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The Courage to Teach Writing

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The Courage to Teach Reading and Writing

BY DR. HELEN V. GILL, EDITOR

Have you read any good professional books lately? Let me recommend one that I have enjoyed. It is titled *The Courage to Teach* written by Parker J. Palmer (1998, Jossey-Bass Publishers). This small book explores the inner life of a teacher and takes "us into the deepest places from which our work takes form and illuminates that space with insights and courage that forever changes us" (Margaret J. Wheatley).

According to Palmer, good teachers do more than deliver knowledge. Good teachers replicate the process of knowledge by knowing how to engage students in the dynamics of the community of truth. While Palmer makes the case that good teaching is always and essentially communal, he hastens to say that he is not abandoning his claim that effective teaching cannot be reduced to technique. He reasserts that community and connectedness is the principle behind good teaching, but different teachers use different ways or methods to create community. Palmer also claims that a teacher must create the space in which this community of truth is practiced. Rather than telling students about the subject matter, a teacher must bring the students into the subject by creating a microcosm that demonstrates how the subject is carried out in real life.

As a reading educator, I can accept Palmer's pedagogy of the community because it is very similar to the integrated approach that is used to teach reading today. For example, Palmer's model would certainly embrace the Michigan definition of reading, the very centerpiece of the integrated approach, that states that reading is the dynamic interaction of the reader, text, and context to construct meaning. Published by Michigan's own Karen Wixson and Charles Peters in 1984, this definition that has become internationally accepted, could be perceived as Palmer's "great thing" or "truth" in reading.

Speaking of great things, this volume of the *Michigan Reading Journal* contains several. Having enjoyed outstanding speakers and advocates of reading and literacy who spoke at the Michigan Reading Association's 43rd Annual Conference in March 1999, several persons asked that the speeches of four keynote speakers be published, thus, allowing our

readership to savor and reflect upon some "great things" from the last MRA conference of the century. The first of these speeches is that of **Dr. Timothy**

Shanahan from the International Reading Association who addresses education for literacy in the new millennium at the national level. Following this selection are three speeches addressing the past, present, and future state of literacy in Michigan. These presentations include Michigan's initiatives by **Annena McCleskey**, legacies by **Dr. Elaine Weber**, and



visions for the future by **Dr. W. Dorsey Hammond**.

Great things may also be found in this issue's peer-reviewed articles. First, **Leslie Ann Oja** finds that workers lacking literacy skills are more likely to be successful when the literacy program uses real job materials, problems, and technology. Second, Drs. **Sandra Cain** and **Leonie Rose** give a rubric for assessing science-oriented storybooks and their use in the elementary science classroom. Third **Barbara Freed** advocates a technique called deep viewing to observe and analyze print and visual text. Fourth, **Dr. Pamela Zhu** demonstrates how bibliotherapy may be used to assist troubled learners. Finally, two short selections, a poem by **Colleen Klein** and an acrostic for administrators by **Dr. Mary McFarland-McPherson**, are intermixed with those articles.

I leave you with a challenge. This summer, in addition to reading the *Journal*, read at least one good professional book. Who knows what "great things" lie between its covers. Let's find out.

Sincerely yours,

Helen Gill

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