

Taos Institute News

Creating Promising Futures through Social Construction

January 2009

An Exciting Year of Taos Institute Activities

A message from Kenneth Gergen, President of the Taos Institute

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This past year stands as an exceptional one in the vitality of Institute activities. Most of the workshops offered by the Institute have been over-subscribed; the numbers of applicants to the PhD program far exceed the available openings; four new and significant books have been published; the Positive Aging Newsletter has been honored; the Journal of Collaborative Practices has been sponsored; new resources have been added to the web; and by almost all accounts, the fall conference in Sarasota, *Dialogues that Deliver*, was a smashing success. These efforts have been further energized by grants from the Whitman Foundation and the Reynolds Foundation, along with individual donations that have, for one, established

the Dharma scholarship program of support for graduate students.

Yet, the excitement is not limited to these public activities. Behind the scenes lively dialogues have taken place, all promising wonderful things to come. With friends and associates of the Institute, there are plans in motion to develop a Masters Degree program in relational leadership, a European Master Class series in organizational management, a Spanish speaking network on dialogic practice, an on-line course in postmodern therapy, and a new, membership status that would enable more people to participate in the development of Institute activities. Plans are also concrete for a conference on **Constructing Worlds** next August in Copenhagen. So, there is much to celebrate, and even more to which we should look forward.

We invite all to participate, to voice their opinions, and to collaborate in bringing visions to fruition. And for Americans most focally, and the world more generally, it is certainly inspiring to have a U.S. President who believes in dialogue. May we all work together for peace and good will.

Ken Gergen, Ph.D. kgergen1@swarthmore.edu

*As we
generate
meaning
together we
create the
future.*

Constructing Worlds

Plan now to join with the Taos Institute
for a conference in
Copenhagen, Denmark.
Mark your calendars for
August 20-23, 2009



Postmodern/Social Construction Assumptions:

Invitations for Collaborative Practices

Thoughts from Harlene Anderson, Ph.D.

“How can our “theories” and practices have relevance for the people that we work with?” is an ever-present question for me. I situate my response in a body of intangible assumptions associated with a postmodern/social construction orientation. These assumptions inform a perspective or framework for the way that we think with, talk with, respond with, and create with the people that we meet in our everyday work and lives. Drawing primarily from the works of Bahktin, Gergen, Lyotard, Shotter, and Wittgenstein, I will briefly discuss six interrelated assumptions and the invitations that each presents for our practices. (See Anderson, H. (2008) Collaborative Practices (www.taosinstitute.net) for a more extensive discussion of this topic).

1. ***Maintaining skepticism.*** A postmodern/social construction perspective suggests that holding a critical and questioning attitude about knowledge (i.e., established dominant discourses, meta-narratives, universal truths, or rules) as fundamental and definitive is primary. We are born into and live within ingrained institutionalized knowledge traditions that are mostly invisible and taken-for-granted. In turn, we are at risk to blindly buy into and unwittingly reproduce such knowledge traditions that can lead to forms of practice that are out of sync with and alien to our fast changing contemporary societies and their members. This does not suggest that we abandon, or can for that matter, our pre-understandings (i.e., professional knowledge and discourses, psychological theories, a priori criteria, or research data): any and all knowledge can be useful. Nor does it suggest that postmodern/social construction assumptions form an unchallengeable meta-knowledge narrative: inherently, they must be open to the self-critique. *The invitation is to remember that we are prejudiced by our pre-understandings and experiences that are influenced by our knowledge traditions, and yet given this, we must remain humble about our knowing, realize that we can never have complete and coherent understanding of another person, and always be open to learning from and about their uniqueness and the novelty of their life.*
2. ***Avoiding the risks of generalization.*** Though knowledge such as dominant professional discourses and theoretical truths can be generalized and applied across all peoples, cultures, situations, or problems, the usefulness of such is doubtful. Thinking in terms of such ahead-of-time knowledge (i.e., theoretical scripts, predetermined rules, or given methods) can create categories, types, and classes (i.e., people, problems, solutions) which can inhibit our ability to learn about the uniqueness and novelty of each. We are accustomed to (and sometimes trained to) viewing, wittingly or unwittingly, the people and the events of their lives that we encounter in our practices knowingly and as familiar rather than not-knowingly and as exceptional. Knowing and familiarity tempt us to proceed based on our gap-filling knowledge which in turn can risk depersonalizing the other, preventing us from learning about their specialness, and being out of sync with their timing, and thus limiting their and our possibilities. Instead, learn about the distinctiveness of the other and their life directly from them and see the familiar in an unfamiliar or fresh way. *The invitation is to listen, hear, and respond with the other in such a way that what we bring to the encounter does not close us to their meanings, descriptions, and understandings of their lived experiences, but rather engages us in dialogue with them.*
3. ***Knowledge as an interactive social process.*** Embedded as it is in culture, history, and language, knowledge (i.e., theories, ideas, truths, beliefs, or how to) is produced within and through social discourse. The construction of knowledge is an interactive interpretive process in which all parties contribute to its creation, fluidity, sustainability, and change; therefore, it is not fundamental, definitive, fixed nor discovered. So, we cannot instill knowledge upon another; it cannot literally be transmitted from the head of one person to another. It occurs, so to speak, in the metaphorical space between us. *The invitation is to act as a catalyst for a conversational partnership: a space, a relationship, and a process in which each person participates in dialogical construction of newness and has a sense of ownership of it.*
4. ***Privileging local knowledge.*** Local or home-grown knowledge (i.e., expertise, truths, values, conventions, narratives, etc.) created within a community of persons (i.e., family, organization, classroom, etc) who have first-hand knowledge and experience of themselves and their situation is important. Knowledge formulated within a community is the product of relational expertise and will be more relevant, pragmatic, and sustainable for that community. This does not suggest consensus or agreement. Such indigenous knowledge, of course, always develops against the background of dominant discourses, meta-narratives, and universal truths and is influenced and will continue to be influenced by these conditions. *The invitation is to ensure that each member of the community has the opportunity to participate as an equitable contributor to the conversation, including the design of the designated activity and its outcome.*

