

30th Annual International Trauma Conference.

Psychological Trauma: Neuroscience, Embodiment, and the Restoration of the Self

Boston Massachusetts.

This was a truly inspiring conference with an all star cast from the world of trauma. The conference was hosted by Bessel van der Kolk (The Body Keeps the Score) who used the opportunity to continue to present data and the theory that early traumatic events (Adverse Childhood Experiences and others) are the root a variety of symptoms that can best be understood by the proposed diagnosis of Developmental Trauma.

There was much discussion by researchers and theorists including Ed Tronick (he of the “still face” YouTube clip) and Bruce Perry (Neuro-sequential model of therapeutics) about how so many children are pathologized and labelled as having ADHD, Conduct Disorder, Oppositional Defiance Disorder and so on, where we label the symptoms and ignore the underlying trauma and consequent brain adaptations that were initiated by this.

Martin Teicher brought brain imaging to support the growing body of knowledge about how brains grow in relationship to the environment and to the human relationships they are born into. (This was a bit clever for me!!)

Richard Whitaker (“Mad in America”) brought his information about research data that is frequently unpublished or highlighted about the ineffectiveness of some psychiatric drugs.

As well as this call to arms to address trauma and not just treat symptoms, I attended the two-day preconference seminars around working with children and their bodies. Using techniques from Therapy and SMART to help children reconnect both to their own bodies and to their caregivers.

Beatrice Beebe presented fascinating work around moment to moment analysis of exchanges between mothers and babies and the information that is seen in minute emotional expressions of disgust or dis interest.

There was so much good stuff going on and of course I couldn't be in two places at once, but an other highlight was listening to Tarana Burke, the founder of the “Me Too” movement and hearing her talk about her intentions and her work to use her energy in this movement to connect women (originally black American women) to each other to create healing communities and not with the main intention being about identifying perpetrators and certainly not about being victims!!

I heard an American veteran talk about an awesome project using Shakespeare to support other veterans with PTSD and three young men using mediation programmes in challenging schools in Baltimore.

I have learnt so much and am so inspired by the holistic approach to seeing trauma rather than a long list of diagnosis. I enjoyed the integration of the body into healing and the attention to human connection with each other as the key intervention.

Thank you, Foundation PSA., I take this learning back into my role as the manager of a charity trauma service for children and adolescents and as a trainer working in schools and social care to bring trauma informed practice to life.