Through a series of vignettes, Palmer encourages reflection and strives to bolster readers’ initiative and confidence. *The Courage to Teach* is an awakening, and a gentle, directive touch that reaches out to teachers of all levels and ages.”

—Childhood Education

“This book provides a great deal of insight and new ideas on good teaching which cannot be reduced to techniques because it comes from the identity and integrity of the teachers. The book balances the concerns on the thread of connectedness. . . . [T]he spiritual dimension is explored in a unique way by relating with other fields of study.”

—International Journal on World Peace

“With *The Courage to Teach,* Parker Palmer challenges us to recall our original motives for becoming teachers, and he seeks to guide us in the process of reclaiming the sense of vocation capable of sustaining us in that striving.”

—Transformations

“It takes courage to teach in today’s schools. But what kind of courage? This question is seldom asked and, if asked at all, is usually framed in terms of violence prevention, dealing with overzealous parents and defending the profession against government spite. So to read that educational courage is an affair of the heart is a welcome change. For, as Parker Palmer argues in *The Courage to Teach,* teaching is about commitment and connections. It is about relationships among students and subjects and the world that connects both. It is about living and learning. Ultimately it is about the kind of community necessary in classrooms for authentic education to take place. And the key to this kind of education is the human heart.”

—Catholic New Times

From leaders, teachers, thinkers, and writers . . .

"To go on this journey with Parker Palmer into the uncharted territory of 'the self' in teaching is not only viewing teaching from a thrilling new perspective. It is also to be in the presence of a great teacher who, by sharing himself so openly and honestly, engages us in the very kind of teaching he so eloquently describes."
—Russell Edgerton, director of educational programs, Pew Charitable Trusts, and past president, American Association for Higher Education

"A profoundly moving, utterly passionate, and inspired articulation of the call to, and the pain and joy of, teaching. It is must reading for any and every teacher, at any level."
—Jon Kabat-Zinn, author, Wherever You Go, There You Are, and coauthor, Everyday Blessings

"This book is good news—not just for classroom teachers and educators, but for all of us who are committed to the healing of our world."
—Joanna Macy, author, World as Lover, World as Self

"Parker Palmer has taught me more about learning and teaching than anyone else. *The Courage to Teach* is for all of us—leaders, public officials, counselors, as well as teachers. It compassionately and insistently asks us to recognize that our capacity to do good work springs from our recognition of who we are."
—Margaret J. Wheatley, author, Leadership and the New Science, and coauthor, A Simpler Way

"This is a profoundly satisfying feast of a book—written with a rare mix of elegance and rigor, passion, and precision—a gift to all who love teaching and learning."
—Diana Chapman Walsh, president, Wellesley College

"Evokes the heart of what teachers really do, and does so in a vivid, compelling, and soulful way."
—Robert Coles, University Health Services, Harvard University

OTHER BOOKS BY PARKER J. PALMER

The Promise of Paradox
The Company of Strangers
To Know as We Are Known
The Active Life
Let Your Life Speak
A Hidden Wholeness
The Courage to Teach Guide for Reflection and Renewal

JOSSEY-BASS

The Courage to Teach

EXPLORING THE INNER LANDSCAPE
OF A TEACHER'S LIFE

Tenth Anniversary Edition

Parker J. Palmer

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Foreword to the Tenth Anniversary Edition

During the decade it took me to write *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life,* I spent many hours pondering the past and peering into the future.

My Buddhist friends tell me this is not a good way to live. Every wisdom tradition urges us to dwell in the reality of the "eternal now," not in the illusion of what once was or might be. And yet, past and future are sources no writer can do without, rich as they are with memory and fantasy, which calls into question the credibility of anyone who writes about the inner life, not least myself!

But the truth is that I wrote this book while looking back on thirty years in education, trying to understand why teaching had always thrilled and terrified me. I was exploring the inner landscape of *this* teacher's life, hoping to clarify the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual dynamics that form or deform our work from the inside out. I wanted to find ways to deepen the self-understanding and thus the practice of anyone who cares about teaching as much as I do.

