Editor’s Introduction

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Parker is a school where there is a passion for education.

The writers of this book express the passions and explore the ideas that have for many years been the basis of the reasoned philosophy, the moral standards, and the reflective practice of teaching and learning at Francis W. Parker School in Chicago. This volume invites teachers, staff, board members, and others to join the authors in exploring the articulations and understandings of the purposes, methods, and reasons that underlie progressive education at Parker.

By no means is this volume a closed book. Quite the contrary: A Passion for Education invites you to connect your own passion for education with the thoughts and feelings conveyed in this book. This book is a work in process and in progress. We look forward to future issues of this book that contain new essays with the insights, reflections, and passions that you bring to the school.

From its founding in 1901, Francis W. Parker School has attracted and generated educators, students, parents, alumni, and staff who believe that education can change lives and transform society. The standards and practices that express Parker’s progressive philosophy of education have endured for more than a century because the founding ideals of the school continue to resonate powerfully and meaningfully in the lives of the adults, children, and adolescents who make up the Parker community.

Many schools have missions, but at Parker, there is a calling: a calling to teach, to mentor, to lead, to touch the lives of young people in ways that will inspire them to learn and grow and, with self-confidence, strive to make a difference in the world. Parker’s philosophy of education encourages students and teachers to thrive together on their involvement with ideas and with each other in the context of a diverse learning community. This moral philosophy guides the faculty to design curriculum and use a range of teaching methods that inspire each student to strive for excellence and creativity in order to know
the pleasures of learning and the value of contributing to the progress
and improvement of society. Colonel Parker put the matter this way:
“The needs of society should determine the work of the school. The
supreme need of society is ideal citizenship. Ideal citizenship
demands for the individual the highest degree of knowledge, power,
skill and service. Therefore, the one purpose of the school is to
present conditions for ideal citizenship.”

By nurturing a culture in
which students feel free and safe to explore their imaginations, Parker
teachers encourage students to become citizens who connect the
classroom experience with the outside world. As they grow into
adults, Parker students develop qualities of character and citizenship
that guide them through life as resourceful, thoughtful, and active
participants in a diverse, democratic society.

Colonel Parker’s vision of education is not an easy one to live up
to. There is no single, clear, direct path. Progressive education is
focused both on the means and the ends of education. The links are
interdependent. Our approach to education requires that teachers
be attuned to the needs of both society and each individual student.
To be child-centered without a commitment to the development of
citizenship is not only insufficient, it is irresponsible. To be society-
centered without being attuned to the developmental needs of each stu-
dent is not only insufficient, but irresponsible as well. Both approaches,
integrated and balanced, are necessary to promote the formation of
character, talent, and citizenship in each student. Parker is more than
a school: it is an ideal, and the ideal we aim for is to meet the needs
of our students so that they can develop, in character and in commit-
ment, ways to guide them in their actions toward ideal citizenship.

Education calls on the full capacities of thought and emotions
within the life of each teacher. Knowing oneself as an adult and as an
educator—knowing one’s passions and resistances, strengths and
weakness, needs and desires—is an essential aspect of the education
of each educator. This self-knowledge is born from experience and
reflection, from taking risks and learning from successes as well as
errors. Reflection is not only a solitary encounter with aspects of one-
self; it is also the pursuit of knowledge and understanding that can

arise from conversation and encounters with others. In this way, reflection is both a personal and a public act. It is a psychological and social experience as well as a mode of learning. This volume will be successful if it helps you shape your practice as a learning experience. We hope this volume will stimulate private wonderings and thoughts as well as meaningful dialogue and shared actions.

Each culture has its own unique and defining characteristics. As a school culture, Parker has its own set of distinct, complex, and subtle features that take time and study to understand. We appreciate how difficult it is to enter a new community, learn its vocabulary, discern its structure, learn how the institution thinks and works, know its strengths as well as its vulnerabilities. We also appreciate how important it is for seasoned educators to know how to develop and grow as professional educators over the course of time in this environment. We offer this book, then, for three main reasons: first, to facilitate the orientation of new members of the faculty, staff, and the board into a school community that has a long, distinguished, and particular heritage; second, to provide more longstanding members of the school community with an opportunity to reflect on their practice and experience of teaching and learning at Parker; and third, to invite others outside Parker to learn more about our approach to educating young people for the 21st century.

