

## Editors' Introduction

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In this era of ever-increasing assessment and outcomes-based education, of escalating standardized testing (coming Borg-like, thanks to the encouragement of the Spellings report,<sup>1</sup> to a college or university near you) and strategic “visioning,” it can sometimes seem like most of the important debates in our profession are taking place *outside* of the classroom. But, in this issue’s commentary, Jerry Farber asks us to consider something completely unmeasurable but vitally significant: how present we are *in* our classrooms. We’ve talked before in this space about what we’ve termed “incarnational teaching”—that way of embodying principles in real, tangible ways in the classroom. What are we communicating to students about our intellectual and ethical commitments, about our view of the discipline, about the power of words and story?

These questions remind us of an anecdote from Jennifer’s fall 2007 British novel course:

I was giving my usual first-day syllabus spiel: office hours, course requirements, the “why I call on you in class” justification. Check, check, check. Another class smoothly launched. Phew. I blithely moved on to the required texts, gesturing to the eight novels we would be reading together over the course of the semester, and I started to say what I always say: “I want to assure you that you don’t need to love the books in this course to get a good grade, you simply need to. . . .”

A hand shot up, and a student interrupted me.

“But, Professor Holberg, do *you* love these books?”

A very good question, indeed — one that brought Jennifer, and should bring all of us, up short. We can all answer that question, perhaps muttering something about loving technical aspects of the novel or loving the intellectual challenge of a poem, even if the text itself is one we actually loathe. Then, too, we aren't saying that every text that we teach must be deeply beloved. Yet it is striking to notice that the student wanted reassurance of professorial love for the material. That oft-quoted line from Wordsworth's *Prelude*, "What we have loved / Others will love, and we will teach them how," nonetheless remains an important formulation of what we do because it reminds us that our love for our work (if we still feel love — the subject for another introduction, no doubt) is not self-evident or (to use a phrase from the Web) highly viral. Instead, it must be demonstrated by us and cultivated in our students.

All of this, of course, is difficult because it asks us to expose who we are, to admit enthusiasm when cynicism seems so much easier and always has so much great intellectual cachet. Calling teaching a "daily exercise in vulnerability" (17), Parker Palmer (1998) nevertheless helps us understand that love and intellect are not in opposition:

Good teachers possess a capacity for connectedness. 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. The methods used by these weavers vary widely: lectures, Socratic dialogues, laboratory experiments, collaborative problem solving, creative chaos. The connections made by good teachers are held not in their methods but in their hearts — meaning *heart* in its ancient sense, as the place where intellect and emotion and spirit and will converge in the human self. (11)

As this issue finds you at the end of another academic year, this connectedness and spirit may feel spent. Love and intellect are not easily balanced amid the pressures to certify our graduates and justify our programs. But as you prepare your summer research and writing projects, ask yourself: Do I *love* these books? Why do I choose to spend time on *this subject of study*? And if I do love this work, how do I let my students know?

## Note

1. According to a report in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, “Among recent key developments seen to stem from or be encouraged by the Spellings commission: hundreds of U.S. colleges are using standardized student-achievement tests, allowing comparisons between institutions, while investigating options for creating more such tests” (Basken 2007).

## Works Cited

- Basken, Paul. 2007. “A Year Later, Spellings Report Still Makes Ripples. More Colleges Test Students and Share Data.” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 28 September. [chronicle.com/weekly/v54/i05/05a00101.htm](http://chronicle.com/weekly/v54/i05/05a00101.htm).
- Palmer, Parker J. 1998. *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