As I wrote, I was also looking ahead. In the midst of a culture that devalues the inner life, I hoped to do more than make the case that good teachers must live examined lives and try to understand what animates their actions for better and for worse. I wanted to anticipate the impact of our society's growing obsession with educational externals—

including relentless and mindless standardized testing—and find ways to protect and support the inner journey at the heart of authentic teaching, learning, and living.

As the past recedes, we can gain perspective on it. So writing the Foreword and Afterword for this tenth anniversary edition of *The Courage to Teach* has helped me see more clearly how this book emerged from my own teaching experience. It has also given me a chance to check the accuracy of my predictions and the aptness of my prescriptions for a future that at the time this book was first published still consisted of events that had "not yet gone through the formality of taking place."[1]

PREHISTORY REVISITED

Because I began writing *The Courage to Teach* a decade before it was published, this book's tenth anniversary feels more like a twentieth to me. In fact, throughout the book's decade-long prehistory—during much of which I had only a title, a swarm of half-baked ideas, heaps of scrap paper covered with scribbled notes, and page after page of unusable text—I gave so many talks referring to my book in progress that some people got the impression it was a *fait accompli.*

I began getting calls from librarians: "Someone is trying to borrow a copy of *The Courage to Teach,* but I can't find it anywhere. How can I get my hands on one?" My callers were generally not amused when I told them that I, too, wished I had a copy but that we would both have to wait until I actually wrote the thing.

That it took me a decade to write this book is due partly to the fact that I am a very slow writer. When people ask me what I do for a living, I tell them I am a rewriter. I doubt that

I have ever published a page that has not been refried eight or ten or twelve times. As is true of many writers, I do not begin with a clear idea and then commit it to paper. The very act of writing helps me discover what I feel or know about something, and since each succeeding draft drives that discovery a little deeper, it is hard to know when to stop.

But the fact that it took me a decade to write this book is not due only to my slow hand. I also credit a generous providence for giving me time to accrue and assimilate two experiences without which the book would have been less grounded, less honest, and hence less helpful. One of these was a failure, the other a success. Today I count both of them as blessings.

Of course, the failure did not feel like a blessing at the time. Four years before *The Courage to Teach* was published, while the book was still a gleam in my eye—or a stone in my shoe, depending on the day—I spent a year as the Eli Lilly Visiting Professor at Berea College in Kentucky. By the end of that year, I had been reminded of two things related to this book: why the title was on target (at least, for me) and why I needed to write about teaching with as much humility as I could muster.

Berea College has served the young people of Appalachia since 1855. Its liberal arts program is offered tuition-free to students from one of the most impoverished regions of the United States, all of whom are given on-campus jobs to help operate the college and finance their own education. I had felt drawn to Berea ever since my graduate school days at the University of California at Berkeley in the 1960s, when higher education was roundly and rightly criticized for ignoring the victims of poverty. Teaching at a college with a social justice mission had long been high on my vocational wish list.

“Be careful what you wish for” is a cliché worth attending to. The year I taught at Berea was one of the most difficult of my life. As an affluent northerner who had only read about Appalachia, I was unprepared for the depth of the culture gap between my students and me, and I was often unable to teach across it. My own “capacity for connectedness”—a key concept in *The Courage to Teach*—frequently failed because I lacked personal knowledge of “the other.” Worse still, I was slow to acknowledge and repair my own ignorance.

These professional struggles were amplified by personal loss, and as I insist in this book, the personal can never be divorced from the professional. “We teach who we are” in times of darkness as well as light. In the middle of my year at Berea, in the small hours of a subzero January morning, I learned that my beloved father had suddenly and unexpectedly died. Far removed from the consolation of family and old friends, I was devastated.

Every day of my second semester at Berea I had to climb a mountain of personal grief and professional failure to drag myself back into the classroom while “the courage to teach” ebbed and flowed in me, mostly ebbing. I would not repeat that year for fame or money, but it left me with a pearl of great price: deepened empathy for teachers whose daily work is as much about climbing mountains as it is about teaching and learning.

My other pivotal experience during the ten-year prehistory of *The Courage to Teach* was an unqualified success, not because of me but because of the people with whom I shared it. From 1994 to 1996, at the request of the Fetzer Institute and with its generous financial and staff support, I designed and facilitated a program called “The Courage to Teach.” Working with twenty-two K-12 teachers from southwestern Michigan, I became an “inwardbound” guide,

helping them explore the inner landscape of their lives through eight quarterly retreats of three days each, following the cycle of the seasons.