Parker’s current renaissance inspires us toward clarity and appreciation, moving us beyond a stance that can put us at risk for taking too much for granted. Specifically, as a school, we are committed to moving the school culture from one that has been based largely on the casual lore of oral tradition to a more articulated habit of written tradition. This book exists now because the school is at a very specific crossroad in its history. Within the next few years, many of our most senior teachers, women and men who have taught at Parker for most, if not all, of their teaching careers, will retire. Unless we as a school are careful, we risk losing an essential and detailed fabric of understanding about what makes a Parker education distinctive and distinguished: its philosophy, standards, and practices held in the faculty, particularly the senior members of the faculty, in richly textured, subtle, and profound ways. Providing educators, staff, board members,
parents and others with a thoughtful orientation process is vital for the school’s future, we believe, and for the future of American education. We offer this volume to provide an important pathway for new and seasoned members of the Parker community, and beyond, to talk together about education at Parker and at other schools. The purpose of this book is not to glorify the past, but to inform the present so that, together, we can make good choices now and in the years to come.

Writing forces us to be clearer in our thinking, reflection, and practice. This book joins other volumes as a resource to guide, encourage, and challenge the reader to join the ongoing conversation about Parker’s philosophy of education and how the values, standards, and practices of the school should inspire us all in our evolving effort to provide our students with the most thoughtful education possible. These other volumes include *Talks on Pedagogics by Colonel Francis W. Parker* (2001/1894); *Between Home and Community* (1976), edited by Marie Kirchner Stone; Parker’s first education journal, *Studies in Education* (1912–1934); and the new education journal, *Schools*.

*A Passion for Education* is by no means an all-inclusive anthology of the thinking, writing, teaching, and living that continues to animate our school, but it does include certain selections or references found in these other volumes. Reflective practice has always been a central and vital quality of teaching and learning at Parker. The essays in this book speak to the quality of reflection that has made Parker a school that is both open to new ideas and committed to supporting valued practices over time. Understandings about child and adolescent development and about the role of curriculum, peers, parents, and teachers in the lives of students all grow out of community conversation about the meanings, purposes, and best practices of education.

We have selected for this volume some of the founding and older documents because they are well-crafted statements of purpose and because of their continuing presence in the hearts and minds of our present community. In addition to written texts, we have interspersed ten line drawings throughout the volume, created by Mildred (Hoerr) Lysle ’22 in 1937 to celebrate the life and career of our
founder, Colonel Parker. We also have selected some of the most recent documents published by our present community because they, too, are eloquent accounts of purpose and practice, and they show the ways in which the fabric of our community life continues to rework the threads and patterns of our intellectual and moral heritage.

Above all, this book provides the reader with a sense of the origins and the development of a profound philosophy of education that has inspired teachers and students across the generations. This book records the many shapes of an ongoing process: how a set of standards and a collective imagination and spirit can foster a deep sense of appreciation for the ways in which a school can give life and hope to great possibilities for growth and learning, both for the individual and the community.

Parker has always committed itself to reflective practice. John Dewey, the great American philosopher of education, who worked closely with Colonel Parker; Flora J. Cooke, the school’s first principal; and Anita McCormick Blaine, the school’s founding benefactor, believed that reflective practice thrives on conversation and devotes itself to open-mindedness, thoroughness, and whole-hearted commitment to integrity and the possibilities that both continuity and change can bring. As the world changes, as the needs of a rising generation of students change, so too must educators assess the necessity of navigating these new waters knowing that the school must find ways to innovate as well as respect tradition.

The design of that dialogue grows out of conversation within the community. Reflection opens up possibilities to assess the balance between continuity and change, between tradition and innovation. We turn to our heritage as one means of beginning the conversation, hoping that as we understand how certain standards and practices came into being, we will begin to see how we may apply them to the needs and demands of the present and the future.

We open this volume with two expressions of the school’s collective purpose. For many years now, the school’s mission statement has been on prominent display in our hallways, reminding us all of the larger goals and values that shape our daily choices and actions. More recently, we have added a text to the façade of our school. As you
enter the circle drive, you now see the words of Colonel Parker that have guided our practice for more than one hundred years. Flora Cooke cited these lines in her introduction to Talks on Pedagogics because she found them so important. During this past summer of 2005, Daniel B. Frank conferred with Francis W. Parker School administrators, faculty and Educational Council members to produce a statement on standards and excellence inspired by those four sentences. We adorn the bricks on our outside with the words that express our inner values. Like the mission statement on the inside, the public display of deeply held beliefs infuses and informs the whole, reminding us of our core values and high aspirations.

