

Parker J. Palmer

Time Line for Palmer

- 1939** Is born into an upper-middle-class family in Chicago, Illinois.
- 1962** Starts his Masters in Sociology at the University of California at Berkeley.
- 1970** Receives his Ph.D. from UC at Berkeley.
- 1974-1985** Takes a sabbatical at Pendle Hill, the Quaker retreat center near Philadelphia, where he become the Dean of Students before leaving in 1985.
- 1979** Publishes *The Promise of Paradox*.
- 1983** Publishes *The Company of Strangers: Christians and the Renewal of American Public Life* and *To Know as We Are Known*.
- 1990** Publishes *The Active Life*.
- 1993** Wins the national award of the Council of Independent Colleges for Outstanding

Contributions to Higher Education.

- 1993-1994** Is appointed the Eli Lilly Visiting Professor at Berea College in Berea, Kentucky.
- 1994-1996** Undertakes the "Courage to Teach" program while at the Fetzer Institute.
- 1998** Publishes *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*. Is named as one of the thirty "most influential senior leaders" in higher education and one of the ten key "agenda setters" of the past decade by The Leadership Project, a National survey of 11,000 administrators and faculty.
- 2000** Publishes *Let Your Life Speak*.
- 2001** Is granted the Distinguished Alumni Achievement Award by Carleton College.
- 2004** Publishes *A Hidden Wholeness: The journey Toward an Undivided Life*.

Introduction

Parker J. Palmer characterizes himself as "a Quaker, a would-be pacifist, a writer, and an activist." Noting that what he has become is compatible with his unique human nature, Parker suggests that he had not always known what he wanted to be. As is typical of much of his writing and teaching, Parker draws upon his own experiences to illustrate that every human being has a unique nature with potentials and limitations. Palmer warns us against "wearing other people's faces" and suggests that asking the questions "Who am I?" and "What is my nature?" is the first step toward achieving "the joy that every human seeks" and to the "path of authentic service in the world."1

A reoccurring theme in Palmer's life and work is a fondness for and the ability to simultaneously embrace seemingly contradictory or paradoxical positions or beliefs. As Palmer himself explains, "my vocation is the spiritual life, the quest for God, which relies on the eye of the heart. My avocation is education, the quest for knowledge, which relies on the eye of the mind. I have seen life through both eyes as long as I can remember—but the two images have not always coincided.... I have been forced to find ways for my eyes to work together, to find a common focus for my spirit-seeking heart and my knowledge-seeking mind that embraces reality in all its amazing dimensions."2

Parker J. Palmer grew up in the 1940s and 1950s in a white, upper-middle-class family in suburban Chicago. With his father associated with the same chinaware company

for more than fifty years—first as an employee and eventually as chairman of the board and owner—Palmer experienced a stable and relatively affluent home environment. As Palmer himself explains, his father taught him to rely on a "larger and deeper grace" and modeled for him compassion and generosity.

While love and respect characterized the boy's relationship with his father, Parker was not interested in a career in business. As a young boy, Parker expressed an interest in flight which contributed to his goal—announced in high school—of becoming a naval aviator. This interest in aviation manifested itself in a young Parker Palmer spending long hours developing ten- and twelve-page books on aviation. The logical consequence of this fascination with aviation seemed to lead to a career as an aviator or aeronautical engineer—but as Palmer later discovered and explains—this adolescent compulsion of making of books about aviation—when coupled with his fascination with language—enabled Palmer to find his true calling as a writer.

Graduating Phi Beta Kappa from Carleton College in Minnesota with a major in philosophy and sociology, Palmer moved on to the Union Theological Seminary in New York. Quickly learning—thanks to mediocre grades and a pervasive boredom—that the ministry was not for him, Palmer soon pursued his master's and doctorate in sociology at The University of California at Berkeley. Beginning there in 1962 and finishing his doctorate in 1970, Palmer experienced Berkeley during the tumultuous 1960s. Characterizing his Berkeley experience as an "astounding mix of shadow and light," Palmer was drawn to the "light" and left Berkeley with a "lifelong sense of hope, a feeling for community, a passion for social change."³

While pursuing his masters and doctoral studies, Palmer taught for two years (1965-1967) and loved it. Though he considered a university career, the "light" of his Berkeley experience fueled his belief in the possibility of real and lasting change. Instead of pursuing an academic career, Palmer accepted a position as a community organizer in Washington, D.C.

Describing his work in Washington as teaching in a classroom without walls, Palmer remained there for five years, interlacing his work as a community organizer with his duties in the sociology department at Georgetown University. After five years of this work, Palmer took a year's sabbatical at Pendle Hill, the Quaker retreat near Philadelphia.

One year stretched into ten, with Palmer eventually assuming the role of Dean of Students at Pendle Hill. Here at the retreat, Palmer found God in the silence of the Quaker meetings. As suggested in the selection included here, Palmer's understanding of and advocacy for dialogue as a pedagogical process has its origins in his Pendle Hill experience of the Quaker way of living and thinking. Until coming here, religion and faith in God had been largely an intellectual exercise.

While he was at Pendle Hill, Palmer's writings began to attract attention. In pamphlets on community and the power of paradox, and in books on spirituality, education, and on Christianity and the renewal of public life, Palmer began to attract a national following.

Following his decade at Pendle Hill (1975-1985), Palmer remained active as a writer, speaker, workshop facilitator, and consultant for educational, community, and religious organizations. Employed by variety of institutions, including colleges and universities, Palmer continued to teach and write, sharing with an ever-expanding audience his faith that an education that integrates the head and the heart can produce effective social change. Becoming an associate of the American Association of Higher Education and a senior advisor to the Fetzer Institute provided Palmer with a forum to inspire changes in

education and in the broader community of our modern world. Through presentations, speeches, and his writings, Palmer has established himself as one of the most influential leaders active today. Nearing his seventies, Palmer is considering leaving the public arena—as he puts it—“to make space for whatever else is out there.”

Permeating much of Palmer's writings and teaching is the theme that contemporary human beings live disconnected or inauthentic lives. Palmer attributes this lack of integrity or this disconnectedness in the way we live to the way that the modern world answers the questions “How do we know what we know?” and “By what warrant can we call our knowledge true?” Fearing the intellectual chaos resulting from a society where truths are no more than the personal whims of individuals, Palmer suggests that modern society has embraced a scientific *objectivism* as the only or ultimate reality. To acquire pure or untainted knowledge of this ultimate reality, humans must disconnect themselves from it both physically and emotionally. The modern human being has been socialized to believe that genuine or real knowledge is derived through scientific reasoning and must not be contaminated by subjective or spiritual elements. To the extent that the subjective or spiritual side of the human being survives, it is isolated or segregated from the rational or scientific self.

