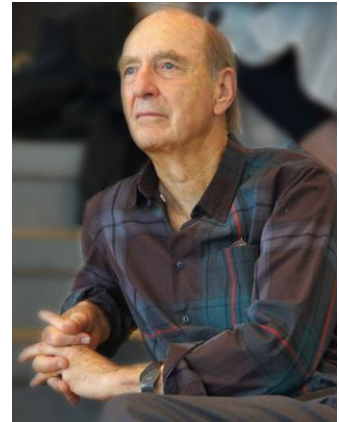


Brief Encounters with the Taos Institute

December 2014

A Look at the Taos Institute The Year in Review – 2014

By Kenneth Gergen



It's the season for reflection – on life's blessings, paths taken and untaken, and the forms of life we are creating. Here I wish to share a few glimpses of Taos Institute activities this past year. This isn't so easy; the network of Associates now spans the globe, and the innovative initiatives are countless. How does one describe all the stars in the heavens? So, in this brief space, I shall touch only lightly on some major constellations.

Surely the most striking offering was the summer conference in Drammen, Norway, *Beyond the Therapeutic State, Collaborative Practices for Individual and Social Change*. The hope was to move beyond the culturally devastating reliance on diagnosis and drugs, and to share collaborative alternatives. The rousing discussions were sparked not only by therapists and scholars, but from many people who had been abused by the present system of “mental health.” Video excerpts of the conference can be found at

<http://taoslearning.ning.com/groups/taos-conferences/videos>.

On the organizational side, Taos teamed up with the Danish consulting firm, Rambol Attractor, to offer its fourth *Summer Institute* on systemic/constructionist ideas and practice. The mixture of academics, consultants, and professionals from both the private and public sectors produced lively and productive dialogue. The fifth Summer Institute will take place in Copenhagen in early July, 2015.

Given this year's concentration of conferences in Europe, perhaps it should be no surprise that the European Associates have now given birth to the *Taos Institute Europe* (TIE). Headed up by Jakob Norlem, a Danish leadership development specialist, the Europeans are energetically developing plans for conferences, workshops, and educational programs. A preview of their work was offered in a fall symposium in Prague on relational research. You can join or keep up with TIE activities at www.taosinstituteeurope.com.

At the same time, the Latin American countries are now organizing Taos related events. This effort, currently chaired by Rocio Chaveste and Papusa Molina from the Kanankil Institute in Merida, Mexico, is rich in potential. Soon we should hear more from the Taos Institute Latin America (TILAC).

One of the most exciting events of the year was the launching of a Masters of Social Science degree program in *Relational Leading*. In this case Taos teamed up with the Professional Development Foundation in London. This two-year, on-line program is primarily tailored for practitioners, and features course work in social construction, collaborative practices, and relational leading. The thesis – typically some form of action research – is submitted to Middlesex University, where the degree is awarded. Participants are welcomed from around the world. Through the spectacular efforts of Ginny Belden-Charles, the director of the program, and her stellar colleagues, Kristin Bodiford, Saliha Bava and Celiane Camargo-Borges, the first cohort is up and running. Ginny would welcome

inquiries about the new classes next fall (g.belden-charles@taosinstitute.net).

At the same time, the Taos PhD program has gone through a significant evolution this year. The reputation of the program is spreading, and other universities are seeking collaboration with us. As a result, we have now added two additional and quite prominent universities to the Taos program. In addition to Tilburg University, qualified students can now complete their PhD programs at the Free University of Brussels and Leiden University in the Netherlands. Unfortunately, however, we still have far more applications than we can successfully accept.

Also booming is the International Certificate Program in Collaborative Practices – offered in collaboration with the Houston/Galveston Institute. The program is now offered in 11 countries – from Brazil and Argentina, to Taiwan, and thence to Norway. For more information: <http://www.collaborativecertificate.org>. Our collaborators in La Red de Trabajo para Dialogos Productivos have also been wonderfully active, drawing together research projects in dialogue in seven countries. A new certificate program has just been launched.

Taos Institute Publications continued to offer significant new books to the world. We take pride in this new work, including *A Student's Guide to Clinical Supervision: You are Not Alone*, by Glenn E. Boyd and a revision of the book *U & Me: Communicating in Moments that Matter*, by John Stewart. Last year I was also delighted to announce the launching of WorldShare Books, a unique publishing venture in which we offer book length manuscripts for downloading free of charge! Some 30 Associates from around the world participate on the Editorial Board, thus offering an opportunity to publish in many languages. Last year we were happy to offer eight books for downloading. Thanks mainly to our editorial Board, we have more than tripled the number of offerings, and have added books in German, Portuguese, Chinese and Farsi! Exciting new contributions are also in the offing, including a book on social construction and educational practice, and another treating issues in social construction and religious belief.

Last year I also lamented Taos' lack of connection with the Middle Eastern part of the world. Since then, one of our Associates, Tahereh Barati, set in motion the translation of a social constructionist book into Farsi. A participant in our PhD program, Edgar Noumair, has also offered foundation resources to translate several books into Arabic, and to set up a website for dissemination and dialogue. This is awesome. Yet, we remain disappointed that the values and practices represented in these efforts have yet to make a mark in the political world. Deadly conflicts continue undaunted. Steep mountains remain to be mounted.

In retrospect, as I look back on 2014, I find myself truly moved by the creative power of collaborative participation. And so much of this work has been voluntary. A heart-felt BRAVO! to all who joined in bringing these collaborative offerings around the world.