(continued on next page)

5. **Language as a creative social process.** Language in its broadest sense (i.e., any means by which we try to communicate, articulate, or express verbally or otherwise with ourselves and with others) is the medium through which we create knowledge. Language, like knowledge, is dynamic and creative; words, for instance, are not meaning-reflectors but rather gain their meaning as we use them and in the way we use them. In addition, the meanings that the interlocutors bring with them to an encounter, will influence and be influenced by a number of other things such as the context in which they are used, the intent with which they are used, and how we express ourselves (i. e., our tone, our glances, our sighs, our gestures). Language and words are relational: as Bakhtin (1984) suggests, “No utterance in general can be attributed to the speaker exclusively; it is the *product of the interaction of the interlocutors*, and broadly speaking, the product of the whole complex social situation in which it has occurred” (p. 30). *The invitation is to remember that our clients, as we do, bring their language (i.e., words, descriptions, meaning, beliefs) with them and that it is in the encounter and interaction of our different languages that dialogic transformation is possible.*
6. **Knowledge and language as transforming.** Knowledge and language are relational and generative, and therefore intrinsically transforming: in this kind of “witness” process as Shotter calls it, transformation—whether in the form of a shift, modification, difference, movement, clarity, etc—occurs. Each person, as well as their utterances and responses, is partly constructed and reconstructed by the other and the other is likewise. That is, when engaged in the use of language and in the creation of knowledge we are involved in a living activity (i.e., dialogue with oneself or another) and cannot remain uninfluenced or unchanged and cannot fully determine or predict the outcome of the relationship and the dialogue. *The invitation is remember that we are not change agents but rather engaged with others in mutually transformational relationships and conversations.*

These assumptions simply offer a different language or set of assumptions from which to experience, describe, and perform our daily lives with each other which give us more options and agency for, as Wittgenstein suggests, ways to “go on.” Important for practitioners, they present an alternative to formulaic, recipe-like institutionalized practices, a dialogical alternative that is more collaborative and therefore more relevant to our clients’ lives and desires and filled with potential possibilities. They do not suggest an oppositional perspective, nor do they suggest an abandonment of our knowledge and language conventions and inherited discourses. Nor do they suggest a meta-(or better)-narrative since self-critique is inherent.

Tips for collaboration

- Make room for and give the client the choice to tell his/her story in his/her own manner and pace;
- Be genuinely interested in and curious about the client's story;
- Listen attentively, carefully, and sincerely;
- Respond (i.e. comment, ask questions) with coherence to learn more about what the client is saying rather than what the practitioner thinks the client should be saying;
- Hear to try to understand the client's situation from his/her perspective or sense-making map rather than from the practitioners;
- Notice how the other person responds before continuing;
- Pay attention to the clients words and do not make assumptions about their non-words;
- Check-out through comments, questions, and alternative words if you have heard what the other wants you to hear rather than silently interpreting, and misinterpreting, them;
- Pause and allow silences for listening, hearing, and reflecting spaces; and
- Allow each person to choose to respond to what peaks his/her interest and in their own way.

Conversations in Social Construction: A Video Series

Thanks to Andrews and Clark Explorations, a significant body of constructionist thought is captured on videos that feature many of the founders, board members and associates of the Taos Institute.

The growing series, "[Conversations in Social Construction](#)" now includes:

- *Foundational Ideas in Social Construction* with Ken Gergen
- *Social Constructionist Ideas about Psychotherapy* with Harlene Anderson
- *Generating Research* with Mary Gergen
- *Relational Responsibility* with Sheila McNamee
- *Social Constructionist Ideas about Research* with Sheila McNamee
- *Narrative and Collaborative Therapies: Blurring the Boundaries or Integrating Practices* with David Pare

For more information and to purchase videos in the series email jenandrews@aol.com or visit (http://masterswork.com/shopsite_sc/store/html/conversation.html) or call toll-free: 1-800-476-1619.

Dialogues that Deliver: Generative Practices in Collaboration, Conflict and Community, Sept 2008, Sarasota, Florida



Shared by Carsten Horstrup, Taos Institute Associate

Returning to the cool north (Denmark) from the Taos Conference in Sarasota, Florida, I find myself even more connected to Taos. I think for obvious reasons. First it was an opportunity to see, hear and talk to some of the founders, who have inspired my work with organisations over the last 10 to 15 years, to see their passion and to hear their stories was a great inspiration.

Second it was great to meet some of the co-associates – to listen to their experiences and ideas and to develop new opportunities for the future. To learn from the many exciting Ph.D. projects in motion through the Taos – Tilburg program – and, maybe be inspired to take that path myself... Who knows.

The network of associates is a great asset and contributor to the growing constructionist community – and in my eyes this network has even greater potential to follow the guiding question from Suresh Srivastva: “How can we appreciatively facilitate the lives of others?”

The idea of growing a Constructing Worlds network – a network of sharing and innovating constructionist, systemic and appreciative ideas and practices across academic disciplines and across



different fields of practice is one of the possibilities to create better social worlds – in families, communities and organisations!

Thanks for a great conference – and see you around;-))

Shared by Sylvia London, Taos Institute Associate

The Taos Conferences are like family reunions—regular get-togethers of friends and colleagues in order to catch up on what has been happening as well as the sharing of many ideas, dreams, and wishes. It is exciting on a personal as well as professional level, and the reunions are always full of surprises.

