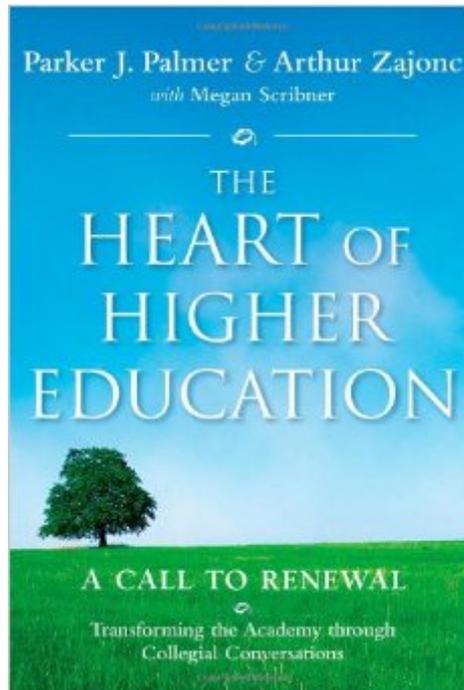


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# The Heart Of Higher Education: A Call To Renewal



## Synopsis

A call to advance integrative teaching and learning in higher education. From Parker Palmer, best-selling author of *The Courage to Teach*, and Arthur Zajonc, professor of physics at Amherst College and director of the academic program of the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society, comes this call to revisit the roots and reclaim the vision of higher education. *The Heart of Higher Education* proposes an approach to teaching and learning that honors the whole human being—mind, heart, and spirit—an essential integration if we hope to address the complex issues of our time. The book offers a rich interplay of analysis, theory, and proposals for action from two educators and writers who have contributed to developing the field of integrative education over the past few decades. Presents Parker Palmer's powerful response to critics of holistic learning and Arthur Zajonc's elucidation of the relationship between science, the humanities, and the contemplative traditions. Explores ways to take steps toward making colleges and universities places that awaken the deepest potential in students, faculty, and staff. Offers a practical approach to fostering renewal in higher education through collegiality and conversation. *The Heart of Higher Education* is for all who are new to the field of holistic education, all who want to deepen their understanding of its challenges, and all who want to practice and promote this vital approach to teaching and learning on their campuses.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

When I saw that Parker Palmer was a collaborator on this book I pre-ordered it immediately. His

writing and work have been like a lifeboat for me in both my personal journey and my work as an educator over the course of many years. I am beginning my ninth year in "higher" education after almost 30 years working with young children and families and my questions have remained consistent. Whether working with the youngest children or graduate students I have been amazed at how the systems that we work within discourage us from considering strategies for the education of the "whole" human. In early childhood education there is an emphasis on language and literacy, fine and gross motor, social and emotional development. In those settings I would ask myself how to acknowledge and reach those more intangible and unmeasurable places in the child: the heart and soul. My work with adult students and colleagues at the University has been the same. This book tackles the difficult questions and paradoxes of how to create a learning environment in which students are encouraged to cultivate both critical thinking and compassion; mind and heart. The authors do an excellent job of exploring the potential benefits of integrative education and the transformative conversations that may lead us to new ways of teaching and learning together. If you are interested, like I am, in how to help students learn to "think the world together" rather than "think it apart" in educational settings, then this book is for you.

Whereas Palmer's *The Courage to Teach* has become an inspirational text for a generation of teachers who want to re-enchant teaching with soulfulness, this book, written with physicist Arthur Zajonc, takes a more philosophical approach, establishing an education of the heart based on the foundation of new discoveries in physics. If the Newtonian approach to education focused on an objective world devoid of inner purpose, the quantum worldview considers the atom not as a discrete entity, but as a nexus of relationships (26). The authors believe that our most humane qualities — compassion, purpose, emotion, subjectivity — have been excised out of the modern university education. Early on Harry Lewis, former dean of Harvard, states, "The students are not soulless, but their university is" (3). If as Whitehead argues, "every intellectual revolution is a protest against inert ideas" (58), then this book asserts its transformative pedagogies as an antidote to the soullessness of 21st century university. Rather than technical mastery, the goal of higher education should be wholeness, which needs to be intentional and systemic rather than accidental and piecemeal (56). Zajonc, as the director of the Center of the Contemplative Mind in Society, gives special attention to the role of contemplative pedagogy as a means by which to offer students a purposeful, holistic education. Written by two leaders in higher educational reform, this engaging and insightful book is worthy of serious attention.

I first became acquainted with Parker J. Palmer's writing through his book, "The Courage to Teach," which focuses on teaching at all levels and emphasizes how the best teaching and learning happen when teachers and students speak personally out of their unique engagement with a subject. Teaching is a personal sharing of encounters with a subject, and it works when it invites students to become aware of and join the dialogue. In this book, co-written with physicist Arthur Zajonc, the authors focus on higher education and encourage faculty to engage in collegial conversations, across the disciplines at their institutions. Palmer and Zajonc hope these conversations will build awareness of this personal dimension to all learning and in this way transform colleges and universities. Their ideas are very appealing to me, though I have to add a skeptical note. In my own experience, such conversations are more likely to work among colleagues who are already aware of and committed to exploring this dimension. Others may see the whole idea as superfluous. It would be interesting if through conversation faculty coming from person and more subject-centered perspectives could explore and mutually respect each others' positions, but I'm not sure I or this book know how to make this happen.

It's a strong advocacy for an alternative education based on "new sciences", blending interdisciplinary proceedings in teaching and learning. An integral education implies wide range of virtues and qualities, such as morality, aesthetics, emotion, devotion, spirituality etc. At the universities only cognitive abilities receive some attention, putting aside other essential references for a good formation of young beings. The Authors try hard to argue in favor of a radical renewal, appealing to other pedagogies in higher education institutions, insisting upon "the heart of higher education" as being formation, not training. We can easily understand the argument, but it will be very difficult to convince faculty, who is quite resistant in changing its comfort zone. One problem is that such thinking doesn't fit in scientific method smoothly, because it appreciates measurable formalisms and empiricisms. For example, contemplative pedagogy "coming from Oriental inspiration" sounds marvelous, but it is seen as esoteric at best. In the end, we have to accept that higher education is not a kind of "education"; rather, it is flat training for cognitive aims.

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