

The Difference Between Education and Training

by Rachel Naomi Remen

For me, the process of education is intimately related to the process of healing. The root word of education -- educate -- means to lead forth a hidden wholeness in another person. A genuine education fosters self-knowledge, self-trust, creativity and the full expression of one's unique identity. It gives people the courage to be more. Yet over the years so many health professionals have told me that they feel personally wounded by their experience of professional school and profoundly diminished by it. This was my experience as well.

It has made me wonder. Perhaps what we have all experienced is not an education at all but a training, which is something quite different. Certainly in medicine the training dimension of schooling has become more and more central and assumed a greater importance as the many techniques of the scientific approach have been developed. The goal of a training is competence and replicability. Uniqueness is often discouraged and may even be viewed as dangerous.

A training is all about the right way and the wrong way to do everything. In a training your own way of doing something can often become irrelevant. In such a milieu students often experience their learning as a constant struggle to be good enough. Training creates a culture of relentless evaluation and judgment. In response students try to become someone different than who they are.

At the end of the Healer's Art teachings, the students stand in a large circle, silently review their memories of the course and identify the most important thing that they learned or remembered during the course. They then turn this insight into an affirmation: a little phrase which begins in one of three ways: I am ... I can ... or I will. One at a time, the students go around the circle each saying their phrase out loud. This year will be the 24th year that I have taught the course at my medical school. The most common thing that students say in this sharing is a simple three-word phrase: I AM ENOUGH. Year after year it is the same phrase I myself say as well. It is the beginning of everything.

In Medicine, training is essential to technical competence. The real question is, is training good enough?

[...]

My dream of medicine was not to become competent. My dream was to become a friend to life. It was that dream that enabled me to endure the relentless pursuit of competency required of me. But competence did not fulfill me then and could not have fulfilled me for my medical lifetime. Only a dream can do that.