This year, Sarasota for me started on the right foot as I decided to join Jane Seiling’s and Jackie Stavros’ workshop, “Pathways to Publishing.” It was a day full of excitement, great tips, the ideas were flowing in at an incredible pace. I am grateful for their experience, ideas, and wit and mostly for their amazing generosity and disposition to stay connected and available to us as we go through the sometimes painful process of putting our ideas and work into writing that is presentable and inviting.

Then, the conference gathering began... the lobby at the hotel was full of laughter, hugs, and kisses as we revisit our lives and the history of the Taos Institute. Honoring the history of the Taos Institute provided a context for new participants just joining the conference or checking out the ideas for the first time. As “Associates” we are guests as well as hosts for newcomers; this was visible by the number of workshops, talks and presentations Associates delivered... so much to choose from.

I enjoyed the structure of the conference that allowed us to be together as a large group two or three times a day, and then, at other times we could work in small groups and connect on particular topics and interests. There was not enough time, but there is never enough time to connect with all the people I am interested in talking with. Fortunately, the gathering becomes a platform to continue relationships, begin new ones, and keep them going throughout the year by taking



advantage of e-mail, messenger, and Skype technologies with a few visits sprinkled in between.

As a foreigner (I live and work in Mexico City) who is fully bilingual, I was aware of some of the difficulties my friends and colleagues had whose first language is not English and who are not familiar with the US expressions and acronyms used during some of the presentations. There is a desire and commitment to be inviting and inclusive to participants from all over the world. This is always a challenge for plenary and workshop presenters who are not used to speaking with a multilingual group regarding the way to present, the speed, the use of language. Maybe teaming up with presenters whose first language is not English could help increase the awareness, as well as bring the excitement of the multiple voices and perspective.

I would like to end this note thanking the Taos Institute for providing us the opportunity to meet people who have become an important part of my life in many more ways than a yearly conference. Their friendship and hospitality has extended beyond an interesting and exciting professional relationship to include other friends, colleagues, and family members.

See you all next year.



Board Members On the Go: What's Been Happening — 2008

Reporting by Mary Gergen

The Board of the Taos Institute enjoyed two events together in 2008, the first a retreat at Marsh Haven, NC at the home of board member **Jane Magruder Watkins** and Taos associate **Ralph Kelly**, where we constructed our “mischief” for the next several months. Then in September, with the gods on our side, we hosted a fabulous conference in Sarasota, Florida. (We lucked out as we had no hurricanes, no torrential rains, nor heat wave.) Our several Danish guests, especially, loved the beach. Others discovered the shopping at St. Armand's Circle. The highlight of our conference for us was the reunion on opening night of the 7 original founders of the Taos Institute: **Suresh Srivastva**, **David Cooperrider**, **Diana Whitney**, **Harlene Anderson**, **Sheila McNamee**, and **Ken and Mary Gergen**.

Each board member also has had interesting times, going our separate ways this year. Here are a few highlights.

We congratulate **Harlene Anderson**, who in June 2008 was awarded the Distinguished Contribution to Family Therapy Theory and Practice award given by The American Family Therapy Academy. As Janice Defehr's Ph.D. advisor, Harlene also attended the oral examination of Janice who was awarded her degree at Tilburg University in November 2008. Congratulations Dr. Defehr... and Dr. Anderson for seeing her through this rigorous process!

Sheila McNamee traveled a lot this past year ... including professional appearances in Holland, Denmark, Norway, Italy, and several trips to California ... to avoid the passenger seat while her son, Taylor, was learning to drive! She is proud to say, however, that he is an excellent driver (probably due to her absence)! Sheila was also invited to speak at a memorial service for **Tom Andersen**, the noted family therapist, who died in Norway last year. Also present at the memorial service were Taos associates **John Shotter**, **Arlene Katz**, and **Marty Roberts**, who was a sponsor of the occasion. As their Ph.D.

advisor, Sheila also attended the oral examinations of Kathleen Clark and Peggy Penn, who were awarded their degree at Tilburg University in November 2008. Our congratulations to Dr. Clark and Dr. Penn! Also to Dr. McNamee!

Mary Gergen co-hosted a workshop on social constructionism with **Ken Gergen** (again over Mother's Day in 2008; next year it will be Father's Day), at their home in Philadelphia, 2008 Baseball World Series Champs. Among professional presentations, her choice for the loveliest place to give a talk this year was at the University of Victoria, Canada, where Taos associate **Marie Hoskins** was the “hostess with the mostess”. Her most exciting intellectual adventure was co-editing a special edition of an electronic newsletter on performative social sciences, as well as writing in dialogue on performance with Kip Jones for the newsletter. To check it out, go to

<http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/issue/view/10>

Ken and Mary Gergen continue to edit the Positive Aging Newsletter, a project co-sponsored by the Taos Institute.

For **Ken Gergen**, one of the most exciting events of 2008 was to complete a writing project several years in the making. The book, *Relational Being: Beyond the Individual and Community*, will be published by Oxford University Press this year. It develops the radical thesis that individual attributes, such as memory and motivation, are the product of relationships. Ken has also represented the Taos Institute at conferences and workshops in Poland, Switzerland, Scotland, Chile, Denmark, Mexico, and Canada, as well as the U.S. He has received awards for his work this year from the Constructivist Psychology Network, the East Side Institute, and Ibanez University in Chile.

Dan Wulff and Sally St. George are now settled-in up in chilly Canada at the University of Calgary where part of their work is in collaboration with **Karl Tomm**, well-known family therapist.