Palmer does not deny the importance or validity of “objectivist” knowledge but refuses to accept the either/or reasoning that offers a kind of mindless egalitarianism as the only other option. Searching for a way of avoiding the horns of this dilemma, Palmer suggests that the truths discovered and/or created in a complex, resourceful, and interdependent community of inquiry are at least as powerful as those derived from the more dominant *objectivist* model.

The modern world views the world through analytical lenses. In doing so, Palmer argues that we have fragmented reality into an endless series of binary opposites. While Palmer acknowledges that binary logic has resulted in significant scientific achievements, he suggests that our overreliance on it has destroyed or is destroying our ability to understand and appreciate the wholeness and wonder of life.

To Palmer, there is a reality that transcends either/or or binary thinking. Referring to Niels Bohr's assertion that “the opposite of a true statement is a false statement, but the opposite of a profound truth can be another profound truth,” Palmer encourages us to entertain the possible truths of seemingly opposite yet profound both/and statements. In certain situations, in which “truth is a paradoxical joining of apparent opposites,” it is more sensible to “stop thinking the world into pieces and start thinking it together again.”⁵

We ignore life's paradoxes at our own peril. One need only to look at education today to observe the consequences of broken paradoxes. As Palmer explains, the separation of facts from feelings produces “bloodless facts that make the world distant and remote and ignorant emotions that reduce truths to how one feels.”⁶ In what for him is a kind of spiritual journey, Palmer encourages us to open our minds to a kind of paradoxical thinking that leads to a creative synthesis of the spiritual reality derived from the heart and the objectivist reality derived from the mind.

To prepare us for such paradoxical thinking, Palmer suggests that we need good teachers. While it is necessary for good teachers to know their subject matter, how to teach it, and for what purpose, these skills and/or attributes are not sufficient. According to Palmer, the key question to ask is "Who is the self that teaches?" In order to empower others to embrace the paradoxical nature of reality, teachers must know their own hearts. They must become authentic beings who are comfortable in their own skins. In Palmer's words, "good teachers join self and subject and students in the fabric of life They are able to weave a complex web of connections among themselves, their subjects, and their students so that students can learn to weave a world for themselves."⁷

For Palmer, the goal of education is for each individual to develop his or her authentic self. This can best be accomplished in what Palmer calls a community of truth created by teachers who know their own hearts, individuals struggling with the question "Who is the self that teaches?" Palmer's community of truth is grounded in the claim that "reality is a web of communal relationships, and we can know reality by being in community with it."⁸ As one who knows her own heart, the teacher facilitates active participation of members of the group. As the group focuses on a common subject worthy of their respect, they engage in increasingly complex patterns of communication. Members share observations and interpretations, correct and complement one another, engage in conflict with others, and experience consensus almost simultaneously. As the community develops, members take ownership of a "circular, interactive, and dynamic" process that has meaning. In the community of truth, as in real life, "truth is an eternal conversation about things that matter, conducted with passion and discipline."⁹

Since Palmer's graduate work focused on philosophy and sociology, it is no great surprise that his educational ideas are closely aligned with those of Matthew Lipman's philosophy-for-children program (see Chapter 16). Both emphasize the importance of dialogue as a pedagogical tool, and both suggest that the role of the educator is to create learning communities that are eventually owned and maintained by the participants themselves. For Lipman, this is a self-correcting community of inquiry where a group of children begin with a well chosen text—a selection from a novel, short story, poem, piece of music, or scientific discovery—that is philosophically interesting. Using carefully crafted questions much like those Palmer advocates to create space that is both bounded and open, the teacher stimulates discussion among members of the group on issues and ideas of importance to them. Palmer labels his process as a community of truth and offers a more thorough analysis of the kinds of questions teachers or facilitators need to ask to foster the development of such a community.

A careful reading of Palmer's work suggests that his thought has been significantly influenced by Aristotelian and Socratic ideas. In addition, his rejection of either/or thinking is reminiscent of John Dewey's critique of modern thought. Still, he is unwilling to be limited by Dewey's naturalism but embraces instead seemingly paradoxical opposites as an essential component of his spiritual journey.

Notes

Parker J. Palmer, "Now I Become Myself," *Yes!* (Spring 2001), p. 2.

Parker J. Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey* (San Francisco: Harper Publishers, 1993), p. xxiv.

Parker J. Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation* (San Francisco: Josey-Bass Publishers, 2000), p 20

Parker J. Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life* (San Francisco: Josey-Bass Publishers; 1998), pp. 50-51.

Ibid., pp. 62-63.

Ibid., p. 66.

Ibid., p. 11.

Ibid., p. 95.

Ibid., p. 104.

From The Courage to Teach

The Hidden Wholeness: Paradox in Teaching and Learning

There is in all visible things
an invisible fecundity,
a dimmed light,
a meek namelessness,
a hidden wholeness.

This mysterious Unity and Integrity
is Wisdom, the Mother of all,

Natura naturans.

—THOMAS MERTON, "HAGIA SOPHIA"

Thinking the World Together

The culture of disconnection that undermines teaching and learning is driven partly by fear. But it is also driven by our Western commitment to thinking in polarities, a thought form that elevates disconnection into an intellectual virtue. This way of thinking is so embedded in our culture that we rarely escape it, even when we try—and my own words will prove the point.

In earlier chapters, I tried to correct several imbalances in the way we approach teaching. To correct our overemphasis on technique, I stressed the teacher's identity and integrity. To correct our obsession with objective knowledge, I stressed subjective engagement. To correct our excessive regard for the powers of intellect, I stressed the power of emotions to freeze, or free, the mind.

My intent was to rebalance the scales. But in a polarizing culture, it is hard to do that without slamming the scales in the opposite direction. In arguing for the neglected pole, I may be mistaken for someone who excuses poor technique, urging teachers just to "be themselves"; who believes there are no standards for truth, just "whatever you think it is"; who doesn't care about the content of your thoughts, just as long as you "share what you feel."

It is obvious (I hope!) that these are distortions of what I have said. But we distort things this way all the time because we are trained neither to voice both sides of an issue nor to listen with both ears. The problem goes deeper than the bad habit of competitive conversation some of us have: tell me your thesis and I will find any way, fair or foul, to argue the other side! It is rooted in the fact that we look at the world through analytical lenses. We see everything as this or that, plus or minus, on or off, black or white; and we fragment reality into an endless series of *either-ors*. In a phrase, we think the world apart.

Thinking the world apart, like thinking at a distance, has given us great power. Just as I respect the power of objectivity, rightly understood, I respect the power of analysis—in its rightful place. I have used analytical tools to develop my thesis in this book, and the remarkable machine on which I am writing it is driven by millions upon millions of either-or decisions. Without binary logic, we would have neither computers nor many of the gifts of modern science.

But for all the power it has given us in science and technology, either-or thinking has also given us a fragmented sense of reality that destroys the wholeness and wonder of life. Our problem is compounded by the fact that this mode of knowing has become normative in nearly every area, even though it misleads and betrays us when applied to the perennial problems of being human that lie beyond the reach of logic.