A Passion for Education opens, appropriately, with the voice of a student meditating on the correspondence of our outward form and our inner being. Katie Jenness ’03, in her essay “Funky Bricks,” brilliantly portrays the subtle and profound ways in which the school invites strong, individual expression. Jenness found herself living in a school building whose very bricks suggested a design for community support along with a high regard for each individual’s unique, quirky, and challenging experience of school life. Some ninety years earlier, the founding faculty of the school described the origins of that school in their commitment to the teaching of what they call “motives” rather than facts or subjects. “The Social Motive in School Work” is the leading article in the school’s first volume of Studies in Education, launched in 1912 and dedicated to the publication of annual reflections on the intellectual standards and interdisciplinary practices of the school.

As a teacher, trustee or parent may well ask: How does a Parker teacher create the kind of relationship that these teachers and students describe? Frank, in his essay “Progressive Education and The School Romance: Toward a Theory of the Subjective Experience of School Life,” offers a conceptual framework for thinking about the wide variety of relationships that give shape and meaning to school experience for children and adults alike. He invites all members of the school community to value their school experiences, and those of others, and to empower all in the school to tell those stories and search, through reflective commentary, for their essential meanings,
both for the storyteller and for the audience. The overall aim is to explore the subjective experience of school life as a way to connect reflective practice with social progress. Most of the contemporary essays in this volume were developed in conversation between their authors and Frank, enriching both his writing and theirs.

This fertile blending of theory and practice has long been the essence of a Parker education. We return to student commentary in our next selection, this time from Volume VI of *Studies in Education*, as two graduates from the early years of the school, Eliot Dunlap Smith and Vera Edelstadt, extol an education for character in reflections that are remarkably similar to Katie Jenness’s observations more than eighty years later.

We see many variations on the theme of education as relationship. Two members of our current faculty suggest some of the ways in which we as teachers begin to make full use of our adult selves in developing meaningful relationships with our students. Michael Mahany and Robert Stone, in their essay “Bat-Child Found in Cave: The Dynamics of Humor in the Progressive Classroom,” reflect on strategies in their work with eighth graders. They give a number of examples from daily class management to overnight field trips that show the advantages of the judicious use of humor in working with students at an age when children are often unresponsive to adult sensibility. In the spirit of that judicious humor, we follow Mahany and Stone’s essay with a brief memory of Colonel Parker’s sense of humor, which at least to one person was so prickly and so forbidding that only the strong of heart could hope to survive the rigors of a faculty meeting.

Tom Rosenbluth, in his essay “Lost and Found,” considers the ways in which some members of a school community are adrift, perhaps lost, and how we might find them. Schools are demanding, even forbidding, places, and students as well as teachers often disguise themselves or act in ways that will deflect the gaze or even the attention of others. Rosenbluth listens to the voices of young and old as they call out, but he is also concerned that so often the hardest thing to do in school is to keep ears and mind sensitive, fresh, and open. Empathy is a powerful facilitator of change in human experience, and Bill
Duffy’s essay “Psychoanalysis and Education: The View from Self-Psychology” offers a deeply thoughtful and reflective set of insights about the use of empathy in teaching.

Beyond the classroom, and beyond our personal and professional lives inside and outside this school, Parker has always been mindful of our lives as citizens in a vast and complex democracy. From its inception until the present day, Parker has had teachers who have understood that educational policy is always a part of larger concerns about social policy.\(^2\) We are teachers, yes, but we are also citizens. The young people in our charge grow up to be our fellow citizens, and while we therefore must help them see the world fully and accurately, our mission is to give them the tools and the understanding for citizenship.

We are responsible, that is, for guiding them, sometimes explicitly, sometimes implicitly, toward their own discovery of what the world is, but we leave it to them to decide what the world should be.

This commitment to education is never very far from any part of our daily practice, as the reflections of our most gifted teachers often attest. Joan Bradbury, in her essay “Encountering Writing Standards: Confidence, Fury, and Self-Doubt in the Third Grade,” places her work with third graders in the context of the ongoing national conversation about the place of standards in educating children. She describes what she learned from her students in the process of administering a nationally normed writing test. In the richness of her account, and the profound commentary she makes on the savage reductionism of single standards, she recalls for a new age the founding spirit of a Parker education.\(^3\) Bradbury is fully aware that her students’ encounter with reductive standards is for them the exception rather than the rule; mindful of the ways these impositions pervert the tasks and alienate the children of so many public schools, her support and encouragement of student inquiry into the meaning and value of standards characterize a school community that makes the organic growth rather than the artificial measure of children central.