Technically, I led this program. Truthfully, those teachers led me. I learned lasting lessons from them about the discouraging, oppressive, and sometimes cruel conditions in which too many public school teachers must work; about the willingness of these good people to look within themselves for sustenance instead of waiting for someone to supply it; about the heart-deep commitment that keeps them coming back to the classroom—their commitment to the well-being of our children.

My two-year journey with public school teachers persuaded me beyond doubt that they and their kin are among the true culture heroes of our time. Daily they must deal with children who have been damaged by social pathologies that no one else has the will to cure. Daily they are berated by politicians, the public, and the press for their alleged inadequacies and failures. And daily they return to their classrooms, opening their hearts and minds in hopes of helping children do the same.

The hard times I had with teaching and the good times I had with teachers in the decade before *The Courage to Teach* was published helped me write this book from a place of passion in myself. The word *passion,* of course, can mean intense love or intense suffering or both. The two go hand in hand in language as well as life.

THE FUTURE IS HERE

Today, a decade after *The Courage to Teach* was published—now that ten years' worth of events have "gone through the formality of taking place"—how accurate was my crystal ball

regarding the future of education, the needs of teachers, and the service I hoped this book might render?

My instinct that education would become more obsessed with externals, shrinking the space needed to support the inner lives of teachers and students, was, I'm sad to say, all too accurate. Of course, one hardly need consult the Oracle at Delphi to make such a prediction. The excesses of No Child Left Behind (NCLB)—a set of unfunded, even unfounded federal mandates that have done much to undermine teacher morale and stifle real teaching and learning—are the inevitable outcomes of a mind-set that cares about weights and measures more than meaning.

To those who say that we need weights and measures in order to enforce accountability in education, my response is, yes, of course we do, but only under three conditions that are not being met today. We need to make sure (1) that we measure things worth measuring in the context of authentic education, where rote learning counts for little; (2) that we know how to measure what we set out to measure; and (3) that we attach no more importance to measurable things than we attach to things equally or more important that elude our instruments.

Otherwise we will find ourselves—as I think we do—in the tragicomic situation that John Dewey lampooned some seventy years ago. Dewey was asked what he thought about the IQ test. His response, drawn from his childhood years on the farm, could easily apply to many of the "measures of learning" required by No Child Left Behind:

> Dewey . . . likened [the IQ test] to his family's preparations for taking a hog to market. In order to figure out how much to charge for the animal, his family put the hog on one end of a seesaw and piled up bricks on the other until the two balanced. "Then

we tried to figure out how much those bricks weighed," said Dewey.[2]

Today we say, in effect, "This child weighs seventy-six bricks' worth of language skills, while that one weighs eighty-three bricks." But we still don't know how much the bricks weigh—and the kinds of bricks we use differ from one setting to another! As much as I wish I had been wrong, I was right in 1997 about our continuing obsession with educational externals.

On a happier note, I was also right about the way inner work can help teachers connect with their students (thus aiding and abetting learning) and empower them to resist the forces that threaten to undermine real teaching (of which NCLB is only the most recent example). In the decade since this book was published, I have heard from many teachers that its approach to teaching has helped them deepen, renew, and sustain their vocations in trying times. And later in this Foreword, I will cite some research that supports my anecdotal evidence.

But I was wrong about the potential audience for this book. Although I had worked intensively with a group of K-12 teachers several years before the book's publication, I thought my readers would come almost exclusively from higher and adult education. These were the domains in which I had worked for three decades and had some degree of name recognition and from which I drew most of the book's examples and illustrations. So it has been a source of surprise and delight to me that *The Courage to Teach* has been read by many public school teachers and administrators, to whose world I was a relative newcomer in 1997.

Equally delightful and even more surprising has been the readership this book has attracted in worlds other than education, including medicine, law, politics, philanthropy,

ministry, and organizational leadership. Ever since the book came out, people have been asking me, “Why don’t you write a book called *The Courage to Lead* or *The Courage to Serve* or *The Courage to Heal,* since so much of what you say here applies to work other than teaching?” Every profession that attracts people for “reasons of the heart” is a profession in which people and the work they do suffer from losing heart. Like teachers, these people are asking, “How can we take heart again so that we can give heart to others?”—which is why they undertook their work in the first place.