How can we escape the grip of either-or thinking? What would it look like to "think the world together," not to abandon discriminatory logic where it serves us well but to develop a more capacious habit of mind that supports the capacity for connectedness on which good teaching depends?

Niels Bohr, the Nobel Prize-winning physicist, offers the keystone I want to build on: "The opposite of a true statement is a false statement, but the opposite of a profound truth can be another profound truth."

With a few well-chosen words, Bohr defines a concept that is essential to thinking the world together—the concept of paradox. In certain circumstances, truth is found not by splitting the world into either-ors but by embracing it as *both-and*. In certain circumstances, truth is a paradoxical joining of apparent opposites, and if we want to know that truth, we must learn to embrace those opposites as one.

In the empirical world, as Bohr makes clear, there are choices to be made between true and false, choices that must be informed by fact and reason. If the question before us is whether a particular tree is an oak or a maple, we can examine its pedigree in full confidence that it cannot be both and that certain empirical markers will reveal what kind it is.

But Bohr also affirms another realm of knowing where binary logic misleads us. This is the realm of "profound truth," where, if we want to know what is essential, we must stop thinking the world into pieces and start thinking it together again.

Profound truth, rather than empirical fact, is the stuff of which paradoxes are made. But profound need not mean exotic or esoteric. We encounter paradoxical profundities every day simply because we are human, for we ourselves are paradoxes that breathe! Indeed, breathing itself is a form of paradox, requiring inhaling and exhaling to be whole.

The first two chapters of this book are full of ordinary truths about teaching that can be expressed only as paradoxes;

- The knowledge I have gained from thirty years of teaching goes hand in hand with my sense of being a rank amateur at the start of each new class.
- My inward and invisible sense of identity becomes known, even to me, only as it manifests itself in encounters with external and visible "otherness."
- Good teaching comes from identity, not technique, but if I allow my identity to guide me toward an integral technique, that technique can help me express my identity more fully.
- Teaching always takes place at the crossroads of the personal and the public, and if I want to teach well, I must learn to stand where these opposites intersect.
- Intellect works in concert with feeling, so if I hope to open my students' minds, I must open their emotions as well.

None of these truths about teaching can be approached as a simple either-or, though in academic culture we constantly try to do so. When I speak with faculty about the fear students bring into the classroom and how it paralyzes their ability to learn, often some critic will say, "So, you want us to stop being professors and become therapists."

No, that is not what I want. What I want is a richer, more paradoxical model of teaching and learning than binary thought allows, a model that reveals how the paradox of thinking and feeling are joined—whether we are comfortable with paradox or not.

Behind the critic's comment is a trained incapacity to see that heart and mind work as one in our students and in ourselves. They cannot be treated separately, one by the professor, the other by the therapist. When a person is healthy and whole, the head and the heart are both-and, not either-or, and teaching that honors that paradox can help make us all more whole.

When Things Fall Apart

It takes training to think the world apart because we arrive in this world with an instinctive capacity to hold paradoxes together. Watch a young child go through the day, and you will see how action and rest, thought and feeling, tears and laughter are intimate and inseparable companions.

In a child, the opposites commingle and co-create each other with the animal fluidity of breathing in and out. But that easy embrace of paradox is soon drummed out of us. Early in our journey toward adulthood, we are taught that survival depends on our ability to dissect life and discriminate among its parts.

The ability to discriminate is important—but only where the failure to do so will get us into trouble. A child must learn the difference between hot and cold to keep from getting hurt and the difference between right and wrong to keep from hurting others. But it is equally important that we retain, or recover, the ability to embrace paradox where discrimination will get us into trouble—the kind of trouble we get into when we enter adulthood with partitions between thinking and feeling, personal and professional, shadow and light.

We split paradoxes so reflexively that we do not understand the price we pay for our habit. The poles of a paradox are like the poles of a battery: hold them together, and they generate the energy of life; pull them apart, and the current stops flowing. When we separate any of the profound paired truths of our lives, both poles become lifeless specters of themselves—and we become lifeless as well. Dissecting a living paradox has the same impact on our intellectual, emotional, and spiritual well-being as the decision to breathe in without ever breathing out would have on our physical health.

Consider our paradoxical need for both community and solitude. Human beings were made for relationships: without a rich and nourishing network of connections, we wither and die. I am not speaking metaphorically. It is a clinical fact that people who lack relationships get sick more often and recover more slowly than people surrounded by family and friends.

At the same time, we were made for solitude. Our lives may be rich in relationships, but the human self remains a mystery of enfolded inwardness that no other person can possibly enter or know. If we fail to embrace our ultimate aloneness and seek meaning only in communion with others, we wither and die. Other-directedness may

serve us well in certain roles or at certain stages of life, but the farther we travel toward the great mystery, the more at home we must be with our essential aloneness in order to stay healthy and whole.

Our equal and opposite needs for solitude and community constitute a great paradox. When it is torn apart, both of these life-giving states of being degenerate into deathly specters of themselves. Solitude split off from community is no longer a rich and fulfilling experience of inwardness; now it becomes loneliness, a terrible isolation. Community split off from solitude is no longer a nurturing network of relationships; now it becomes a crowd, an alienating buzz of too many people and too much noise.

As Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, "Let [the person] who cannot be alone beware of community. Let [the person] who is not in community beware of being alone." In a culture that rips paradoxes apart, many people know nothing of the rich dialectic of solitude and community; they know only a daily whiplash between loneliness and the crowd.

We even have personality technologies to make the whiplash stronger. I am thinking of the psychological tests we use, or misuse, to categorize ourselves as personality "types." Am I introverted or extroverted, inner-directed or other-directed, intuitive or sensate, feminine (and made for community) or masculine (and made for competition)? We put ourselves in either-or boxes, or are put there by others, and fail to embrace the paradoxical nature of the human self.

The world of education as we know it is filled with broken paradoxes—and with the lifeless results:

- We separate head from heart. Result: minds that do not know how to feel and hearts that do not know how to think.
- We separate facts from feelings. Result: bloodless facts that make the world distant and remote and ignorant emotions that reduce truth to how one feels today.
- We separate theory from practice. Result: theories that have little to do with life and practice that is uninformed by understanding.
- We separate teaching from learning. Result: teachers who talk but do not listen and students who listen but do not talk.

Paradoxical thinking requires that we embrace a view of the world in which opposites are joined, so that we can see the world clearly and see it whole. Such a view is characterized by neither flinty-eyed realism nor dewy-eyed romanticism but rather by a creative synthesis of the two.

The result is a world more complex and confusing than the one made simple by either-or thought—but that simplicity is merely the dullness of death. When we think things together, we reclaim the life force in the world, in our students, in ourselves.

The Limits and Potentials of Self

Paradox is not only an abstract mode of knowing. It is a lens through which we can learn more about the selfhood from which good teaching comes.

