

Brief Encounter with the Taos Institute

November 2018

This month we welcome Sally St. George and Dan Wulff, Taos Institute Board members, as they share reflections on ways to “Do Taos”....

A Small Group of Thoughtful People



By Sally St. George and Dan Wulff

We arrived home from the warmth of the Taos 25th Anniversary and Conference in Cancun, Mexico to the chill of winter in Calgary, Canada. But the temperature difference has not cooled our excitement for some of the new things that were experienced and generated in Mexico. One of those experiences in particular has stimulated some ideas regarding future Taos gatherings. We had the pleasure of being invited to the home of Luis Castellanos and Becky Vela Nuñez to converse with a group of Cancun practitioners who meet regularly to talk about their practices from a social constructionist perspective. The idea for this engaging and translated conversation originated as a way to honor the Mayan land upon which were holding our Taos Anniversary and Conference and to extend our appreciation to those who live and practice professionally in Cancun, but who could not attend the conference. We spent three hours talking about the hopes these practitioners, who come from different disciplines, hold for employing social constructionist principles and practices in transformations regarding the environment and violence in their home community.



The content of our conversation was generative and stimulating, but what we want to emphasize here in this article is the way the atmosphere for our conversation was prepared. We think this has implications for ways to “Do Taos.” We met in the warm and welcoming home of Becky and Luis. They arranged a circle of chairs and offered snacks and drinks. Everyone introduced themselves and what they hoped for from our conversation. Three hours seemed to go by in a heartbeat. Our conversation flowed in the context of everyday life, in a relaxed and personal environment, among friends, and with a spirit of learning and valuing. The trappings of professional discourses gave way to practical everyday language among a community of people who care about people. It was personal, affirming, grounded, and energized. They invited us to come back whenever we were in town.

The potential of this form of gathering has no bounds and it could be taken up anywhere by any group of people who wished to discuss constructionist ideas and practices for the local good. Local or regional meetings could occur whenever and however the persons in the area decided to organize themselves. Projects and social movements always included this form of meeting—local people meeting informally in people’s homes over a meal to talk about issues of common concern or interest. While we love the big conferences and seeing everyone and picking up new ideas (just like the one that occurred in Cancun this past week), we could also “Do Taos” on a regular basis with our fellow locals by opening our homes and providing a bottle of wine and some snacks—a very inexpensive and friendly way to engage and expand our local networks. It would be a wonderful way to continue to develop ideas and practices that emerged in the larger gathering. We are reminded of Margaret Mead’s words: “A small group of thoughtful people could change the world. Indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”