Left to right: Taos Board of Directors Bob Cottor, Jane Watkins, Sheila McNamee, Sally St. George, Dan Wulff, Harlene Anderson, Ken Gergen, and Mary Gergen (not pictured: David Cooperrider)

Sally and Dan attended an ‘activist’ conference in Edmonton, Canada sponsored by the Parkside Institute. The featured speaker was Tariq Ali. They find that these sorts of professional/personal activities really get the ‘change the world juices’ going. There are so many ways to be co-opted into being ‘status quoticians,’ these sorts of events are a must for them. Dan and Sally presented a workshop on community-minded family therapy to an eager group of family therapy students in Taipei, Taiwan in July 2008. Sally taught a compressed three-work course on couple therapy at Holy Kong Polytechnic University in July, in which Harlene Anderson and Dan were guest presenters.

Dan and Sally have also been instrumental in promoting and editing *Qualitative Research Resources*, with **Ron Chenail**, a Taos Associate, and professor at Nova Southeastern University in Florida.

Bob Cottor's major project for the past year has been the development of Ryan House, a nonprofit, freestanding pediatric facility that will provide palliative care for children with life-limiting conditions and respite care for their parents and families. Ryan House is named for Bob's seven-year-old grandson, Ryan, who was diagnosed as an infant with spinal muscular atrophy, a progressive genetic neuromuscular disorder for which there is no treatment or cure. The Cottor family has been very active in this process while celebrating Ryan's life through creating this very needed and meaningful community resource. **Bob and Sharon Cottor**, a Taos Associate, are committed to constructing a collaborative healthcare program for Ryan

Taos Board continued

House. It is Bob and Sharon's intent to export the Ryan House model for pediatric palliative and respite care to other communities in the United States. For more information on Ryan House visit: <http://www.ryanhouse.org>

Jane Magruder Watkins and husband/partner/Taos Associate **Ralph Kelly** have been spreading post-modern OD (Organization Development) from Williamsburg to NTL in Maine, to the Netherlands, the UK, South Africa, Bahrain, Lebanon, and Jordan all since last April! AI has become global requiring way too much time on airplanes!

David Cooperrider has been working with several projects which have a deep and expanding impact on the future of the globe. In June, David designed and facilitated an AI Summit for the ASAE & The Center for Association Leadership

which connected fifteen U.S. locations, five international locations, hundreds of virtual participants and approximately 400 participants onsite at Washington, DC's Gaylord National Hotel. The Global Summit on Social Responsibility ushered in a new era of global cooperation to deal with the issues of our times.

As the association of associations, ASAE & The Center for Association Leadership has set the standard for association best practices for its 25,000 members. With this project, they have undertaken to become the standard bearer for association social responsibility.

David is continuing the important work of the BAWB, sponsored by the Weatherhead School of Management at Case Western Reserve University. The Business as Agent of World Benefit AI Summit brings corporate and academic

thought leaders together to combine theory with practice in seeking to respond to social issues like poverty, the environment, and health while also making a profit.

The last word is reserved for **Dawn Dole**, our Executive Director. Dawn not only manages our Board (something akin to herding cats), but in 2008 she also published *Positive Family Dynamics: Appreciative Inquiry Questions to Bring Out the Best in Families*, with Taos associates **Jen Hetzel Silbert**, **Ada Jo Mann** and **Diana Whitney**, Board Member Emerita, Bravo, **Dawn**.

The founders and board members work everyday to bring the ideas of social construction to the forefront of practices that deal with bringing about positive change in society. It is the relationship at the center of everything.

Questions on “Dialogues that Deliver” by Edd Conboy, The Whitman Institute

Inspired by the Taos Institute conference in Sarasota, Florida, September.

Comments from Ken Gergen.

1. *Can you provide an overview of the main elements that were discussed in terms of producing “dialogues that deliver?”*

We begin with the assumption that different forms of dialogue achieve different ends, for example, bringing about mutual understanding, solving problems, reducing conflict, generating new ideas, building cohesion in a group, giving meaning to life, and so on. The challenge, then, is to illuminate specific forms of dialogue that may be effective in particular circumstances. Some of the topics that cut across the various discussions of dialogue at the conference were: making advanced preparation in terms of space, time and participants; building rapport among participants; selecting specific forms of speech practice (e.g. questions, narratives, avowals, mutual affirmation) that can achieve specific goals, and excluding others (name-calling, negative comments, fear-mongering.); maintaining a posture of

innovation; and assessing efficacy.

2. *How do Taos folks define dialogue and frame its relationship to social construction?*

Although there are differences of opinion on definition, we generally view dialogue as a generic term that simply refers to conversational interchange (which could even include argumentation). Given this general orientation, we may then distinguish among various forms of dialogue. For example, the practice of Appreciative Inquiry differs substantially from narrative mediation, or the program of the Public Conversations project. All forms of dialogue will construct worlds of the real and the good, and in this sense are critical to the process of social construction. We often view “transformative dialogue” as that kind of dialogue that crosses boundaries of the real and the good, renewing or restoring the process of collaborative construction. We view dialogue as the engine of social construction, the process from which our realities are most often spun.

3. *What are some of the “lessons learned” among Taos Institute participants over the past 15 years?*

These are a few I would select:

- Transformative dialogue is not a “natural act.” Setting people into conversation may or may not yield useful outcomes.

- Transformative dialogue is an acquired skill, but unlike many other skills, it is not one that can be realized by an individual alone. Rather, it is a skill that becomes effective only through another's affirmation.

- Every dialogue will create certain forms of reality, while suppressing others.

- People bring with them to dialogue multiple and mixed views of self and world; their goals and wants are fundamentally mutable. This emphasis on polyvocality both expands the potentials of what may be achieved within a particular setting and renders outcomes less reliable.

- It is important to engage in “double listening” to any dialogic input, first with respect to the content that is being communicated, and second to the implications of what is said for the relationship among the participants.