In workshops on teaching and learning, I invite faculty to look at their own classroom practice through the lens of paradox. I ask each teacher to write brief descriptions of two recent moments in teaching: a moment when things were going so well that you knew you were born to teach and a moment when things were going so poorly that you wished you had never been born.

Remembering such moments is the first step in exploring one of the true paradoxes of teaching: the same person who teaches brilliantly one day can be an utter flop the next! Though we normally take that paradox in a fatalistic or self-mocking manner, in this exercise we are asked to take it seriously as a source of self-knowledge.

Next, I ask people to gather in groups of three to focus on the positive case and help each group member in turn identify his or her gifts—that is, to name the strengths and capacities of the teacher that helped make the case in question an authentic learning experience.

Conducting this exercise on paper, as I am about to attempt, is not nearly as engaging as doing it face to face. I hope you will try it with a few colleagues, if for no other reason than the opportunity it offers to affirm one another as teachers, something we rarely do. Not only does the exercise help us understand ourselves in the light of paradox, but it can deepen our sense of collegiality as well.

Here is a moment from my own teaching experience at a small college in Appalachia, whose students come primarily from that economically depressed region:

In my 1 P.M. senior seminar, we had been reading *Habits of the Heart* by Robert Bellah and his colleagues, whose main themes I had outlined in a lecture the preceding session. Now I wanted us to take the book's thesis that expressive individualism has replaced community and tradition—a thesis built largely on data from the urban North—and test it against the experience of these students from Appalachia.

I asked them—first in small groups, guided by focus questions, and then in our large group, guided by me—to explore what they had been taught and what they believed about "freedom" (one of the key elements of individualism explored in *Habits*), especially "freedom from . . ." and "freedom to . . ." The small groups seemed very animated, and in the large group, more than three-fourths of the students contributed to an open and engaging discussion.

Most of them said the same thing: they wanted "freedom from" things like unhealthy family ties, narrow religious beliefs, and prejudiced communities, and they wanted "freedom to" be themselves, choose for themselves, express themselves, and even "be selfish." Their comments seemed to fit the *Habits* thesis perfectly—and yet I had the sense that there was more to their lives than they were able, or willing, to articulate.

Then one of the students—a popular young man, well known on campus for his religious faith and humane spirit—found some excuse (I cannot remember what it was) to tell the story of his false arrest earlier that term for drug-dealing in what turned out to be a case of mistaken identity. Given his character and the irony of his arrest, it was a very funny story, and he had everyone laughing uproariously until I intervened with a question: "Why didn't you sue the police for false arrest? You might have gotten rich overnight."

The room quieted while the student explained that he would never have sued, that he was just happy that his mistaken identity had eventually been cleared up. Then, defending and excusing the police, he said, "Everyone makes mistakes." Almost all the other students quickly made it clear that they agreed with his moral position.

I pursued the inquiry: "Let me hold a mirror up to you. You talk in terms of individualism and self-seeking, but underneath all of that you have such a

strong sense of communal membership that you are willing to forgive the police their mistake rather than try to make money off of it. The kind of individualism the authors of *Habits* are talking about is not softened by that sense of community. The stereotypical individualist would have hired a lawyer that evening and filed suit the next morning."

In discussion, the class members seemed to find this interesting and insightful, and they agreed that this mix of individualism and community described them well. I ended up feeling that together we had accomplished two things: a deeper understanding of the book and a deeper understanding of the students' lives. I also had a sense of what the next item on our agenda should be: Why the gap between their individualistic rhetoric and their instinctively communal behavior?

What gifts do I possess that helped make this moment possible? Answering that question here may seem a bit self-congratulatory. I ask only that you reserve judgment until you read my second case. Then it will become clear that there is less to me than my gifts!

Here are some of the strengths other teachers have ascribed to me when I have offered this case in workshops:

- A capacity to combine structure or intentionality with flexibility in both planning and leading the class: clarity about my objectives but openness to various ways of achieving them
- Thorough knowledge of the material I assigned to my students and a commitment to helping them master that material too
- A desire to help my students build a bridge between the academic text and their own lives and a strategic approach for doing so
- A respect for my students' stories that is no more or less than my respect for the scholarly texts I assigned to them
- An ability to see my students' lives more clearly than they themselves see them, a capacity to look beyond their initial self-presentation, and a desire to help them see themselves more deeply
- An aptitude for asking good questions and listening carefully to my student's responses—not only to what they say but also to what they leave unsaid
- A willingness to take risks, especially the risk of inviting open dialogue though I can never know where it is going to take us

Receiving such affirmation is like getting a massage, which is reason enough to welcome it. But there are two additional and important reasons for doing so. First, becoming aware of our gifts can help us teach more consistently from our identity and integrity. Acknowledging our gifts is difficult for many of us, either because we are modest or because it is risky to stick one's head up. But when we are not reminded of and honored for the gifts we bring to teaching, it is easy for us to revert to the dominant pedagogy, even if it has little relation to who we are.

Second, we need reassurance about our gifts in order to take the next step—examining, with others, a moment when our teaching became all pain and no joy. Looking at our "failings" is always hard, but it is easier when done against the backdrop of our strengths. It can even be fruitful, as I hope to show in a moment, when we use paradox to transform a litany of failings into a deeper understanding of the identity from which good teaching comes.

Here is my second case. It comes from the same college, the same semester, and the same course, though a different section—thus proving that you never step into the same stream twice!

In my 3 P.M. senior seminar class, I was troubled from day one by a sense that a fair number of my students were cynical about what we were doing and were determined to stay disengaged. No matter what I tried, their entire emotional range seemed to go from silly to sullen to silent.

Three young women in particular behaved in junior high school mode, passing notes back and forth, ignoring printed items I circulated for discussion, talking to each other during both lectures and discussions, rolling their eyes in response to comments made by me and by other students, and so on. The whole class annoyed me, but these three were a particular needle in my eye.

After several sessions, I spoke to the class, said I was not happy with how it was going, named the behaviors I found distracting, and asked people to tell me what I needed to change—or else to get engaged with what we were doing. No one made any suggestions for changes, and as time went on, some students became marginally more involved with the class. But the Gang of Three continued to misbehave.

So I confronted them outside of class one afternoon when I happened to run into them on campus. "Confronted" is not an excessive characterization—I spoke with anger. They responded by telling me three things: (1) I should not "take it all so personally"; (2) I had made a mistake by disagreeing too vigorously with something one of them had said in class, which had made her mad at me; and (3) they were seniors who were tired of the college's required courses, of which mine was one, and had decided before the term even began to "blow it off."

All of that added to my anger, so I kept pressing for an apology until I got one. At that point, I apologized for my anger (which I realized was excessive, because I had become obsessed with these three) and suggested that perhaps we could start over. The young women agreed to try—probably to keep me from blowing up again.