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2. See Parker’s comments on these larger concerns in the chapter “Democracy and Education” in *Talks on Pedagogics*, 303–342.

3. A compelling essay to read in conjunction with Bradbury’s piece is Parker’s 1882 essay “Examinations,” published in *Talks on Pedagogics*, 343–348.
“Funky Bricks,” Katie Jenness’s metaphor of the school’s support for students as individuals, comes from the architecture, the very bricks of the school. This echoes the metaphor that guides the statement of purpose composed ninety years earlier by the school’s first benefactor, Anita McCormick Blaine, who gave the school its land, its first building, and its fiscal stability for thirty years. Mrs. Blaine presents the school’s origins and aims as a metaphorical architecture. She asks that we judge the work of the school by looking to its foundations. For Mrs. Blaine, the standards of education arise from the compelling need that young people have to find and make meaning in their lives. The standards of our school, like the society in which we live, are democratic.

Andy Kaplan, in his essay “Teacher and Student: Designing a Democratic Relationship,” develops the meanings of democratic standards in recounting his adventures with high school students, focusing primarily (as teachers so often do) on those moments when a sudden rift or rupture helps us see the forces and the foundations of our relationship with students more clearly. Two kinds of adjustments characterize that relationship: along one axis, we seek harmonies between the mature and the immature members of our community; along another axis, we negotiate the tensions of the personal and the impersonal in relationships that require scrupulous professional detachment as well as deep emotional intimacy.

Teaching is a profession at once demanding and humbling, not least because to confront the issues of growth and discipline in a changing world requires a flexibility and a willingness to adapt to new challenges and new realities. Mark Mattson gives us a glimpse into the personal and professional dynamics of that change in his essay “New Reflections on my Brightening Glass and the Growing Light Inside,” which charts his remarkable capacity for self-reinvention over the past ten years. It is indeed heartening to read of a master teacher’s openness, to realize that with the passage of time, a good teacher continues to wonder, to question, to have doubts, to seek new ways of approaching students and subjects.

It is not only our teachers, it is our very institutions that think, and one of the most compelling institutions at Parker is Morning
Exercise (commonly referred to as “Morning Ex” today). The second volume of *Studies in Education* in 1913 was devoted to this central element in the life of our school. Founding Principal Flora J. Cooke traces the institution back to the early days of Colonel Parker’s career. She writes of the morning assembly as an outgrowth of New England transcendentalism, a quasi-religious moment in the life of the school that permitted all its constituent parts to experience themselves as a whole. As you read her description, it may remind you of what Ralph Waldo Emerson called “the Oversoul.” Ms. Cooke wrote this essay to introduce a volume called *The Morning Exercise as a Socializing Influence*. Martha Fleming, the woman responsible for developing and organizing the practice of Morning Ex at Parker for thirty years, describes the many ways in which the activities of Morning Ex manifested that influence in the lives of the Parker community. She makes us realize that it is not just what occurs on stage that defines its importance, it is more deeply what is going on in the audience.

From our earliest assemblies to the present day, Morning Ex has brought the world to Parker and Parker to the world. To use one of Dewey’s ideas, Morning Ex makes us aware of each other, not only as a face-to-face community but also as a public in search of the greater community beyond our doors. Much as we try to remain open and sensitive to issues and concerns in the greater community, we also try to face the challenges of democratic life on a personal level. Mary Dilg has published two books and written a number of articles on multiculturalism. In the chapter from *Thriving in the Multicultural Classroom* that we republish here, Dilg addresses the stress, sacrifice, and situations that some students have to experience just to attend a school like Parker. By helping us become more conscious of the borders and boundaries that students must negotiate, she helps all of us become both more sensitive and more active in the work we do with children.

The work of four recent alumni brings together the school’s heritage of cultural sensitivity and the socializing influence of Morning Ex in the transcript of a Morning Ex presented in April 2001. These students put together a presentation based on extensive archival research in the Parker Archives and at the Chicago Historical Society.
Their subject is a war of words between Ms. Cooke and the incendiary racist senator from Mississippi Theodore Bilbo in 1945. Long after she had retired, Ms. Cooke continued to be socially and politically involved, and her denunciation of Senator Bilbo’s racism reminds us once again of the lessons of ideal citizenship so dear to the mission of this school.