Taos Institute -Tilburg University Ph.D. Program in Social Sciences

A Banner Year for the Taos -Tilburg Program



After Kathy Clark's Defense



Janice DeFehr's Defense at Tilburg



Peggy Penn and John Rijsman

New graduates and newly matriculating students have contributed to a lively and productive year for the Ph.D. program. Among the recent graduates are Marvin Shaub, Peggy Penn, Janice DeFehr, Kathy Clark. Their dissertations treated such topics as theory and practice of psychotherapy, collaborative mediation, and the acculturation process. We also take pride in the diversity represented in the program. Already graduated are students from Denmark, Canada, the US, and Bermuda. Currently participating students expand the geographic reach, with participants from Indonesia, Germany, Switzerland, Norway, Israel, and the Bahamas. Entering the program during the past year are Raphael Amato and Roxanne MacCloud from Canada, Susan Riva and Ulrich Gysel from Switzerland, Louis Schoenmakers from Surinam, and Joachim Lee from Singapore.

New students from the United States include, Neil Olonoff, Stephen Shimshock, Glenn Boyd, Jonathan Cabiria, Denise Lee, and Andrew Ward.



Marvin Shaub at Tilburg Doctoral Defense

It is an honor to announce that Kathy Clark received a \$2,500 scholarship from the American Society for Healthcare Risk Management Foundation (ASHRM Foundation). The Foundation's mission is to fund education, scholarships and research programs to facilitate the advancement of healthcare risk management.

For more information on this program and the various topics of study visit the program's web page at: <http://www.taosinstitute.net/tilburg/tilburg.html>

Completed Dissertations

The Taos Institute-Tilburg University students who have completed the program share their dissertations on the Taos Institute website. Please visit this page: www.taosinstitute.net/tilburg/tilburgdissertations.html to view these dissertations.

Noteworthy Dissertations

The Taos Institute is collecting dissertations from around the world which are related to social construction research, theory and practice. Visit www.taosinstitute.net/resources/dissertations.html. Many new scholars are finding intriguing and innovative ways to employ social constructionism as the substantive focus of their work, as a guide to methodological designs, or as an organizing framework for the entire dissertation/thesis enterprise. We hope these "noteworthy dissertations" will stimulate networking conversations among all who read them. Authors of these dissertations have granted the Taos Institute non-exclusive rights to post their dissertations on its website in a PDF format. Please use correct citation when quoting from any of these documents.

New Associates in 2008

We are pleased to introduce the following colleagues as Associates of the Taos Institute. They were invited to participate in this capacity for their outstanding work in their field related to social construction and its applications to academics, professional practice, organizational and community development. We invite you to get to know them.

Verena Aebischer, Ph.D., Departement de Psychologie, Universite X Nanterre, France
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Eugene Epstein, Ph.D. MSW, Institut für Systemische Impulse und Ausbildung, Williamshaven, Germany
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Jerry Gale, Ph.D., Recipient of the AFTA 2006 Distinguished Research Award, Associate Professor, Department of Child and Family Development, The University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia
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Frank Kuo Yu-Hui, Ph.D., Haas School of Business, University of California, Berkeley, CA

Taos Institute Web-page Featuring the Associates

Taos Institute Associates are colleagues who have supported the work of the Taos Institute and continue to promote and work with social constructionist thought, practice and theory in their own work. We hope you will take some time to visit the Taos Institute website page which features our colleagues who are Taos Associates.

<http://www.taosinstitute.net/about/instituteassociates.html>

In Memory of Michael White,

Taos Institute Honorary Associate

By Lorraine Hedtke & John Winslade, Taos Institute Associates

Michael White died unexpectedly on April 4, 2008, while on a teaching tour in the States. Besides being an honorary associate member of the Taos Board, Michael was the co-founder of the Dulwich Centre of Adelaide, Australia, and most recently the founder of the Adelaide Centre for Narrative Therapy. Along with David Epston, he is credited as the founder of narrative therapy, and their work has touched hundreds of thousands all around the world.

Michael was expressly interested in serving those who did not have a voice and who had been disenfranchised by the systems intended to help them. In the United States, he is known mostly for his in therapy work. Less widely known are the ways he worked for social justice around the world. He worked to address the issue of deaths in custody among aboriginal communities in Australia. He spearheaded projects working with HIV Aids in Zimbabwe and set up counseling programs for people in Palestine who are survivors of torture and at the same time worked to establish narrative therapy in Israel. He worked as community builder in Bangladesh and worked for political justice for asylum seekers in Australia.

Michael injected a sharp post-structuralist analysis of power into his work and this deeply influenced his work in domestic violence programs and anti-violence projects. He taught in Hong Kong and Russia, Ireland and England, Brazil and Korea, to reach out to people who had been diagnosed with severe mental health concerns. He listened, really listened to people, and amazing things happened in his presence. He took great joy in witnessing an alternative story to a story of oppression and literally would fall off his seat with excitement.

Michael's brilliance, his ideas, and his writing bless us all, even those who never read his work directly. He has written prolifically about narrative ideas, even establishing his own publishing house to disseminate narrative practice. He created a robust practical application of Social Constructionism. He could make sense out of meaty ideas from anthropologists like Myerhoff, Geertz, and Turner, psychologists like Bruner, William James, and Vygotsky, and philosophers like Foucault, Derrida, and Deleuze. He wove their concepts comfortably with stories from his clinical practice, or offered us a metaphor from a recent bike race. Michael left us maps – blueprints of sorts — to continue to use to make sense of the world in his absence. Through his exploration of the “absent but implicit”, however, he ensured that his absence is underscored with his ongoing implicit presence.