Following that encounter, one of the three made a few real contributions to the class, but the other two—though they stopped misbehaving—remained disengaged. The class as a whole was dull and distracted, and I simply wanted to get the whole thing over with. I had found my sea legs with the group and was no longer thrown off by anyone, simply because I had lowered my expectations for any given session: *I made peace with the class by giving up on it*. I hate to teach, or live, that way, but with this group, that seemed to be the only way out.

I have reread and relived this miserable episode many times. It causes me so much pain and embarrassment that I always try to leap quickly from the debacle to the natural question, "What could I have done differently that might have made for a better outcome?" But when I lead this exercise in workshops, I insist that participants avoid that question like the plague.

The question is natural only because we are naturally evasive: by asking the question too soon, we try to jump out of our pain into the "fixes" of technique. To take a hard experience like this and leap immediately to "practical solutions" is to evade the insight into one's identity that is always available in moments of vulnerability—insight

that comes only as we are willing to dwell more deeply in the dynamics that made us vulnerable.

Eventually, the how-to question is worth asking. But understanding my identity is the first and crucial step in finding new ways to teach: nothing I do differently as a teacher will make any difference to anyone if it is not rooted in my nature.

So I ask the small groups to look at this second case in the light of a particular paradox: every gift a person possesses goes hand in hand with a liability. Every strength is also a weakness, a limitation, a dimension of identity that serves me and others well under some circumstances but not all the time. If my gift is a powerful analytical mind, I have an obvious asset with problems that yield to rationality. But if the problem at hand is an emotional tangle with another person and I use my gift to try to analyze the problem away, the liabilities that accompany my gift will quickly become clear.

What are we to do with the limits we find on the flip side of our gifts? The point is not to "get fixed" but to gain deeper understanding of the paradox of gifts and limits, the paradox of our mixed selves, so that we can teach, and live, more gracefully within the whole of our nature.

When I explore my second case with fellow teachers, I always learn important things about my teaching, as long as my colleagues are able to avoid the fix-it mode. Most important, I learn that my gift as a teacher is the ability to dance with my students, to co-create with them a context in which all of us can teach and learn, and that this gift works as long as I stay open and trusting and hopeful about who my students are.

But when my students refuse to dance with me, my strength turns to weakness. I get angry, although my relational nature often keeps me from expressing my anger in clean and open ways. I become silently resentful and start stepping on the toes of my unwilling dance partners, occasionally kicking their shins. I become closed and untrusting and hopeless far more quickly than need be, simply because they have rejected my gift.

I have no wish to learn distanced methods of teaching simply to satisfy students who do not want to relate to me: teaching from afar would violate my own identity and integrity and only worsen the situation. Instead, I want to learn how to hold the paradoxical poles of my identity together, to embrace the profoundly opposite truths that my sense of self is deeply dependent on others dancing with me *and* that I still have a self when no one wants to dance.

Using *and* rather than *but* in that sentence is important because it expresses a true paradox. My sense of self is so deeply dependent on others that I will always suffer a bit when others refuse to relate to me; there is no way around that simple fact. At the same time, I still have a self when relationships fail—and the suffering I experience is evidence of it.

I need to learn that the pain I sometimes experience in teaching is as much a sign that my selfhood is alive and well as the joy I feel when the dance is in full swing. If I learn that simple but profound truth, I might stay closer to my gift and farther from repressed anger and be more likely to teach in ways that will work for both me and my students.

The root cause of this low point in my teaching was not a failure of technique, though there are techniques that could help me in such moments. The root cause was a sense of self-negation, or even self-annihilation, that came when my students were unwilling to help me fulfill my nature.

It is embarrassing to put it that baldly. I know, intellectually, how naive it is to assume that other people, especially students, are here to help me fulfill myself—naive at

best and arrogant at worst. But that assumption is what did me in as that class unraveled, and my own growth as a teacher requires that I face such awkward facts.

To become a better teacher, I must nurture a sense of self that both does and does not depend on the responses of others—and that is a true paradox. To learn that lesson well, I must take a solitary journey into my own nature *and* seek the help of others in seeing myself as I am—another of the many paradoxes that abound on the inner terrain.

Paradox and Pedagogical Design

The principle of paradox is not a guide only to the complexities and potentials of selfhood. It can also guide us in thinking about classroom dynamics and in designing the kind of teaching and learning space that can hold a classroom session.

By *space* I mean a complex of factors: the physical arrangement and feeling of the room, the conceptual framework that I build around the topic my students and I are exploring, the emotional ethos I hope to facilitate, and the ground rules that will guide our inquiry. The space that works best for me is one shaped by a series of paradoxes, and I think I understand why.

Teaching and learning require a higher degree of awareness than we ordinarily possess—and awareness is always heightened when we are caught in a creative tension. Paradox is another name for that tension, a way of holding opposites together that creates an electric charge that keeps us awake. Not all good teachers use the same technique, but whatever technique they use, good teachers always find ways to induce this creative tension.

When I design a classroom session, I am aware of six paradoxical tensions that I want to build into the teaching and learning space. These six are neither prescriptive nor exhaustive. They are simply mine, offered to illustrate how the principle of paradox might contribute to pedagogical design:

1. The space should be bounded and open.
2. The space should be hospitable and "charged."
3. The space should invite the voice of the individual and the voice of the group.
4. The space should honor the "little" stories of the students and the "big" stories of the disciplines and tradition.
5. The space should support solitude and surround it with the resources of community
6. The space should welcome both silence and speech.

I want to say a few words about what each of these paradoxes means. Then, to rescue the paradoxes and the reader from death by abstraction, I want to explore some practical ways for classroom teachers to bring these idea to life.

1. *The space should be bounded and open.* The boundaries around a teaching and learning space are created by using a question, a text, or a body of data that keeps us focused on the subject at hand. Within those boundaries, students are free to speak, but their speaking is always guided toward the topic, not only by the teacher but also by the materials at hand. Those materials must be so clear and compelling that students will find it hard to wander from the subject—even when it confuses or frightens them and they would prefer to evade its demands. Space without boundaries is not space, it is a chaotic void, and in such a place no learning is likely to occur.

But for a space to be a space, it must be open as well as bounded—open to the many paths down which discovery may take us, to the surprises that always come with real learning. If boundaries remind us that our journey has a destination, openness reminds us that there are many ways to reach that end. Deeper still, the openness of a learning space reminds us that the destination we plotted at the outset of the journey may not be the one we will reach, that we must stay alert for clues to our true destination as we travel together.

2. *The space should be hospitable and "charged."* Open space is liberating, but it also raises the fear of getting lost in the uncharted and the unknown. So a learning space must be hospitable—inviting as well as open, safe and trustworthy as well as free. The boundaries around the space offer some of that reassurance, but when those boundaries hold us to difficult topics, additional reassurance is required. So a learning space must have features that help students deal with the dangers of an educational expedition: places to rest, places to find nourishment, even places to seek shelter when one feels overexposed.

