

Essential Listening Summer Workshop in Bordeaux, France

Reflections on the Core Practice Series

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The *Essential Listening* ITP summer workshop in Bordeaux took place on July 6-8 this year and was presented by Pam Kramer together with ITP Bordeaux Group Leaders Jacques Moreau and Isabelle Goldie. The theme of this newsletter is the power of the mind, and listening is intimately connected with understanding, but one of the purposes of the workshop was to develop greater awareness of how we listened in order to access more profound levels of understanding.



But before I turn to the listening dimension of the workshop inspired by Otto Scharmer's *Theory U*, I will mention something about the daily ITP practices. Each day we practiced the kata, and for an ITP practitioner who had so far only practiced with others via online ITP sessions, learning and practicing with others in the same physical space not only provided me with a real sense of community, but I noticed that my kata practice took an immediate jump forward. Somehow learning from more experienced practitioners in the same physical space taught me so much more than I had been able to pick up from books, videos and virtual ITP zoom sessions. My practice improved immediately and lastingly; in particular, I 'got' the way other more experienced practitioners were breathing into the kata exercises, which was really important for me and really transformed my practice.

The Leonard Energy Training Exercises (LET) were also powerful. One in particular impressed me and I would like to relate it. As part of the workshop, we enjoyed a group experience practicing the LET exercises in nature (I have practiced the kata for about a year and a half, but was new to these). After a set of previous exercises, we formed a large circle in the park where we were practicing, and Pam invited us to share with the others how we felt. Most had reported positive feelings (happy, peaceful, energised etc.), but I felt somewhat sad, and shared this. I wasn't clear why, and my mind tried to make sense of it by assuming I must have been subtly ruminating on some issue which could have made me sad. Then Pam invited us all to turn around facing outwards from the circle with our backs to each other, and to my astonishment, my sadness immediately left me the moment I turned around! Again my mind tried to interpret this: was it because I didn't like the group so was relieved to turn away from them? But I enjoyed their company! Was it because I get exhausted by too much human contact and need periodic downtime? I couldn't figure out why, but it was an interesting object lesson for me in how the cause of an emotional state can be very different from the mind's best guess about what caused it, and how a simple change in bodily position can sometimes bring about a profound change emotionally.

To return to essential listening: my understanding of listening transformed during the course of the workshop. On the first day, before we began to practice, we circulated around the dojo sharing our answers to the question 'What is Listening?' with each other, and the answers I heard reminded me that we don't only listen to the words other human beings say, but we can also listen to the natural environment, since listening in its essence is a way of being attentively present with another (and not necessarily a human other).

As we were progressively introduced theoretically and through practices to Scharmer's ideas about essential listening, I also realised that my understanding of what listening to other human beings means had also been too narrow, since there is a way of listening to another which seeks to listen to the fundamental intention or emotion which is 'behind' and motivating the other's words, which might be expressed as a kind of 'heart' listening. For instance, I had the experience of helping another group member by listening to him as he related a challenging situation. I tried to listen to what was 'beyond' his words, and when I reported back to him what I 'heard', he was very grateful, and he told me it had helped him to come to an insight – that he was irritated, rather than anxious, about the situation he had shared – which he had not recognised before, and the listening exercise had enabled him to see this.

I also learned something about listening co-operatively with another for emergent creative solutions, a kind of listening for the future possibilities which may open. This form of listening moves beyond trying to understand another's fundamental intention or emotion and tries to 'hear' potentials which may be pressing towards actualisation. On the face of it this may sound bizarre, but the experience of trying to listen in this way with others gave me a sense of what it means. Perhaps an analogy to this could be co-operative attempts to brainstorm on paper, where this sort of listening is implicit, but it is deeper than brainstorming.

Another takeaway from the workshop for me was a theoretical one: the realisation that Scharmer's *Theory U* could integrate very naturally with ITP, and its Staying Current process, especially the emphasis on listening creatively for the emergence of future potentials. I went away from the workshop inspired by the promise of Scharmer's theory and practices as a supplement to ITP, and a more profound sense of the nature of listening.