But my most gratifying surprise of the past decade, related to *The Courage to Teach,* has been the extent to which we have been able to “put wheels” on its ideas by creating vehicles that bring the ideas to ground and provide transport for people who want to explore them.

By “we” I mean the people who joined me following the initial two-year “Courage to Teach” program to create the Center for Teacher Formation—which, because of the growing demand for its work from people outside education, has changed its name to the Center for Courage & Renewal.[3] That “we” includes Marcy Jackson and Rick Jackson, the center’s founding and continuing codirectors; Tom Beech, Rob Lehman, Mickey Olivanti, and Dave Sluyter of the Fetzer Institute; and Sam Intrator, professor at Smith College, and Megan Scribner, freelance editor, who have done most of the heavy lifting for a series of edited books that flowed from *The Courage to Teach,* helping put our work on the map.[4]

Today, the Center for Courage & Renewal, working through a “Courage Collaboration” of one hundred fifty trained facilitators, offers programs in some thirty states and fifty cities to help people in many walks of life “reconnect who they are with what they do.” In what we call

“circles of trust”—identical in spirit and practice to the circle of teachers who met at the Fetzer Institute from 1994 to 1996—the center works with physicians, lawyers, clergy, foundation executives, politicians, and nonprofit leaders while continually expanding its core work with K-12 educators.[5]

As I argue in the Afterword, much has happened over the past decade to affirm and advance this book’s emphasis on the inner lives of teachers and learners. One of those developments is a 2002 study by Anthony Bryk and Barbara Schneider published under the title *Trust in Schools: A Core Resource for Improvement.*[6] Funded by the Russell Sage Foundation, these scholars from the University of Chicago “set out in the early 1990s to explore the dynamics of reform unfolding in Chicago schools as a 1988 law that profoundly decentralized school governance was taking effect.”[7]

Believing “relational trust” to be a vital but neglected factor in school success, Bryk and Schneider examined the impact of that variable on student achievement, as measured by standardized tests, comparing “the performance of schools with high levels of trust with that of schools where relations were not as strong.” As reported in *Education Week:*

> They found that schools performing in the top quartile on standardized tests were more often schools with high levels of trust than those performing in the bottom quartile. They also examined the 100 schools that had made the greatest and least annual gains on standardized tests between 1991 and 1996, and matched those results against the teacher-survey data on trusting relationships.

> They found that schools reporting strong trust links in 1994 were three times more likely to report eventual improvements in reading and mathematics scores than those where trust levels were low. By 1997, schools with high levels of trust had a one in two chance of being in the “improving” category, compared with lower-trust schools, which had only a one in seven chance. Schools whose staffs reported low levels of trust both in 1994 and 1997 had “virtually no chance of showing improvement in either reading or mathematics,” the authors write.[8]

Bryk and Schneider also found that relational trust—between teachers and administrators, teachers and teachers, and teachers and parents—has the power to offset external factors that are normally thought to be the primary determinants of a school’s capacity to serve students well: “Improvements in academic productivity were less likely in schools with high levels of poverty, racial isolation, and student mobility, but [the researchers] say that a strong correlation between [relational] trust and student achievement remains even after controlling for such factors.” [9]

If the capacity to educate students well depends heavily on relational trust, on what does relational trust depend? Clearly, it depends on an educator’s capacity to “explore the inner landscape” of his or her own life, learning how to negotiate that tricky terrain in a way that keeps trust alive.

Relational trust is built on movements of the human heart such as empathy, commitment, compassion, patience, and the capacity to forgive. If the inner work necessary to cultivate such dispositions and counteract whatever undermines them is not seen as vital to educational success—and if institutional support for inner work is lacking—then

this critical variable is left up for grabs. We know what its fate will be in a culture that is consistently corrosive of trust.