But if that expedition is to take us somewhere, the space must also be charged. If students are to learn at the deepest levels, they must not feel so safe that they fall asleep: they need to feel the risks inherent in pursuing the deep things of the world or of the soul. No special effects are required to create this charge—it comes with the territory. We only need fence the space, fill it with topics of significance, and refuse to let anyone evade or trivialize them.

3. *The space should invite the voice of the individual and the voice of the group.* If a space is to support learning, it must invite students to find their authentic voices, whether or not they speak in ways approved by others. Learning does not happen when students are unable to express their ideas, emotions, confusions, ignorance, and prejudices. In fact, only when people can speak their minds does education have a chance to happen.

But a teaching and learning space must be more than a forum for individual expression. It must also be a place in which the group's voice is gathered and amplified, so that the group can affirm, question, challenge, and correct the voice of the individual. The teacher's task is to listen for what the group voice is saying and to play that voice back from time to time so the group can hear and even change its own collective mind.

The paradox of individual and collective voices is most clearly illustrated by an example from outside the classroom: making decisions by consensus. Here, no decision can be made as long as even one voice dissents, so the group must learn to listen to individuals with care. But as a corporate voice emerges through honest dialogue, the group makes a claim on each person, compelling us neither to roll over nor to be defiant but to seek, and speak, our truth more thoughtfully. In a learning space shaped by this paradox, not only do students learn about a subject, but they also learn to speak their own thoughts about that subject and to listen for an emergent collective wisdom that may influence their ideas and beliefs.

4. *The space should honor the "little" stories of the individual and the "big" stories of the disciplines and tradition.* A learning space should not be filled with abstractions so bloated that no room remains for the small but soulful realities that grow in our students' lives. In this space there must be ample room for the little stories of individuals, stories of personal experience in which the student's inner teacher is at work.

But when my little story, or yours, is our only point of reference, we easily become lost in narcissism. So the big stories of the disciplines must also be told in the

learning space—stories that are universal in scope and archetypal in depth, that frame our personal tales and help us understand what they mean. We must help students learn to listen to the big stories with the same respect we accord individuals when they tell us the tales of their lives.

5. *The space should support solitude and surround it with the resources of community.* Learning demands solitude—not only in the sense that students need time alone to reflect and absorb but also in the deeper sense that the integrity of the student's inner self must be respected, not violated, if we expect the student to learn. Learning also demands community—a dialogical exchange in which our ignorance can be aired, our ideas tested, our biases challenged, and our knowledge expanded, an exchange in which we are not simply left alone to think our own thoughts.

But there are forms, or perversions, of community that are inimical to deep solitude, that do not respect interiority and are invasive of the soul. When the group norm asserts, however subtly, that everyone must speak, or must speak in a common voice, then both speech and dissent are stifled, the solitude of the individual is violated, and no learning can occur.

An authentic learning community is not just compatible with solitude; it is essential to a full realization of what the inner teacher is trying to tell us. In a community that respects the mystery of the soul, we help each other remove impediments to discernment. Given certain sensibilities and safeguards, nourished and protected by a teacher, a learning community can help us see both barriers and openings to the truth that lives within us.

6. *The space should welcome both silence and speech.* Words are not the sole medium of exchange in teaching and learning—we educate with silence as well. Silence gives us a chance to reflect on what we have said and heard, and silence itself can be a sort of speech, emerging from the deepest parts of ourselves, of others, of the world.

Psychologists say that a typical group can abide about fifteen seconds of silence before someone feels the need to break the tension by speaking. It is our old friend fear at work, interpreting the silence as something gone wrong, certain that worthwhile things will not happen if we are not making noise. But in authentic education, silence is treated as a trustworthy matrix for the inner work students must do, a medium for learning of the deepest sort.

These six paradoxes add up to sound pedagogy—in theory. But what do they look like in practice? I will try to answer that question, with one proviso: what follows is not a "formula" for teaching but rather a personal account of how I have tried to hold these paradoxes together in my own work.

The principle of paradox can help illumine the selfhood of any teacher and the construction of any teaching and learning space, but the particular pedagogy I am about to describe emerges from a self-hood that may bear scant resemblance to your own. By saying yes—or no, or maybe—to what follows, you may discover something about the sources of teaching that have authenticity for you.

Practicing Paradox in the Classroom

To show how these six paradoxes might be implemented in the classroom, I want to look in detail at the moment described in my first case study—in full awareness of the humility required by my second case! When I sat down to plan the session described in case one, I began with the first paradox: the learning

space should be open and bounded. To implement that principle, I turned to the text we were reading at that point in the course, *Habits of the Heart*.

A good text embodies both openness and boundaries—the boundaries created by a clear and compelling set of issues and the openness that comes from exploring those issues in a reflective manner. By choosing such a text and immersing myself in it, I can often get a sense of the learning space I want to create in class. So I reviewed the issues central to *Habits*, finally settling on what Americans believe about freedom as the one I wanted to pursue.

But taking pedagogical clues from a text does not imply slavish adherence to it; the most boring classes I ever took (or taught) stayed so close to the text that we might as well have stayed home. By a good text I mean one that is fundamentally sound and—another paradox—one with enough unexplained gaps that it cannot be followed like a cookbook.

Students do not learn to learn from a text that is without sin, one that raises all the right questions and gives all the right answers. But a text with discontinuities and ambiguities demands our engagement, giving students space to move into its field of discourse and think their own thoughts. Taking pedagogical clues from a text means looking not only for what the text can teach us but also for what we can teach the text.

Habits of the Heart, it seems to me, is blessed by certain gaps in its data, which are based on interviews with a narrow range of Americans from which the authors draw some wide-ranging conclusions. From my vantage point at a small Appalachian college, I was aware that *Habits* had little to say about the large number of Americans who live in poverty and nothing at all to say about the unique experience of poverty in Appalachia.

To honor the first paradox—a learning space should be open and bounded—I decided to create boundaries by asking my students to focus on the picture of freedom that *Habits* paints and then to open that space by asking them, "What's wrong with this picture" based on their own experience. (Of course, the questioning approach itself honors the first paradox by creating clear boundaries around the subject while leaving students free to make their own responses.)

By inviting data from my students' lives into the conversation, I was honoring that part of the second paradox that says the learning space should be hospitable. Hospitality in the classroom requires not only that we treat our students with civility and compassion but also that we invite our students and their insights into the conversation. The good host is not merely polite to the guest—the good host assumes that the guest has stories to tell.

This second paradox requires that a learning space be charged as well as hospitable, a space where students are challenged as well as welcomed. I hoped to create this charge by lifting up freedom as the concept I wanted my students to reflect on. I knew that freedom was a major issue in their lives: some were still rebelling against their families, and others felt that the college unduly constrained their lives.

So my focus questions—"What have you been taught in the past about freedom, especially 'freedom from' and 'freedom to'? And what beliefs about freedom do you now hold?"—were chosen because I thought they might be hot buttons, and so they were. They got my students' attention, emotionally and intellectually, drawing them so deeply into the learning space that they could hardly avoid the challenge to think real thoughts.

