

Brief Encounter with the Taos Institute

December 2018

This month we welcome Sally St. George and Dan Wulff, Taos Institute Board members, as they share reflections on the Taos 25 anniversary and conference – Show and Tell – Taos Style...



“Show and Tell”

by Dan Wulff and Sally St. George

Reflecting on the Taos25 Conference in Cancun last month, we continue to marvel at the Friday night “Show and Tell” event. With all the important conversations going on in the workshops, restaurants, and hallways, the performances on Friday night stand out to us as something unique. Amidst the thoughtful and generative conversations about important issues in our world, Show and Tell created a space for people to perform on “different wavelengths” — to show another side of themselves and to risk performing it in public. A conference revolving around ideas of social constructionism could become quite “heady” so to see people dancing, doing stand-up comedy, singing, playing the clarinet, doing improv, performing “spoken word,” Japanese calligraphy, and creating a Taos25 dance routine seemed in marked contrast. Or was it?

The avenues to express our ideas, in particular social constructionist ideas, are not limited to the cognitive or intellectual. As whole persons, expressing ourselves in the myriad ways that people can express themselves seems fair game. The Show and Tell event provided a space for different forms of relating to each other and the audience (of around 65 people) was integral to the event too. The crowd reaction to each performance provided valuable encouragement and appreciation for the performers who were “risking” it— stepping out of customary or



comfortable ways of relating to reveal parts of themselves that are less often shared at academic conferences.



So could we suggest that the Show and Tell night was more than just entertainment and fun? (It certainly was those things!) It was a chance to perform other aspects of who we are, who we think we are, who we would like to be. It is a chance to try on relating with others in a “different key” — a key that may be unfamiliar to you and/or to others. In a world of rehearsed, structured, or preferred ways to be in the world, this was a chance to experiment with yourself and how to relate with others. We are reminded of our colleague and friend, Frank Barrett, who so skillfully demonstrates being in the moment with his jazz piano. Even jazz piano can be scripted, but Frank encourages us to “say yes to the mess” — to be more in the moment and spontaneous. It takes courage to “let go” and risk being with others in less controlled and strategic ways.

Our point in this little piece is to valorize being “more” than what we think we are—to relish all aspects of our relational potential. We are so grateful to the performers at Show and Tell at Taos25 (and the enthusiastic audience) for showing us a little bit more of themselves. We think this is another way to “do” Taos.