

## KNOWING VS. BELIEVING

The conventional idea of teaching is that a teacher has the ability to cause someone else to know something the teacher knows. If the teacher is skilled, the student learns it and knows it.

Yet, when I consider this, I realize that everything I would say I would say I “know” is not what my teachers taught, but what I saw for myself, beyond the teaching. The passage from teaching to learning to *knowing* includes a mysterious, unmarked pathway.

Someone in one of our follow-up classes recently brought this into focus when she said, “Everything you told us in the first class made sense. Although at first I didn’t want to believe you because it was too simple, I did finally believe what you said. I just didn’t see what it had to do with me and my life.” She added that she had come to believe me because she had been struck by how certain I was that everyone has innate health and how it seemed to be absolutely true for me.

As she spoke, it occurred to me that this person could have passed a test on the points made in the class immediately after the class. She could have put together an outline and informed others of those points. The judgment could be made that she “learned” what had been “taught”. But, in point of fact, she didn’t “know” it at all. She simply took it in and believed it. It did not affect her beyond her intellect. It would not do any harm for her to believe and tell others that people could have a stress-free life filled with love and joy and a host of beautiful feelings. Yet believing it would not actually help her (or anyone else) to have a stress-free life. That would only happen when she could *know* it.

She went on to say that a while after she had been to the class, she had a realization that profoundly changed her way of going about life. What she realized was connected to what she had believed from the class, but it was in her own words and of her own understanding, and it was her own true knowledge. It arrived as an insight that filled her with hope and a vision for positive action. At that point, she began to change her life and experience a whole different quality of life. Only after that happened did she recognize that her insight was what she had learned in class in a new form that meant something to her and worked for her. Those ideas from the class were information about life, of no particular use to her, until they came alive within her as her own understanding about life, of profound benefit to her.

As much as I’d love to think that the ideas presented in class were so compelling that she couldn’t get them off her mind, that the stories told were so moving that they filled her heart with hope, that the metaphors used were so vivid that she resonated with them, that the logic was so clear that she couldn’t ignore it – as much as I’d love to think I really

am a skilled “teacher” who caused her to “know” something wonderful that changed her life – that’s is quite clearly not the case. The intermediary between the teaching/learning and *knowing* was her own innate ability to think for herself that elicited her own wise insight. Not my teaching.

What she did remember and could not get off her mind was that I seemed calm and content and unaffected by stress, and obviously what I was talking about was true for me. It meant something to her that I *knew*, and would not waver in my certainty, that there is such a thing as a cure for stress, and it is possible for everybody, no matter what. She *felt* my faith in that, even as she was making up objections in her own head as to why these good ideas would not help her. She left with the lingering *feeling* that they could help her, even though it didn’t seem very likely at that time.

The only thing that touched her was what she felt. And the only way it touched her was that she could see that it was knowledge, deeper than beliefs, even though she didn’t know it herself and couldn’t yet put it into words.

That is humbling. It does not improve the power of teaching innate health for the messengers to become ever more skilled at communicating information. It will only influence the power of the teaching for the messengers to become ever more unwavering in their faith, their serenity, their joy and their love of life. The message is embedded in the being of the teacher and can neither be hidden nor faked. It is the fact of contentment and resiliency awakened, the truth of the human spirit. It is a serendipitous blessing of happiness always available within everyone, that, once known, is naturally shared, regardless of the form in which it is shared or whether there is even an intention to share it. The real preparation for teaching is a truly insight-filled, increasingly wonderful life.

That is also instructive. Many people “believe” that everyone could have peace of mind, and “believe” that there is innate health in people available to be tapped into as resiliency and common sense, and “believe” that thinking is the vehicle for the experience of insight. But believing it does not “make it so” for them personally, and when they talk about it, they can spread the belief, but they do not point directly to the mysterious pathway to knowledge. They evoke a commitment to shared wishful thinking, based on logic, that any day now, if we look hard enough, we’ll find happiness. Their lives are filled with searchers hoping to find something and postponing their true happiness while examining and explaining their beliefs about happiness.

The former is wisdom, emerging from a feeling. The latter is positive thinking, based on a logical set of ideas.

This is a lesson. For a time, I thought that human distress was the result of the fact that most people had the idea that it’s an outside-in world, that things and people and events

are the cause of our feelings and experience of life. I thought that human distress would dissolve if people only got the idea that it's actually an inside-out world, that our own thinking and how we understand it, hold it and use it cause our feelings and our experience of life. I was, at that time, a passionate "advocate" of turning away from outside-in and learning that inside-out was the true direction of the flow of life. The logic of it was very clear. No one disagreed with the logic. A lot of people believed me, but nobody's life was changing. Many joined me in a more optimistic view of what was possible. And we wondered together when it would move from possibility into actuality.

At some point, I saw that learning something, "getting the idea", is not even close to "knowing"; it's not even in the same realm. As long as I missed that point, I was baffled why people "got it" but didn't "have it" for themselves, myself included. Until I had the good fortune to stumble upon the pathway from learning to knowing, I was engaged in wishful thinking. I was fervently sure it was true, but I didn't "know" the truth, so all I had to share was my learning, my beliefs. Certainly, optimism is better than cynicism or pessimism, so believing in the potential for positive change and feeling hopeful is light years better than the opposite. But it doesn't move mountains; it only makes mountains appear more likely to be moveable some day.

What moves mountains is insight, insight so clear, so powerful, so absolute that everything looks totally different from that moment on. That is true change from within, the direct knowledge of change, not just the belief that change can happen.

This explains why some of the greatest teachers about life are not people educated to be teachers, but people with extraordinary insight who can't help but exemplify the truth they have experienced and *know*, deep within themselves. That explains why people's lives change, without any effort, when they have such insights because what comes to them is wisdom and clarity that is inevitable and inescapable. Others describe them as "courageous" and they look amazed. What is courageous about doing the only thing that makes sense to do? No one has to overcome fear of the obvious! I saw that in the class, too. As this woman told her story of how she had completely changed her life, one of the other people turned to her and said, "Wow! You have a lot of courage." She looked entirely puzzled by that remark, and she shrugged. "I did what I saw to do," she said.

It is always possible to substitute one set of beliefs for another, to learn something new, or to learn something that makes more sense than something else we've learned and overrides it. Learning is like mixing paint, pouring things from one bucket into another, adding a little of this to that, or like filling empty buckets with the contents from full buckets. It's all about the contents of the bucket.

*Knowing* is different. *Knowing* is understanding where paint comes from, and why you can mix it or move it. It's all about the painter.

©Judith A. Sedgeman, EdD