Free Articles and Papers

We invite you to take a look at the articles on this web page of the Taos Institute website. Perhaps there is a paper or article which you have not read yet.....

www.taosinstitute.net/manuscripts/manuscripts.html

On this page we list “**Books of Interest**”. If you know of a book that has been of interest to you, related to social construction, let us know. We can post the book cover, title and ISBN.

[www.taosinstitute.net/resources/
booksofinterest.html](http://www.taosinstitute.net/resources/booksofinterest.html)

Web of Connections

The **AI Practitioner**, edited by Anne Radford is an excellent source for up-to-date and relevant examples of Appreciative Inquiry. Visit Anne's website at:

<http://www.aipractitioner.com/>

You may find other innovative and interesting links on our web page called **Web of Connections**

www.taosinstitute.net/connection/connection.html

This page includes a list of institutions with which our work at the Taos Institute is deeply resonant.

Generous Grants Allow the Institute to Develop New Programs and Offer Scholarships

The Taos Institute is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. As such, we rely on the generous support of individuals and foundations to operate.

In 2008, the Institute was the grateful recipient of a \$25,000 grant from the Whitman Foundation. This was a continuation grant (also donated in 2007). The generous funds from the Whitman Institute allowed 16 scholarship recipients to attend our Fall conference—Dialogues that Deliver: Generative Practices in Collaboration, Conflict and Community. This grant has also allowed us to continue developing new programs in collaboration with several South American Universities. These South American programs are still in development

and we are thrilled with the progress to date. The Whitman grant also provided scholarships throughout the year to worthy students to attend the various workshops offered through the Taos Institute. The grant is also funding the development of a new redesigned Taos website—which sees over 90,000 visitors each month and is our main source of communication throughout the world. A portion of this grant also went towards the ongoing publishing of the Positive Aging Newsletter in Spanish.

We are grateful for the ongoing support of the Yu family's Dharma Scholarship fund. Kuo Yu, a former student of Kenneth Gergen at Swarthmore College, and his family

donated \$10,000 to provide scholarships for graduate studies and workshop/conference attendance as part of the Dharma Scholarship Fund.

Individual donations have come to the Taos Institute throughout the year from generous donors. We send a heartfelt thank you to those who support the work of the Institute.

If you or someone you know would like to support the Taos Institute please visit the "giving" page of our website for more information.

<http://www.taosinstitute.net/about/donate.html>

Or email: info@taosinstitute.net

Conferences over the Years: Take a look at all the conferences we've held over the past 16 years. The first Taos Institute conference was in April 1993 with over 130 participants from around the world.

<http://www.taosinstitute.net/about/previousconferences.html>

It is exciting to see the growth and YOU have been an important part of making this happen.



Cultures of Participation Book Project

The Christopher Reynolds Foundation in New York awarded the Taos Institute with a \$70,000 grant to fund the "Cultures of Participation" book project. Diana Whitney (Taos Institute founder and board member emerita) is the project liaison for the Taos Institute. Diana is one of the collaborating authors on the Cultures of Participation at Work book project. Jeff Jackson and Maurice Monette of the Vallarta Institute (www.vallartainstitute.com) in Oakland, CA are volunteer Project Managers for the project on behalf of the Taos Institute. This project is designed to create publications published in

English in the U.S. and in Spanish for Cuba where the books will be primarily disseminated. The project is in collaboration with the Center for Psychological and Sociological Research in Havana, Cuba and the Martin Luther King Foundation.

Workshops in 2009

The Taos Institute

Workshop Series

These workshops are all fully sponsored by The Taos Institute. Questions regarding content, registration, and fees for a particular workshop may be directed to the presenter of the workshop. For general questions email the Taos Institute office—
info@taosinstitute.net.

For information and details visit:

www.taosinstitute.net/upcoming/workshops_taos.php

May 28-30, 2009: **Social Constructionist Inquiry**, Calgary, Canada, with Sheila McNamee, Dan Wulff, and Sally St. George. email: calgary_home@shaw.ca

June 10-12, 2009: **Social Constructionist Inquiry**, The Netherlands, with Sheila McNamee and Dian Marie Hosking. email: d.m.hosking@uu.nl

June 19-21, 2009: **Social Construction, Relational Theory and Change Practices**, Wallingford, PA, with Kenneth Gergen and Mary Gergen. email: gv4@psu.edu

Oct. 23-25, 2009 - **Social Construction, Relational Theory and Change Practices**, New Hampshire, Sheila McNamee and Harlene Anderson - email: sheila.mcnamee@unh.edu

Appreciative Inquiry Foundations Workshop, with Jane Watkins—date to be determined.

Pathways to Research, Writing and Publishing, Michigan, with Jane Seiling and Jackie Stavros. email: jstavros@comcast.net—date to be determined.

Positive Aging Newsletter: The Taos Institute is pleased to offer an electronic newsletter, *Positive Aging*. The newsletter brings to light resources—from scientific research on aging, gerontology practices, and daily life—that contribute to an **appreciation of the aging process**. Challenging the longstanding view of aging as decline, this newsletter provides resources for understanding aging as an **unprecedented period of human development**.

www.taosinstitute.net/resources/pa/

Friends of the Taos

Institute Workshops/Conferences

The Taos Institute offers this workshop listing opportunity as a service to our associates and friends to share their great work. The Taos Institute is not responsible for the content or management of these workshops. Questions regarding registration and content should be directed to the workshop presenters. **For details visit:**

www.taosinstitute.net/upcoming/workshops_friends.php

Jan 7-9, 2009: **Leading Positive Change: An Appreciative Inquiry Workshop**, Washington DC, with Ada Jo Mann, Michael Feinson and Roz Kay. email: adajo@innovationpartners.com

Feb 2-6, 2009: **Foundations of Appreciative Inquiry**, Golden, CO, with Amanda Trosten-Bloom and Barbara Lewis, email: office@positivechange.org