To honor the third paradox—that the learning space invite the voices of both individual and group—I began by asking students to take a few minutes to reflect on the question in silence, the silence that most students require to think their best thoughts. Since simple silence is awkward for most people, I asked them to make notes as they reflected, giving them something to do. Then, in a subtle but shameless attempt to concentrate their minds on the task at hand, I said, "I will tell you in a minute what the notes are for."

Because my students did not know whether I would gather and grade their notes (which I would never do) or ask them to use their notes for personal reference in small groups (which I eventually did), all of them made notes, "just in case." Here is a small but significant flashback to the educative value of a charged ethos!

Then I made a gradual movement from the voice of the individual to the voice of the group. Following the personal reflection time, I asked students to gather for ten minutes in self-selected groups of three to share their reflections before the large group dialogue began. Small groups give everyone a chance to speak in a relatively safe setting, and the winnowing that they allow makes it more likely that students will have something of value to say when the large group discussion begins.

When the large group gathers, holding the tension of the third paradox—the voice of the individual and the voice of the group—depends heavily on the teacher's ability to facilitate rather than dictate the discussion. On one hand, the teacher must invite and affirm each individual's voice. That does not mean agreeing with everything that is said, no matter how ludicrous, as cynics sometimes suggest. It means helping each person find the best meaning in what he or she is saying by paying close attention, asking clarifying questions, and offering illustrations if the student gets lost in abstraction.

On the other hand, this paradox requires the teacher to give voice to whatever thought pattern may be emerging from the group: the group does not have a voice until the teacher gives it one. This means listening carefully and holding all the threads of the conversation in mind so that one can eventually lift up a fabric of thought and ask, "Does this look like what you have been saying?" I did this when I showed my students how the self-centeredness they claimed when questioned about their theory of freedom contrasted with the communal ethic they revealed when confronted with an actual dilemma.

The fourth paradox—that we must honor both the little stories of our lives and the big stories of the disciplines—is woven into all the pedagogical moves I have described. It is a hard tension to hold—not only because academia discredits the little story but also because the little stories are the ones students feel most comfortable with. Given free rein, they will hide out in their little stories and evade the big ones.

Though our little stories contain truths that can check and correct the big story (as my students' Appalachian experience corrected the big story in *Habits of the Heart*), the teacher must keep using the big story to reframe the little ones. I did this when I used concepts from *Habits* to point out that my students' resistance to suing the police for false arrest revealed a stronger communal ethic than their talk about freedom had suggested.

The key to holding this paradox is the knowledge that though students can tell their own stories, they, like the rest of us, rarely understand the meanings of the stories they tell. How could they, when education so seldom treats their lives as sources of knowledge? The teacher who wants to teach at the intersection of all the stories, big and little, must continually make interpretations that students do not know how to make—until they have been "heard to speech" often enough to do it for themselves.

The fifth paradox—that the space should support solitude and surround it with the resources of community—is usually implemented only in a metaphorical sense. In most educational settings, we cannot send students off for solitary reflection in the middle of class. But what we can do, even as we are developing a collective voice around a given issue, is to honor the soul's need for solitude within the group.

For example, I tell my students that much as I value dialogue, I affirm their right not to participate overtly in the conversation—as long as I have the sense, and occasional verbal reassurance, that they are participating inwardly. This permission *not* to speak seems to evoke speech from people who are normally silent: we are more likely to choose participation when we are granted the freedom to do so.

Honoring the solitude of my students' souls also means that as I listen to them speak, I must discern how deeply to draw them into a topic with my questions. There are some places where the human soul does not want to go—not, at least, in full view of other people.

I came to such a moment in case one when that young man told the story of his false arrest. I knew immediately the question I wanted to ask him, a question that would raise the issue of freedom versus accountability that had yet to surface in our discussion: "Why didn't you sue the police for false arrest? You might have gotten rich overnight."

But that question has sharp edges, especially in a context of poverty. It could easily be heard as "What are you—stupid? You blew a chance to get rich." So before I could ask the question, I needed to ask myself: Can this student handle the question? Do he and I have the kind of relationship that would keep him from being wounded? This is the metaphorical meaning of protecting a student's solitude: inviting the whole truth while refusing to violate the vulnerability of his or her soul.

The sixth paradox involves creating a space that welcomes both silence and speech. In the session I am examining, there was much talk but only one clear period of silence—when I asked students to collect their thoughts and make notes on the questions I had posed. That was a valuable interlude. But the silences that interest me most are the ones that occur midstream in a discussion, when a point is made or a question is posed that evokes no immediate response.

As the seconds tick by and the silence deepens, my belief in the value of silence goes on trial. Like most people, I am conditioned to interpret silence as a symptom of something gone wrong. I am the salaried leader of this classroom enterprise, and I live by an ethic of professional responsibility, so in the silence my sense of competence and worth is at stake: I am the one who must set right what has gone wrong—by speaking. Panic catapults me to the conclusion that the point just made or the question just raised has left students either dumbfounded or bored, and I am duty-bound to apply conversational CPR.

But suppose that my panic has misled me and my quick conclusion is mistaken. Suppose that my students are neither dumbfounded nor dismissive but digging deep; suppose that they are not ignorant or cynical but wise enough to know that this moment calls for thought; suppose that they are not wasting time but doing a more reflective form of learning. I miss all such possibilities when I assume that their silence signifies a problem, reacting to it from my own need for control rather than their need to learn.

Even if my hopeful interpretations are mistaken, it is indisputable that the moment I break the silence, I foreclose on all chances for authentic learning. Why would my students think their own thoughts in the silence when they know I will invariably fill it with thoughts of my own?

The particular way of practicing paradox I have just described may have more to do with my identity than with yours. But practicing paradox in the classroom is not unique to the kinds of subjects or students I teach.

I have been in high school science labs where the paradox of the individual and group voice is honored as students look into microscopes, one by one, then gather to seek consensus on what they have seen and what it means. I know teachers of grade school mathematics who understand that the charge of math's mysteries must be held in paradox with an ethos of hospitality, especially if girls and minority youngsters are to overcome a culture that says they are less capable of quantitative thinking. I have visited college literature courses where the big story and the little stories are held in paradoxical tension as the teacher helps students understand the drama of the family in *King Lear* by relating it to family dramas that the students know firsthand.

The principle of paradox offers no cookbook fix for teaching. But if it fits who you are, it offers guidance on any level of education and with any field of study.

Holding the Tension of Opposites

Holding the tension of paradox so that our students can learn at deeper levels is among the most difficult demands of good teaching. How are we supposed to do it?

Imagine yourself in a classroom. You ask a well-framed question, and then you wait and wait as the great silence descends. You know you should wait some more, not jump, but your heart pounds then sinks, and finally feels helpless and out of control. So you answer your own question with an emotional mix of anxiety, anger, and authoritarianism that only makes things worse. Then you watch as the opening to learning offered by the silence vanishes—and teaching becomes more and more like running headlong into walls.