Our school has enjoyed the benefits of the long careers of many Parker teachers and administrators. It is one measure of our vitality that we have attracted and sustained such remarkable people throughout so many years. Equally remarkable is the tenure of many parents, whose careers in the school often rival teachers in longevity. Some years ago, Dennis McCaughan and Dan Frank wrote an essay on the subjective experience of school life. The two authors, taking their cue from what Freud called “the family romance,” wrote about the parallel ways we internalize our relationship with schools. They called this relationship “the school romance.”4 In an essay that grew out of our first School Romance Conference,5 McCaughan writes here about the experience of being a Parker parent. He describes the beginning and the end as well as the many fascinating turns along the way of what he calls “a love affair with our school.”

That same attention to a relationship characterizes an essay written some sixty-five years earlier about our school’s founder. In her 1937 essay commemorating the centennial of Colonel Parker’s birth, Ms. Cooke describes the ways in which personal, political, and professional forces shaped the mind and created the driving force of one of America’s greatest educators.

Two recent essays from Schools focus on the vexations and rewards of living and working with the senior class. Early in their respective careers at Parker, Dan Frank and Joey Wade each encountered the anguish and indignation of the school community as it coped with the perennial issues of trying to celebrate as well as separate from our oldest students. The issues are all the more complex just because they are perennial, and these two reflections show us just how vital and

supportive it can be to draw on the Parker community as we do our best to respond. Frank’s essay provides a view of school life that offers us insight into and appreciation of the broader group and organizational dynamics, both social and psychological, that can exist in schools. The essays also support each other: as Wade comments, it was the reading of Frank’s essay that inspired him to take a different approach to his current problems as senior gradehead.

We close our book with some general reflections on the standards and practices of Francis W. Parker School. One of Colonel Parker’s peers and colleagues who worked tirelessly to reshape the American experience of education was John Dewey. We reprint here a 1934 essay, “Education for a Changing Social Order,” on what it means to educate for change. Even this brief work by one of the true giants of American philosophy reminds us of the freshness, originality, and importance of his thinking about fundamental concerns of education. We also reprint “Fundamental Purposes and Principles,” a 1901 statement of founding concepts from the school’s first catalog. It describes the standards that define a Parker education in ways that we hope will resonate more than a century later with the present practices and commitments of our school. Jack Ellison, a legendary teacher and principal of the school, provides an appropriate measure of that resonance in remarks that he made to the faculty at the beginning of the school year in 1971.

We think it befits both the heritage of the school and the aims of this book that we end with words delivered to begin the year. At the beginning of the year, as the school begins the work of its second century, let us look together at how the people of Parker’s past have thought and felt and expressed themselves about the educational life of this community. As we ponder the beginnings of a new year in a new century, we hold up the past as a mirror, searching not only for what has been but also for a clearer sense of who we are and who we can become. As members of our school community, Parker counts on your insights and passions for education to help determine the shape of things to come.
The Mission of Francis W. Parker School

The mission of the Francis W. Parker School is to cultivate in its students qualities of character and citizenship that can guide them through life as resourceful, thoughtful, and active participants in a democratic society.

Parker aims to be a school where students and teachers thrive on their involvement with ideas and with each other. Through inquiry in the academic subjects, experience in the visual and performing arts, and participation in physical activity and community service, our school intends to inspire each student to strive for excellence and creativity in order to know the pleasures of learning and the value of contributing to the progress and improvement of society. We believe that engagement in each of these areas shapes the intellectual development, emotional maturity, and moral life of the growing student.

Our vision is to create a culture in which students and teachers work together to build a humane and joyful school where trust and respect engender in each person a disposition to question, to reflect, to sustain effort, and to act with empathy, confidence, and integrity. Deliberately composed of a diverse group of people, Parker respects the individuality of each student and believes that responsibility, collaboration, and intellectual curiosity develop when students are known and feel appreciated by their teachers and classmates and are encouraged to do their best by stretching themselves beyond their own current achievements and points of view.

Our commitment is to support a community of learners where students feel free and safe and able to explore their imaginations, share who they are becoming, and know the richness of heritage, interests, and passions, both their own and those of others. Our purpose is to develop citizens who, with their teachers, connect the experience of the classroom with life throughout the school, with our broader society, and with the wider world.

A Parker education leads students to develop the self-discipline, independence of mind, and collaborative spirit necessary to apply
their values, skills, knowledge, and ideas to think and act as vigorous participants in the life of our democracy. In these ways, our school strives to connect reflection with action, insight with innovation, deeds with consequences, and character with citizenship.