March 23-26, 2009: **Appreciative Inquiry Foundations Workshop**, Ottawa, ON, Canada, with Joanne Daykin and Cathering McKenna, email: info@innovationpartners.com

April 1-4, 2009: **Appreciative Leadership Development**, Chapel Hill, NC, with Diana Whitney and Amanda Trosten-Bloom, email: office@positivechange.org

April 27-28, 2009: **Appreciative Inquiry - Introducing the Elements of AI into our Daily Lives**, Chapel Hill, NC, email: info@innovationpartners.com

June 22-26, 2009: **Foundations of Appreciative Inquiry**, Chapel Hill, NC, with Diana Whitney, email: office@positivechange.org

July 21-24, 2009: **Foundations and Practice of Appreciative Inquiry**, Portland, OR, with Bernard Mohr and Sallie Lee, email: info@innovationpartners.com

July 27-29, 2009: **Advanced Appreciative Inquiry Practitioner Studio**, Portland, OR, with Bernard Mohr and Sallie Lee, email: info@innovationpartners.com

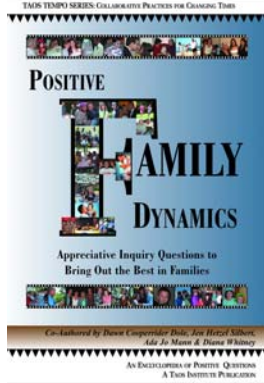
Aug 31-Sept 3, 2009: **The Appreciative Inquiry Summit**, Golden, CO, with Amanda Trosten-Bloom, email: office@positivechange.org

Sept. 22-25, 2009: **Being Appreciative Inquiry: A Spiritual Retreat**, Chapel Hill, NC, with Diana Whitney, email: office@positivechange.org

Nov 3-5, 2009: **Advances in Appreciative Inquiry**, Golden, CO, with Diana Whitney and Amanda Trosten-Bloom, email: office@positivechange.org

Four New Books in 2008

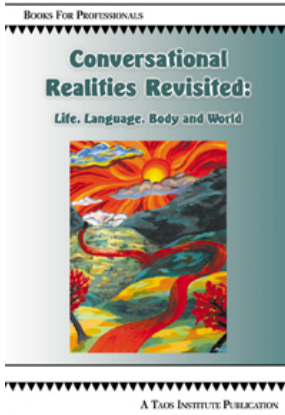
Positive Family Dynamics: Appreciative Inquiry Questions to Bring out the Best in Families, An Encyclopedia of Positive Questions, by Dawn Cooperrider Dole, Jen Hetzel Silbert, Ada Jo Mann, and Diana Whitney



Positive Family Dynamics is a wonderful resource for parents and family members who want to bring out the best in their families! It is an Encyclopedia of Positive Questions. The questions, stories and activities in this book will help you create relationships within your family which will nurture respect, love, and care. The book's imaginative questions, exercises, and positive spirit create a simple yet powerful method for helping families discover hidden reserves of strength and inspired opportunities for better living. They

also provide powerful tools for helping all families become increasingly more appreciative, collaborative and effective in creating and shaping the futures they desire for themselves and their communities. This book contains 56 appreciative questions designed to increase learning, listening and positive dynamics within your family. Positive Family Dynamics is recommended for all family members -- grandparents, parents, children, and beyond.

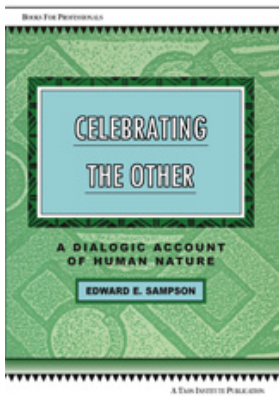
Conversational Realities Revisited: Life, Language, Body and World, by John Shotter



Conversational Realities Revisited is a new edition of John Shotter's 1993 book *Conversational Realities*. Like the first edition, it contests the traditional scientific view that naturally occurring psychological and sociological realities of a systematic and structured kind are to be discovered underlying appearances. Instead, it claims that such orderly 'realities' are both socially constructed and sustained in existence only within the context of people's disorderly, everyday conversational activities. However, this second edition is much more oriented toward practical issues than the first.

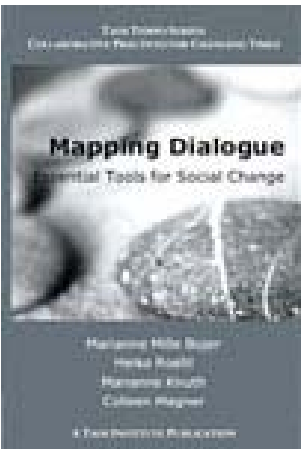
Along with a new Preface describing some of Shotter's changed views on Social Constructionism, this new edition contains four completely new essays along with a thorough reworking of five of the original chapters (while five of the old chapters have been dropped). They explore the logical, poetic, and rhetorical nature of our conversation intertwined practices in the spheres of psychotherapy, management, and everyday life, as well as in other more extraordinary circumstances. In particular, they are concerned to highlight the socially contested but imaginary nature of many of the 'things' we talk of in social life, as well as the nature of the social processes in which they are 'constructed'.

