Live Encounters - Richard Brady

Parker Palmer is fond of saying, “We teach who we are.”  If we’re mindfulness practitioners, we are people on the path of embodying mindfulness in our lives.  Our teaching of mindfulness reflects this, regardless of the particular curriculum we adopt or create.  Our students get this in the way we talk, the way we listen, the way we’re present, the way we attend to them and to ourselves.  The actual mindfulness curriculum we’re able to share in our particular setting may be limited.  We may be constrained to not explicitly teach any mindfulness practices whatsoever.  Even so, students will get who we are.  They will see that mindfulness is more than reduced stress, emotional regulation, higher test scores.  They will see that it is a way of living.  They will see that mindfulness is not an individual matter.  That it is the solid foundation on which relationships are built.

In *To Know as We Are Known*, Palmer’s first book on education, he suggests that “to teach is to create a space in which obedience to truth is practiced.”  “Truth” here refers to the mutuality that exists between content, teacher, and students.  Teaching is a live encounter of all three.  That encounter will be different for different teachers teaching mindfulness to the same students, for a teacher teaching mindfulness to different groups of students, and for a teacher teaching different mindfulness lessons to the same students.  Generalizations about what should and should not be taught and how it should or should not be taught may be a helpful starting point, but must, in any case, be tempered by the reality of the specific context of the teaching.  It might be a helpful reminder to add, “Students learn who they are,” to the opening quote.  In K-12 education, student learning may also be significantly influenced by who their parents are.  Teaching mindfulness from one’s own experience, with an understanding of the truth the students bring with them into the classroom, facilitates the choice of content, pedagogy, and language that builds connection and willingness to engage in new kinds of learning.