

TEDx: The Growth of Certainty – Including it All
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Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing,
there is a field. I'll meet you there.

When the soul lies down in that grass,
the world is too full to talk about.
Ideas, language, even the phrase "each other" doesn't make any sense. - Rumi

An innocuous email from a technology colleague at my school arrived in my “In Box” last October. The email informed us of the upcoming TEDxABQ Symposium on “Innovations in Education” and that they were accepting proposals. For those of you who don’t know, TED stands for Technology, Entertainment and Design, and their motto is “Ideas Worth Spreading” These ideas are presented through talks which are typically 9-18 minutes long.

For some reason, I dashed off a proposal and didn’t think anything of it. A month or so later, I received a “We’re sorry, but your proposal is rejected” email. Five minutes later I received a second email from a different person saying “Yes! We would like you to be a part of our symposium.” So commenced the wild ride that would unfold over the next 7 weeks.

Our first “TEDx” meeting found 17 speakers gathered around a long table. Immediately cutting to the heart of the matter, the main TEDxABQ organizer said: “Tell us what your talk is about in 1 sentence!”

Without further warning, they proceeded to go around the circle starting with Bill a few seats away from me and moving in my direction. When it came to my turn, not knowing what to say, I decided to quote something Justin has often said: “Joy is our inherent nature,” and then I added, “and in learning and practicing T’ai Chi Chih, high school students come to understand this.” It was a little esoteric and a bit mechanical, too. And, quite honestly, I haven’t fully realized through every cell in

my body that joy is MY intrinsic nature, although I desperately want to believe it to be so.

We (the facilitator and I) bandied about a bit, trying to tease out what I meant by “joy” and “inherent nature.” Finally, he gave up and went on to the next.

A week later, draft #1 of the speech in hand, I went to my first coaching session. I had written out the entire talk with “joy” as a focus, elaborating with lots of juicy quotes from Justin and great examples and quotes from students. When it was my turn, they gave me two pieces of feedback:

- 1) Could you please talk more about TCC’s impact on the academic learning experience of high school students?
- 2) You are the expert now! No quotes from Justin needed—put it in your own words!

GULP!

They were completely correct, of course. It’s important to know your audience and for a Symposium on Education, I needed to be more explicit about TCC’s effects on learning in the classroom.

The request to put the Justin quotes into my own words, however, gave me great pause: I had been deeply dependent on Justin for 13 years in ABQ as an anchor, the singular touchstone in my life (no pun intended). And in addition, I had relied a lot on his language to describe TCC without always understanding what I was saying. All of this is fine, of course. Justin has given us powerful tools and scaffolding to draw us in to our merging with TCC. But what an interesting initiation on the heels of Justin’s passing! Put it in your own words!

I took this advice to heart. I proceeded to change the speech around to include an academic impact and significantly, to unearth different language, words that were my own, words that felt alive and true. I struggled with finding a good balance for my audience, one that was accessible and not too esoteric for the masses, but also “essence” oriented.

What unfolded then over the next six weeks felt like a compression, a whittling down of what wanted to be expressed (and not just in words), almost like pushing through the resistance in Seijaku for six whole weeks. The whirlwind also included repeated moments which brought on, in sequence: panic, resistance, surrender,

again and again and again. I gave myself permission to quit this crazy process at any moment!

And yet, something kept me going, something bigger than “me” and my constant anxiety.

The second week of coaching, we learned that we would not have a podium or be allowed any notes on stage. Another bubble burst in my mind! Then they said, “But we advise against memorizing—just memorize main points and it will flow naturally!” (Six drafts later, I memorized the entire thing, as I knew myself better than that.)

The following week (a week before Winter Break), they asked me to include live students sharing and moving on stage. My mind screamed, “But, it’s a week before exams and I won’t see them during the Christmas break and we don’t have time or space to arrange any of this!!!!”

But the kids said yes, and they showed up, mostly, to our practice sessions (after the break), and in the end it was quite amazing to have with me on stage.

The day of the event arrived. The students and I made sure to do a full run-through about an hour before we went on. In this final practice session, I started the speech and about a paragraph in, completely went blank. A few seconds passed, and a gentle voice from behind me started feeding me lines. One of the boys, John, had memorized nearly the entire speech. We ended up setting up a signal if this happened during the “Real” thing.

We then did a full TCC practice. At one point early into the movements, the young woman, Mary, simply sat down on the floor and put her head in her lap. I had been most worried about her nervousness and ability to stay grounded throughout the process. I wondered, “Oh my god! What is happening???”

John and Tim and I continued for a bit, letting Mary sit there with her head between her legs, sort of curled up. Finally, I went over to her, put my hand on her back and encouraged her to breathe down into her t’an t’ien. She indulged me for a bit, and then said, “Amy, I’m praying.” “Oh!” I said, and let her stay there. The boys and I finished up. At the end of the practice, Mary stood, called us together in a circle and, asking us to hold hands she gave a benediction: “In our presentation, may we all express the spirit that we are and may that love be received by the world and by the audience which is friendly and in fact *is* us as we are all one together.”

If it wasn’t already deeply apparent, this experience was truly out of my hands.

The final surrender came when I found out four weeks after the event there may have been a problem with the sound. It was possible that none of it got recorded! After much devoted work on the part of a sound technician, they did manage to figure it out, but after that long roller coaster ride, I could only laugh. I gave up!

So, let's return for a moment to the title of this talk, "The Growth of Certainty – Including It All." What I took away from this TEDx process was a direct experience with a kind of impersonal streaming in spite of seeming personal challenges along the way.

- In crafting a talk about T'ai Chi Chih, I learned it can be really helpful to put into language that which is ineffable because of the birthing process which it facilitates--embodiment of essence. The process seemed to call something into being that I didn't know was there.
- I learned more deeply that if my intuition calls me to step forward out of my comfort zone to share TCC in unexpected ways, do it (and still give myself permission to quit at any moment)! I learned to feel and rest into the impersonal stream which was guiding and supporting me more than I realized, this stream that we all ARE. In my understanding, Justin calls this the "Growth of Certainty." There is something bigger going on and gradually it is joined with and includes all of our humanness.
- Finally, we're going to close with a contemplation. I encourage you to identify and put into your own "language" (not necessarily through the medium of words) an area in your personal TCC practice or teaching that is drawing you closer, that is asking for your loving awareness. Can we all look with fresh eyes at whatever in TCC has flatlined for us, become a little meaningless or that we don't have the direct inner experience to support? Can we trust that we CAN put it into our own words so that it expresses through us authentically in each of our individual languages, through the poetry that IS each one of us?

This is that place that is our enlivened learning, a place we can point to as both thrilling and terrifying, one that feels necessary in that impersonal way of unfoldment and yet deeply personal—the place that asks, "Where is T'ai Chi Chih calling me into a greater intimacy, how is it coaxing me gently into its loving hands?"