

Reflection Paper
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When I first started my educational journey I was not aware that I was so drawn towards teaching. I came from a small town and just wanted to be a firefighter. I soon realized the fire service is very competitive to get into. I decided to join the military to gain some life experience and allow me a way out of my small town. During my tour in England I was chosen to be an instructor of the Battle Field Airman Course (BFAC). This course was designed to get base personal who were deploying to Iraq and Afghanistan combat ready. Our students were military members whose main specialty was not in security. During this time is when I found my passion for teaching.

I had already been deployed once and was chosen to be an instructor of BFAC because my sergeants saw “something” in me. They noticed that I consistently helped teach the newer members of our unit. I loved teaching this course. There was a huge sense of pride that what I was teaching these students might one day save their lives. We taught them basic ground combat skills and improved their hand-to-hand combat techniques. Teaching the Battle Field Airman Course was my last structured class I have taught.

There is an old saying that states, “A firefighters job is never complete”. This can be perceived numerous different ways. When I read this statement, I like to look at it from an adult learners point of view. As firefighters we consistently train and prepare ourselves for multiple different emergency situations. We never stop learning. As technology advances we will always be learning new fire techniques and medical practices. Most of our training is presented to us through our training

division, our officers, and our senior firefighters. Even though I am a young line firefighter, I help build up and mentor the new members of our district.

While reading *The Courage To Teach* I was able to look back on my own teaching styles and examine my teaching philosophy. This book was very philosophical and allowed me to ask myself if I have the courage to teach. Each chapter was a building block on how I can be a better teacher to my students. What I enjoyed is these chapters didn't focus on techniques they focused on examining myself and understanding my own selfhood. Once I better understand myself, I will be able to better teach my students.

I believe Palmer wants us to look inward and realize that teaching emerges from ones inner self. Without self-knowledge we will never be able to fully teach from our heart and this is a crucial step in good teaching. I feel that once we know ourselves we are able to be available and vulnerable to our students, which in turn creates a good learning environment. "Good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher" (Palmer, 1998) This quote proves that we as teachers must know ourselves and if we don't, we are cutting our students short. As I mentor our new members I often ask them to go back to the day and just think about how they felt the first morning of fire academy. This activity allows them to reflect inwardly and remember the true passion for the fire service. During this time I also reflect back to my first day in academy. I feel this short time of remembrance is healthy for both of our souls, and allows us to remember the true reason we are firefighters, and that is to serve those in need.

Fear can appear in many different ways, from a classroom setting to being fearful for your life. Within chapter II Palmer showed us that students and teachers alike are fearful. Considering I am a newer firefighter I am often worried that my mentees are going to ask me a question that I don't know the answer to. My ignorance would be then exposed and I would feel like a failure. This type of fear is what pushes me to study and train harder. I know the day will never come when I know everything, and I am at peace with that. When a question is asked and I don't know the answer, I allow it to be a learning experience for both of us. I show my mentee where we are able to find the answer and we learn together in a collaborative learning environment. Through better exploring my inner landscape, I am able to overcome fear and teach from curiosity, honesty, and hopeful places within myself.

I feel one of the most powerful chapters is chapter IV. Here Palmer introduced the role of community in teaching and learning. This chapter turns the focus of the book towards the community. Palmer describes a few different approaches towards community teaching and learning, I have personally experienced both the objectivist myth of knowing and the community of truth. I enjoy teaching through the community of truth because it allows a freer flowing learning environment. The subject is at the center of the attention. When the subject is focused on, we are able to better create a relationship with it as compared to an object, which we cannot. I like to put the fire service mission as the subject. My mentees and I are then able to communicate back and forth on how we are able to better serve. This allows for an interactive and dynamic environment.

The next chapter really focuses on the teaching community. I loved this chapter because it really cemented in the focus of a subject-centered education and why it is so important. The subject can bring wholeness to the learning environment and allow for mutual understanding between the instructor and the student. This allows for the passion of the subject to be out in the open and for the subject to have a voice of its own. Palmer describes a math teacher who speaks about preserving mathematics through subject-centered education. (Palmer, 1998) This directly relates with one of the primary responsibilities of fire instructors. We must preserve, create, and enhance the fire service, in order to protect it for future generations.

In the final chapter Palmer presents to us four stages that are needed for a movement to happen. These stages don't have to happen in a specific order, but they are necessary for a movement to happen. He proves to us that we all can live an undivided life. If we have a vision and decide to make a change we are able to do that through understanding ourselves and believing in our own selfhood. This movement is not an attack on other people's belief but rather an uprising of our own beliefs in order to help guide and govern our lives. Palmer is trying to tell us to believe in ourselves, and allow your beliefs and visions to flow. All reforms start with just an idea or vision.

Reading *The Courage to Teach* has taught me to teach from the soul. I have discovered without knowing myself, I will not be able to fully teach my students. This book is a book that I will not only read once, but multiple times throughout different stages of my teaching career.

Works Cited

Palmer, P. (1998). *The courage to teach: Exploring the inner landscape of a teacher's life*. San Francisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass.