

*The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*

Parker J. Palmer

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Summary by Emiliano Aguilar and Warren Rosenberg

Parker J. Palmer's philosophical reflections on teaching are presented constructively in his now canonical book, *The Courage to Teach*. The book builds upon the problem he sees with teaching, mainly the disconnection between the three main constituents in teaching (the teacher, the student and the subject). The new afterward is written to address changes in the higher education landscape since he first published *The Courage to Teach* in 1997.

When introducing his observation that teachers have become disconnected from the three important aspects of teaching, Palmer begins his journey with the self. According to his text, "good teaching requires self-knowledge." Palmer cites various reasons why the teacher is internally divided, but none more powerful than stating that "we lose heart because teaching is a daily exercise in vulnerability." To protect against that vulnerability we as teachers become divided from what we study and who we teach due to an overemphasis on the protective stance of "objectivity." Palmer hopes that emphasis is placed equally on the three parts of education, and that in doing so the "subjective" is reemphasized.

Palmer's philosophy adapts the relatively new student-centered model to form a third model of teaching, which places the subject at the center of the educational experience. Teachers and students are placed "around" the subject and work together to better understand the discipline, co-creating knowledge in the classroom. He outlines a web of learning, connecting student, teacher, and subject rather than a top-down, uni-directional model. Consequently, he argues against the "coverage model," despite the large amount of factual knowledge available for each discipline, stressing teaching to what

he calls the “microcosm.” In teaching to the “microcosm” students learn the essential concepts of their field and can use them as a foundation for further study.

Palmer’s work is progressive and requires in-depth and complete reading, as each chapter builds upon the previous ones. His book creates a holistic vision of teaching of higher education that reveals the deep connections that underlie our apparent differences in field, methodology, and educational perspective. No brief summary can do his eloquence and insight justice.