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Palmer's Insight

Palmer has many different insights in his book. I most encourage his assertion that even after years of teaching, veteran teachers still have fear and still produce unsatisfactory lessons from time to time. However, what I find most insightful on his part is the assertion that students have to see a teacher as a person.

From my own experience in High School, I can think of teachers who were notorious for being strict, yet had students frequently act up in their class. I can also think of teachers who were famous for being lax, and who had little discipline. As a High School student, I quickly concluded that authority breeds rebellion, and the more a teacher tries to tighten his or her grip on a class, the more problematic that class becomes. However, looking back I remember strict teachers who had no discipline problem, and not so strict teachers who were walked over by the class. Perhaps a large part of it has to do with other factors, such as how well the teacher can entertain the class, or how successful the teacher's activities are at occupying the class. I think a large part of it though, perhaps most of it, is how well the class saw the teacher as a person.

The teacher's who were successful knew how to interact with the class. They would share personal stories, and invite the class to do the same. They would talk to students outside of class, find out what the student's interests were and talk to the students about these interests. They would often talk to the students as equals, in class as well as outside of class. Even though nobody was deceived as to who had the classroom authority, the teacher would not let that stand in the way of interacting with students on a personal basis. They would often show the students that they had a sense of humor, and appreciate student responses.

By contrast, teachers who had many discipline problems would exhibit none of these characteristics. They would not talk to the class about anything except the subject at hand. They seemed as if they never knew anything besides fractions and multiplication, or whatever the subject was. It was difficult, almost impossible, to imagine that they had once been young, or that they had friends outside of the workplace.