

“SET INNOVATION FREE” - a personal reflection

Alexander Technique International Congress Limerick 2015

I saw this heading just after I got back from the Alexander Technique Congress (on the cover of an “Economist” magazine). I thought “yes, that’s the debate in our profession and a large part of the message being explored at Limerick this year.” Innovation was referred to a number of times in the main talks of the event, with Michael Gelb in particular drawing out the required qualities - including optimism. It was also a theme for discussion at Continuous Learning programmes and smaller events.

This was my first Congress - having qualified with STAT four years ago - so I was intrigued by the different approaches to innovation. The balance of fidelity to principles and exploring how to communicate those principles in today’s world, in groups and large settings as well as individual lessons, was a personal theme for me.

Gratitude was another theme introduced by Michael Gelb at the opening ceremony. We took time to remember the early teachers who are no longer alive to participate in the exploration of this work. Even before the opening ceremony we experienced the generosity of some USA teachers offering us a “Marjorie Barstow tea party” and explored walking with them on the terrace.

There was a great deal on offer - almost too much - although I am glad the organisers opted for a rich offering, leaving it to us to create our own particular palette of colour and exploration. I chose to focus on the Continuous Learning themes, which provided a substantial period of learning and exploration through the week and was glad to be able to add in some workshops too.

The campus generally worked well, with very comfortable student accommodation. It was a joy to walk over the river Shannon several times a day moving between venues. The river provided an opportunity for moments of beauty, spaciousness & fresh air between many indoor activities. I had arrived early and explored Limerick and visited the famous medieval carved choir seats which Galen Cranz spoke of in her presentation.

Ted Dimon's emphasis that it is ideas that change the world (more than marketing) was very welcome - though I notice that he is very good at marketing too! I was delighted to hear him comment that "AT is a very subtle and advanced form of mindfulness" (I hope I quote him accurately). I would like to develop a conversation with him and others about that.

I came away with vivid body memories of particular experiences in the continuous learning sessions I attended with John Nicholls, Missy Vineyard and Vivien Mackie - all very different and exploring fidelity and innovation in their own ways.

We all have our particular circumstances and challenges. I was interested to learn more about working with older people through recent UK research (STAT research group) and Mary Derbyshire's workshop about her work with seniors in the USA. Also thought provoking was "i-AT" (as introduced by Jeando Masoero). These reflections brought me home to my own particular research interests. This is exploring what Alexander Technique can offer to the secular Mindfulness world, which as one presenter (Niall Kelly I think) commented "has become mainstream in a way AT can only dream of." As an ordained Buddhist I also have a deep personal interest in how AT can contribute to how Buddhists practice Mindfulness too. May we all continue to explore fidelity and innovation. My understanding of the AT world has grown, and I am grateful.