Bryk and Schneider have rendered a great service with their study. But I need to say—not as a critique of their work but of our mentality—that *Trust in Schools* reveals a secret that is hidden in plain sight. Who does not know that you can throw the best methods, the latest equipment, and a lot of money at people *who do not trust each other* and still get miserable results? Who does not know that people *who trust each other and work well together* can do exceptional work with less than adequate resources?

We all know these things, privately and personally. But in our public life, we refuse to credit what we know—indeed, we actively deny it—constantly succumbing to the institutional illusion that the logic of the human heart is irrelevant to "real-world" operations that must produce a strong "bottom line." It is hard to know whether to call this disconnect, this denial, self-defeating or stupid or tragic or simply boneheaded balderdash. I think it would take all those words *and* some really strong ones to name with precision this particular form of institutional insanity.

I am grateful to Bryk and Schneider for pressing their findings into the public arena by advising educational policymakers to embrace "the importance of trust in the drive to deliver results." They write, "From a policy perspective, we constantly need to ask whether any new initiative is likely to promote relational trust within school communities or undermine it."[10]

We might begin that process by looking at the impact No Child Left Behind has had on relational trust in our schools. Once we have seen the damage it has done—and have understood what happens to an institution's capacity to pursue its mission when we ignore the dynamics of the heart—we might learn how to craft policies that bear real

promise of educational reform because they appeal to “the better angels of our nature,” are rooted in common sense about how the world works, and take seriously the inner landscape of teachers’ and learners’ lives.

WITH GRATITUDE

Finally, a word to my readers: thank you! Thank you for purchasing well over three hundred thousand copies of the first edition of *The Courage to Teach* and sharing them with students, colleagues, and friends. More important by far, thank you for taking this book’s vision of teaching and learning off the printed page and onto the front lines.

Today, I am even more hopeful about the potential for education reform than I was ten years ago because this book has introduced me to so many people who are teachers or administrators *and* reformers—people who care passionately about education, schools, and the learners they are meant to serve, who are willing to take the risk of acting on their passion.

Grounded in that hope, I have written an Afterword for this edition titled “The New Professional: Education for Transformation.” In it, I explore ways of educating the kind of person we need if professional work of any sort is to serve the world well. The new professional will not only master the core competencies of a field like teaching or medicine or law. He or she will also have the skill and the will to help transform the institutions in which that work is done—institutions that too often threaten our highest professional standards.

As many readers of this book have testified, “exploring the inner landscape of a teacher’s life” allows us to return, grounded and renewed, to the outer landscape of our lives.

Having taken heart in the work to which we are called, we can give heart once again to our students, our colleagues, our schools, and our world—a world where heartlessness yields only to gifts and graces that come from within.

Gratitudes

In 1983, I published *To Know as We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey.* That book opened opportunities for me to meet and work with teachers in diverse settings across the country: colleges and universities, public schools, continuing education programs, retreat centers, religious institutions, and "learning organizations" of many sorts—businesses, foundations, and groups working for social change.

In dialogue with this remarkable array of educators, I was challenged to write a book that would go beyond *To Know as We Are Known* in two respects: it would have a sustained focus on the practice of teaching and an approach to the inner life that is open to the varied paths of the devoted teachers I have met. *The Courage to Teach* is that book, and I thank the kindred spirits who have encouraged me along the way.

My special thanks go to Robert F. Lehman, president of the Fetzer Institute, where I am senior adviser. Through a series of institute projects, he made it possible for me to lay down my travels long enough to finish this book. Even more generous has been his faithful companionship on the inner journey from which this book emerges. Rob Lehman understands the inner life and its impact on the world of action at a depth rare and heartening. For his insight, friendship, and witness I am profoundly grateful.

Working with the Fetzer Institute has enlarged my experience of education. My own teaching has been primarily in universities and adult study programs, and most of the stories in this book come from those worlds. But betweem 1992 and 1997, I gained some insight into the lives of K-12 teachers by helping Fetzer create the Teacher Formation Program, a two-year sequence of renewal retreats for teachers in public schools. The program currently has sites in Illinois, Maryland, Michigan, South Carolina, and Washington State, and as this book goes to press, the Fetzer Institute is establishing a national Center for Teacher Formation to develop additional K-12 sites.[1]

From 1994 to 1996, I led the first Teacher Formation group. My gratitude goes to the inspiring Michigan public school teachers who made that experiment so successful: Maggie Adams, Jack Bender, Mark Bond, Lauri Bowersox, Margaret Ells, Richard Fowler, Linda Hamel, Eleanor Hayward, Marianne Houston, Katherine Kennedy, Cheri McLoughan, Michael Perry, Linda Powell, Toni Rostami, Rick Serafini, Gerald Thompson, and Marcia Weinhold.