That scenario—which could apply to holding any of the paradoxes, not just silence and speech—suggests a simple truth: the place where paradoxes are held together is in the teacher's heart, and our inability to hold them is less a failure of technique than a gap in our inner lives. If we want to teach and learn in the power of paradox, we must reeducate our hearts.

In particular, we must teach our hearts a new way to understand the tension we feel when we are torn between the poles. Some clues to such an understanding are found in E. F. Schumacher's classic text, *Small Is Beautiful*:

Through all our lives we are faced with the task of reconciling opposites which, in logical thought, cannot be reconciled. . . . How can one reconcile the demands of freedom and discipline in education? Countless mothers and teachers, in fact, do it, but no one can write down a solution. They do it by bringing into the situation a force that belongs to a higher level where opposites are transcended—the power of love. . . . Divergent problems, as it were, force us to strain ourselves to a level above ourselves; they demand, and thus provoke the supply of, forces from a higher level, thus bringing love, beauty, goodness and truth into our lives. It is only with the help of these higher forces that the opposites can be reconciled in the living situation.

Schumacher's words help me understand that the tension that comes when I try to hold a paradox together is not hell-bent on tearing me apart. Instead, it is a power that wants to pull my heart open to something larger than myself. The tension always feels

difficult, sometimes destructive. But if I can collaborate with the work it is trying to do rather than resist it, the tension will not break my heart—it will make my heart larger.

Schumacher's illustration of this point is brilliant because it is true to ordinary experience: every good teacher and every good parent has somehow learned to negotiate the paradox of freedom and discipline. We want our children and our students to become people who think and live freely, yet at the same time we know that helping them become free requires us to restrict their freedom in certain situations.

Of course, neither our children nor our students share this knowledge! When my thirteen-year-old announces that he will no longer attend religious services or a student submits a paper on a topic other than the one I assigned, I am immediately drawn into the tension—and there is no formula to tell me whether this is a moment for freedom or discipline or some alchemy of both.

But good teachers and good parents find their way through such minefields every day by allowing the tension itself to pull them open to a larger and larger love—a love that resolves these Solomonic dilemmas by looking past the tension within our-selves toward the best interests of the student or the child.

As always with profound truths, there is a paradox about this love. Schumacher says that a good parent or teacher resolves the tension of divergent problems by embodying the transcendent power of love. Yet he also says that resolving the tension requires a supply of love that comes from beyond ourselves, provoked by the tension itself. If we are to hold paradoxes together, our own love is absolutely necessary—and yet our own love is never enough. In a time of tension, we must endure with whatever love we can muster until that very tension draws a larger love into the scene.

There is a name for the endurance we must practice until a larger love arrives: it is called suffering. We will not be able to teach in the power of paradox until we are willing to suffer the tension of opposites, until we understand that such suffering is neither to be avoided nor merely to be survived but must be actively embraced for the way it expands our own hearts.

Without this acceptance, the pain of suffering will always lead us to resolve the tension prematurely, because we have no reason to stand the gaff. We will ask and answer our own questions in the silence of the classroom (thus creating more silence); we will ride roughshod over the dissenting voice that confounds our learning plan (even though we said we welcomed questions); we will punish the student who writes outside the assignment (no matter how creatively) to bring him or her back in line.

We cannot teach our students at the deepest levels when we are unable to bear the suffering that opens into those levels. By holding the tension of opposites, we hold the gateway to inquiry open, inviting students into a territory in which we all can learn.

How to do this is not a question that can be answered, for it is done in the teacher's heart: holding the tension of opposites is about being, not doing. But some words from Rilke may help. They offer no technique for embracing suffering, because one does not exist. But they offer hope for what might happen if we tried.

The words are from *Letters to a Young Poet*, in which Rilke writes as a teacher. He had received a series of respectful but demanding letters from a neophyte who admired Rilke's work and sought advice on how to follow in his path. Rilke not only took the time to respond but did so with astonishing generosity.

In one exchange, the young poet presses the older one with question after urgent question, and Rilke replies with this counsel: `Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the *questions themselves*.... Do not now seek the answers,

which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. *Live* the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer."

His words could easily be paraphrased to speak to the condition of the teacher whose heart is unable to hold the tension of opposites in the classroom: Be patient toward all that is unresolved in your heart.... Try to love the contradictions themselves.... Do not now seek the resolutions, which cannot be given because you would not be able to live them—and the point is to live everything. Live the contradictions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the paradox.

The hope Rilke gives me lies partly in his notion that on "some distant day" I might find that I have lived my way into a more confident understanding of how to hold the tension of paradox than I have at this moment. Surely he is right about that: having lived into the tensions of teaching for some time now, I am better able to hold paradoxes together than I was years ago.

But my deeper hope comes with Rilke's words "and the point is to live everything." Of course that is the point! If I do not fully live the tensions that come my way, those tensions do not disappear: they go underground and multiply. I may not know how to solve them, but by wrapping my life around them and trying to live out their resolution, I open myself to new possibilities and keep the tensions from tearing me apart.

There is only one alternative: an un-lived life, a life lived in denial of the tensions the teaching brings. Here, I play a masked professional role, pretending outwardly that I have no tensions at all while inwardly all those tensions I pretend not to have are ripping the fabric of my life.

Pretending is another name for dividedness, a state that keeps us from cultivating the capacity for connectedness on which good teaching depends. When we pretend, we fall out of community with ourselves, our students, and the world around us, out of communion with the common center that is both the root and the fruit of teaching at its best. But when we understand that "the point is to live everything," we will recover all that is lost.

I give the last word on this subject to Florida Scott-Maxwell, who, writing toward the end of a long and well-lived life, speaks with authority: "Some uncomprehended law holds us at a point of contradiction where we have no choice, where we do not like that which we love, where good and bad are inseparable partners impossible to tell apart, and where we—heart-broken and ecstatic—can only resolve the conflict by blindly taking it into our hearts. This used to be called being in the hands of God. Has anyone any better words to describe it?"

Questions

Explain why "who is the self who teaches?" is the key question for Palmer.

Compare Lipman's community of inquiry with Palmer's community of truth.

Explain Palmer's assertion that "we fragment reality into an endless series of either-ors."

Explain in your own words each of the six paradoxes of teaching and learning. Think of a personal example that illustrates each of the six paradoxes.

Do you agree with Palmer that "the place where paradoxes are held together is in the teacher's heart"? Explain your answer.

What does Palmer mean by either-or thinking, and explain how such thinking diminishes the "wholeness and wonder of life."

Compare Palmer's views of either-or thinking with John Dewey's discussion of such thinking.

In your own words, describe the ideally educated individual from Palmer's point of view.

Which of the other thinkers included in this volume do you think is most like Parker J. Palmer?

Explain what Palmer means by his vocation and avocation and how each are joined in his vision of the ideally educated individual.