Celebrating The Other: A Dialogic Account of Human Nature, by Edward E. Sampson



In this important book, Sampson launches a new attack - this time on Western culture's centuries-long preoccupation with a contained, individualistic, monologic Self and its fearful suppression of all that is Other - all that is experienced as different from the implicit, self-affirming white male standard. This view, he demonstrates, focuses more on the leading protagonist and supporting cast that he has assembled to service his own interests, desires and fears, than on others as viable people in their own right. Denying the Other so as to create a world secured on behalf of the dominant groups' interests has become an obsession driving not only the larger culture but also the human sciences, in particular

psychology's theories of human nature. Women, African-Americans and others not of the dominant classes have been constructed as serviceable Others, and appear in textbooks, journals and popular accounts as figures whose images and everyday realities have been created to serve the dominant groups' desires. Sampson uses the writings of Mikhail Bakhtin, George Herbert Mead, and postmodern and feminist theorists to reject this dangerous obsession and to create a dialogic foundation to replace the Other-suppressing views of psychology, and indeed, of all Western culture. Sampson's arguments are convincing, liberating, and have major implications for the human sciences and the people they claim to serve. In silencing the Other we distort our own situation and stunt our opportunities for growth.



Mapping Dialogue: Essential Tools for Social Change

by Marianne 'Mille' Bojer, Heiko Roehl, Marianne Knuth, Colleen Magner

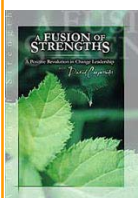
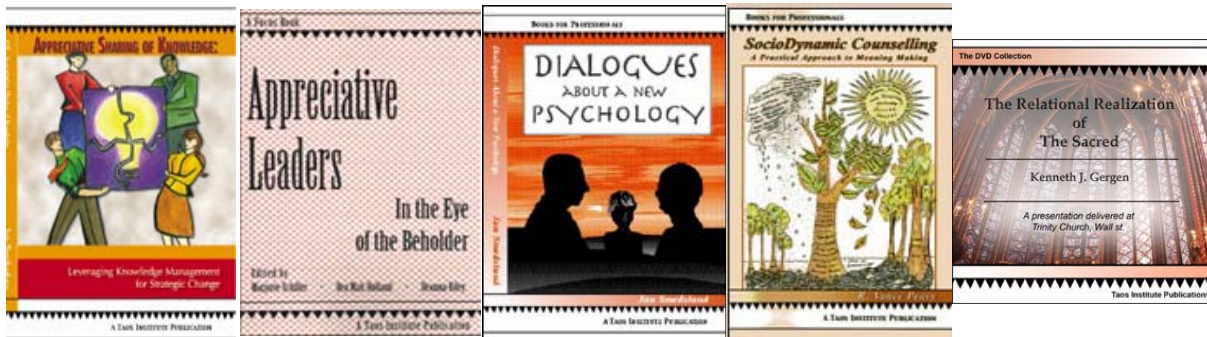
In a world of increasing complexity, answers have a short life-span and people have a growing desire to solve their own problems. Sustainable social change is increasingly depending on successful dialogue. This book provides a closer look at transformative dialogue tools and processes for social change. It profiles ten dialogue methods in depth, and another fifteen more briefly. The methods covered conceptually and in case studies include Deep Democracy, Open Space Technology, Scenario Planning, World Café, the Israeli-Palestinian School for Peace and many more. The book gives insight into the foundations of practical dialogue work, a dictionary to distinguish dialogue from other forms of conversation, and inspiration from traditional African approaches to dialogue.

"Very convincing...I don't think I have seen anything as methodologically clear and practical as this before."
 —Walter Spielmann for the Robert-Jungk-Library

Order online at www.taosinstitute.com

Taos Institute Publications

Visit Taos Institute Publications at: <http://www.taosinstitute.net/publishing/index.htm> for books, videos, books on CD-ROM, and more.



A DVD— **Fusion of Strengths: A Positive Revolution in Change Leadership** (2006) The next generation of management thinking...Join Dr. David Cooperrider, Professor, Weatherhead School of Management, Case Western Reserve University, as he passionately explores the next generation of management thinking. Dr. Cooperrider's ideas are on the leading edge of the field and are bringing about a positive revolution in change. Three powerful concepts in the film are: The Power of Positive Image; The Power of Words; and The Power of Positive Emotions. This video was produced by the Film Investment Group (FIG) and is being distributed by the Taos Institute. 10% of all sales of the video are donated to the Taos Institute.

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF COLLABORATIVE PRACTICES

relationships and conversations that make a difference

The *International Journal of Collaborative Practices* provides a forum for the exchange of ideas and stories from practitioners who utilize collaborative principles in their disciplines and daily work.

The Journal brings together authors and readers who are part of an ever-growing international community of practitioners including scholars, educators, researchers, and consultants interested in postmodern collaborative practices. This community is part of the broader dialogical movement in the social sciences composed of those who share an interest in: "How can our theories and practices have relevance for people's everyday lives in our fast changing world, what is this relevance, and who determines it?"

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Kudos for the Positive Aging Newsletter

For the past seven years Ken and Mary Gergen have been editing the *Positive Aging Newsletter*, sponsored by the Taos Institute and the Heath and Age Foundation. In September, the Wall Street Journal announced that the PA Newsletter is:

THE BEST IN...INSIGHTS IN AGING

The electronic newsletter, which is free to subscribers, is dedicated to one goal, and that is to publish all the research results and news, as well as web, visual and literary resources, that suggest that the last third of life, the "third age" as some call it, is a time of life that is highly generative and rich in wisdom and personal satisfaction. The aim of the newsletter is to actively fight the stereotypes of old age that are so prevalent in our society.

The hope is to undermine the notion that the life-span is an archway, with those who are



growing older becoming "over the hill." Instead the attempt is to emphasize a way of understanding the later years as an upward trajectory.

Thanks to volunteers, the newsletter is also available in French, German and Spanish. Both Italian and Chinese editions are now in the works.

The Gergen's also give workshops and seminars in positive aging. If you would like to receive the newsletter in any of its languages, email Mary Gergen at: gv4@psu.edu

Visit: <http://www.positiveaging.net> to read the current and archived newsletters.

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