

Book Review

***Teaching Presence: Field Notes for Players.* Lee Worley. Naropa University Press, 2018. 152pp.**

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Teaching Presence is a book about the practice of being, relating, and exploring the present moment. It consists of twenty-five chapters organized in four sections: Body, Speech, Mind, and Co-Creating with Space. In each chapter, there are three parts: a principle in relation to presence (context and aims), an exercise and variations of its practice, and guidelines for facilitating it. The book is situated in the field of mindfulness, a notion and practice, originally of Buddhist-descent, that is increasingly used by more and more activities in Western social settings (like arts, sports, therapy and education). Worley questions the contemporary enthusiastic employment of the term and points out two aspects that have been misused or forgotten. She proposes a synchronization uniting 'mindfulness and bodyfulness' (p.13) and an 'awake presence' (p.145) that does not only serve as stress and anxiety relief but embodies a 'common sense that dwells as wisdom and compassion in our head and hearts' (p.26). She argues for a 'tenderness training' (p.13) that underlies all practices of the now but most importantly penetrates a major one: teaching. The practical elaboration of the body-mind integration and cultivation of an open and compassionate heart in the teaching environment constitute the focus of the book.

Teaching Presence is an outstanding practitioner's handbook in the literature of practice-based research. Key notions such as 'body mind awareness', 'space awareness', 'sense perception', 'contemplation' and 'empty mind' are examined both as concepts and physical realities or, as Worley determines them, 'felt-sense experiences' (p.48). I was inspired particularly by the practices 'presence in communication' (p.91) and 'group contemplative dialogue' (p.95) where tools for group presence are given to enable groups to maintain conversation through an awareness of the body, mind, heart, space, speech and the others. On one hand, these practices can operate as problem solving techniques in all kinds of group settings (especially in a class) and on the other they shift the paradigm

of what mindfulness could look like and where it could be applied. I loved the sections 'on becoming bored' (p.41) and 'reclaiming a flexible mind' (p.57). Both of these parts describe how the mental challenges of being bored and projecting which, within the western cultural context, we are taught to move away from, are a 'warning system' (p.42) of the ego for change and invite us 'to choose freshly how we view our world' (p.60).

Quite remarkable is the way the structure and the design of the book perform the embodied and contemplative nature of its content. Sections accumulatively unfold, one from within the other, allowing the content of the book to evolve organically as a training process in the studio as the practice becomes more and more advanced. Every chapter of the book is accompanied by different pictures of landscapes which make a somatic impact and provide a meditative response to the writing. *Teaching Presence* is a text of embodied knowledge distilled through practices of Buddhism, contemplative teaching and performance making. It connects mind, body, heart and space to create a practice of presence as a process through which to 'slow down and attune to a natural rhythm in which we can all dance together' (p.122). Now, more than ever, there is an imperative need of such books.