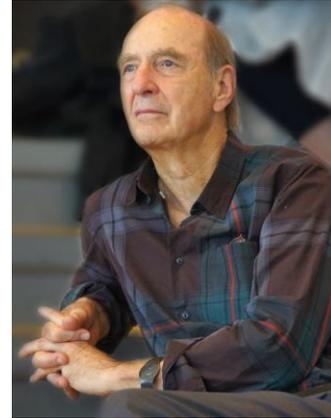


Brief Encounter with the Taos Institute

December 2015

By Ken Gergen

A Year in Review and Visions for the Future



In the conflict-ridden conditions of the world today, it's sometimes difficult to think positively. We each seem to live in our own small worlds, totally helpless to bring peace or relieve suffering in the big world. Yet, there is a way in which "the big world" is made up of just these "small worlds" in which we live. Making a difference in our own particular ways does add up. Thus, as I scan the past year's activities of the Taos Institute, I draw breaths of hope. I take pride, for example, in the graduation of seven of our PhD students. Their dissertations have been devoted to such topics as increasing inclusion in schools, facilitating learning in rural Mexico, and reducing forest fires. Our MS program in [Relational Leading](#) also admitted its second cohort of students, all exploring ways of enabling leaders to work *with* their colleagues as opposed to commanding and controlling. A certificate program in relational leading was also created, which allows people to participate without committing to the full MSc program. With the entry of Belgium into the mix, the [International Certificate Program in Collaborative Practices \(ICCP\)](#) now offers training in 13 countries. I am especially pleased that we have also been able to fund nine Associate projects this year – for example, building a dialogue center in Brazil, developing child protection practices in Italy, facilitating reconciliation in Colombia, generating interracial dialogue in the southern U.S., and building a training program for collaborative relations in Bosnia and Africa. All are making a difference in some part of the world.

One of our chief hopes for the Taos Institute is to make available to the world information and inspiration for collaborative change. In this spirit we created **WorldShare Books** (www.worldsharebooks.net), offering books in all languages, free for downloading. This year we added seven new books to the list - in English, Spanish, Chinese, and Farci. The books cover a wide range of topics, including education as social construction, Buddha as therapist, and mental health innovation in post-war Sri Lanka. Also available in print were two new books, one on positive narratives of aging, *70 Candles!* and another featuring collaborative group practices, *Social Constructionist Perspectives on Group Work*. While on the topic of aging, Taos Associate Samuel Mahaffy created a new web resource, *Positive Aging in Action* (www.positiveaginginaction.org). We include on this website news, research, opinion, book reviews, and announcements that share with the world ways of enriching the aging process. You are all welcome to join in this interactive website, with your views on positive aging.

Another major way of expanding the impact of what we do in our small worlds is through sharing ideas and practices. Thus, we make a major effort to develop global networks.

Everyone is invited, for example to join the Taos Online Community Space (www.taoslearning.ning.com), where multiple dialogues are taking place. On this site, one can join discussion groups on relational learning, collaborative governance, designing research, and more. European readers may especially wish to connect with [Taos Institute Europe](#), and Latin American readers with [Taos Institute Latin America](#).

With these small but significant steps, I also look forward with excitement to upcoming events for 2016. Immediately in January, for example, Taos Institute Europe (TIE) is hosting a conference, ***Social Construction and Design***, which will explore and apply design-inspired constructionist practices. The event will take place in Madrid, Jan. 22-24. For more, see: <https://www.eventbuiizz.com/second-taos-institute-europe-annual-meeting-and-first-conference-on-social-construction-and-design/detail/> On April 13-15 the Taos Institute will join TIE and others to host a conference, ***Inspiring Learning Life***, a festival that will feature best practices from around the world, and explore and create new ways of learning together. This conference will take place just outside Oslo, Norway. See: (www.inspiringlearninglife.com). Then in July, Taos will join with the major Danish consulting firm, Ramboll Attractor to offer a three-day ***Summer Institute***. The institute brings top-notch scholars from around the world together with leaders and consultants to explore relational practices in organizations. Also, please save the date: November 10-12. Taos will host a major conference on ***Relational Practices in Health and Healthcare***. This conference will take place in the new Global Center for Health Innovation, across the street from the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland, Ohio, and will feature a wide range of initiatives that foster collaborative and appreciative orientations to health and healthcare.

As this year comes to an end, let us be thankful for that which we have been able to accomplish, and funnel all these good energies into our upcoming endeavors. I invite everyone to share in the good spirits by joining with us in any way you can. In this month of holidays, let us celebrate and be thankful for all the ways we can make a difference in our own small worlds, and ultimately the world at large.