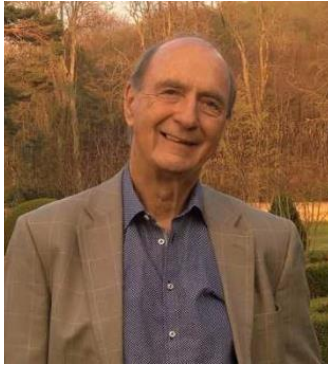


A Brief Encounter with the Taos Institute

January 2019

This month Kenneth J. Gergen, Taos Institute co-founder and board president, shares with us his reflections on the past 25 years of Taos activities and growth...



A Year for Celebrating 25 Years

I often begin the New Year by looking back on the preceding year's activities of the Taos Institute, marking footsteps, considering their direction. And to be sure there is much to be appreciated. Most notable is the launching of the [Diploma program](#). This two year program enables professionals to work closely with a mentor on a project of their choosing, for example, writing a book, creating a new practice, going deep in a topic of interest, or otherwise fulfilling a life's dream.

But I must admit that my attention is drawn most fully to the celebration honoring the 25th anniversary of the Taos Institute last November in Cancun, Mexico. With over 200 participants from around the world, we were feasted on a rich menu of offerings by Associates and newcomers, as well as plenary sessions, both humorous and soul-searching. A time for rejoicing and reaffirmation. How could it be otherwise when you think of the humble beginnings in Taos, New Mexico, in the 1990s? There seven scholars and practitioners found inspiration and energy in ideas about co-creating meaning and the enormous implications for how we live our lives. Invigorated by the support of others, we dared to form a non-profit, educational Institute, the purpose: to bring together theory and practice for mutual enrichment, and for what could be offered to the world.

Who could have imagined the future that unfolded? First we discovered many like-minded and dedicated people wishing to take part in the dialogues, to share, and create. These wishes gave birth to a global network of [Taos Associates](#), a network that is now comprised of over 650 from some 60 countries. Associates in turn began to form smaller and more geographically centered networks. Thus we find today the Taos Latin America, Taos Europe, and Taos China networks. These networks have also meant an expansion in the conference offerings. Where we began with only a single conference a year, other groups and institutions have invited collaborations. Collaborative conferences have taken place around the globe, and on such wide ranging topics as vitalizing education, peace building, collaborative medicine, relational welfare, dialogic practices, relational leading, and more.

It also became apparent that there was an audience eager for relevant reading materials. We began simply with small, inexpensive books on social construction, and appreciative inquiry. This opened a flood gate. Since that time some [38 books](#) have been

published on such wide-ranging topics as mediation, therapy, aging, healthcare, dialogue, education, organizational development, and peace-building. Many of these now appear in multiple languages. Yet, because the cost of printed books is prohibitive for many people, we also began a new initiative: [Worldshare](#) books. Here we began to offer books online, free for downloading. Again, the outpouring challenged the imagination. Now freely available to the world are some 30 different books for downloading, and in 12 different languages. I am especially pleased by the recent offering of several books in Arabic.

All these activities were congenial with our status as an educational non-profit. But what about more specifically educational efforts? We began by offering scattered workshops, later adding on-line courses. Small footsteps soon became leaps and bounds, as we began collaborating with several European universities to prepare thoughtful practitioners for a [PhD degree](#). Over 120 PhDs have now graduated from this program, and the current number of applications is far greater than we can accommodate. For more specialized training, we have joined in collaboration with the Houston-Galveston Institute to form the [International Certificate Program](#) in Collaborative Practice. Thanks to the efforts of energetic Associates, that program is now offered in 12 countries. There are continuing efforts to offer MA degrees in relational leading and in dialogic practices. But in the meantime, the newly minted Diploma program offers unlimited opportunities for constructionist related inquiry.

There are so many shooting stars that lighted the way forward. Associates organized a network on relational research; an electronic newsletter on positive aging now goes out in 9 languages. The Taos website - visited by tens of thousands each year - is now a repository of freely available materials on social construction and related practices. A small [grants program](#) has funded 64 Associates around the world in their creative projects, from helping child victims of the civil war in Colombia, to creating a communal feather nest, now in a Beijing museum. And a contract has just been signed for a *Handbook on Social Construction and Professional Practices*.

I am almost breathless writing these words, and especially as I think of the mammoth creative efforts of all those joining together in the co-creation. All of us should now join together in cheers of co-appreciation.