I am grateful, too, for the people who are giving the Teacher Formation Program a larger and continuing life. They include Judy Brown, Tony Chambers, Charlie Glasser, Eleanor Greenslade, Sally Hare, Marianne Houston, Marcy Jackson, Rick Jackson, Mickey Olivanti, Megan Scribner, David Sluyter, and Penny Williamson, my friends and gifted partners in program development; the staff of the Fetzer Institute, whose devotion and hard work—answering calls, writing memos, issuing checks, cleaning rooms, caring for the grounds, and putting food on the table—has kept the program afloat; and the trustees of the institute who believe in this work and have backed it: Janis Claflin, Bruce Fetzer, Wink Franklin, Lynne Twist, Frances Vaughan, Jeremy Waletzky, and Judith Skutch Whitson (trustee emerita).

For the past decade I have worked independently. Though I teach constantly—in seminars and workshops and retreats, "classrooms" of many sorts—I no longer teach in traditional settings with the same students for a semester or more, as I did earlier in my career at Beloit College, Georgetown University, and Pendle Hill, the Quaker living-learning community.

So I was grateful to be appointed the Eli Lilly Visiting Professor at Berea College in Berea, Kentucky, in 1993-94. During that year, I was rebaptized into the realities of college teaching, and I wrote the first draft of this book. My special thanks go to Phyllis Hughes, Libby Jones, Larry Shinn, the late John Stephenson, and members of the Berea Friends Meeting for encouraging me to grow in my vocation.

I also thank my friends at the American Association of Higher Education (AAHE), where I serve as senior associate: Russ Edgerton (past president of AAHE, now director of educational programs at the Pew Charitable Trusts), Lou Albert, Pat Hutchings, and Ted Marchese. For a decade and more, they have encouraged and helped shape my work, giving me access to an extraordinary community of discourse that I could never have discovered on my own.

Most of the work on this book was done in 1996-97, and during that time I was blessed with four superb editors. All of them helped make this book better than it would have been had I written it alone.

Sarah Polster and Sheryl Fullerton were my editors at Jossey-Bass Publishers. I thank them for supporting me and challenging me in the right proportions and at the right times.

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tried to evoke my voice instead of imposing his own. For helping me find vessels to hold the treasure and for showing me treasure I had not seen, he has my endless thanks.

Sharon Palmer has lovingly shared all the ups and downs of this project and, with her keen eye and good heart, has worked to keep my prose lucid and my spirit whole. The dedication of this book only begins to suggest the depth of my gratitude to her—and to my father, the best man I have ever known.

Madison, Wisconsin
September 1997

Parker J. Palmer

For Sharon

And in grateful memory of my father
Max J. Palmer
(1912-1994)

Introduction

Teaching from Within

Ah, not to be cut off,
not through the slightest partition
shut out from the law of the stars.
The inner—what is it?
if not intensified sky,
hurled through with birds and deep
with the winds of homecoming.

—RAINER MARIA RILKE, "[AH, NOT TO BE CUT OFF]"[1]

WE TEACH WHO WE ARE

I am a teacher at heart, and there are moments in the classroom when I can hardly hold the joy. When my students and I discover uncharted territory to explore, when the pathway out of a thicket opens up before us, when our experience is illumined by the lightning-life of the mind—then teaching is the finest work I know.

But at other moments, the classroom is so lifeless or painful or confused—and I am so powerless to do anything about it—that my claim to be a teacher seems a transparent sham. Then the enemy is everywhere: in those students from some alien planet, in that subject I thought I knew, and in the personal pathology that keeps me earning my living this way. What a fool I was to imagine that I had mastered this occult art—harder to divine than tea leaves and impossible for mortals to do even passably well!

If you are a teacher who never has bad days, or who has them but does not care, this book is not for you. This book is