

Brief Encounter with the Taos Institute

August 2021



International Certificate Collaborative Practice Congress 2021: *Connecting and Sharing across Contexts, Cultures and Languages*

By Harlene Anderson, Taos Institute co-founder, board member and director of the ICCP program

This zoom Congress was *by* and *for* participants with workshops organized and facilitated by 17 around the world ICCP Program directors, faculty, and learners. They crafted a space for the inclusion, connection, and visibility of the voices of those they serve and for Congress participants.

The organization of the Congress reflected an ICCP value: local autonomy and inclusion. We were challenged to create a space and process for participants from multiple countries, cultures, and languages, I was impressed by the workshops I attended and their broad range of practices across contexts, cultures, and languages: education, organization and community development, therapy, and research. Most impressive was the work's illustration and commitment to a better world through social, political, and cultural change. The Congress began and paused with plenaries by Harlene Anderson, Kenneth Gergen, Sheila McNamee, and Jaakko Seikkula with three weeks of daily workshops between the plenaries. Below, I spotlight a few:

Shanghai's ICCP members presented creative work with children and mothers and their use of a variety of media and locations to connect with community members, showcasing their voices, and recognizing each person's value.

The Peruvian's shared their work with street children, highlighting children's voices: a six-year-old said to politicians "*Better to work than to eat from the trash;*" a 10-year-old spoke in a government assembly hall which could be quite intimidating to anyone much less a child. He didn't falter as he spoke. He asked the politicians, "*close your eyes and listen.*" Then noticing how they all suspiciously looked around, he said, "*We won't steal from you. I want you to imagine being a child alone in the streets, cold, and hungry. Imagine if you were put in an institution as a child and stayed there until you were 18 years old and never again saw your parents or family.*" A small girl said, "*There is no tomorrow for us, we can only live for today...we have to be careful of adults because they only want to abuse children.*"

A psychologist in **Taipei** shared how he navigates the challenges of the medical and the political systems from a disadvantaged position and what it is like to be discounted and rarely understood by those system members. A Taipei university professor described how she creates a collaborative learning community with her students.



A team in **Mexico City** invited a construction company owner to tell how he successfully built his business on collaborative principals and *moved from a focus on business relationships to a focus on human relationships*. He illustrated and highlighted the importance of taking care of his employees and employees taking care of each other, and of creating good relationships with all the stakeholders in the communities he builds in.

The Norway ICCP presented a dialogical research process and its hopeful findings: Towards reconciliation after experience of violence – inviting silent, embodied knowledge for joint exploration of addressed concerns.

The collaboration between a Kanankil Institute team in **Mexico** and leaders in government organizations in **Ecuador** illustrated their work with the words of a man in an important child protection policy position who talked about institutional and community change and how he encouraged people to support change. He concluded with words his mother always told him, “*It’s now or never.*”



Collectively, ICCP2021 Congress highlighted how institutional power invites discursive power, both within our ICCP community and in the broader network of dialogic and relational practices. The Congress and its participants demonstrated the courage to challenge professional rules and principles by offering *human-centric* alternatives for us and for those we meet in our daily work and our personal lives.

I am often asked why collaborative-dialogic practice does not take a political position. I am surprised and not surprised by this question. I ask, “How could it not be a political, social, and ethical position?” All are inherent and cannot not be as we seek *ways of being and becoming more human with each other*.

In the opening plenary, Jaakko Seikkula said he was glad I did not ask him about the differences between Open Dialogue and Collaborative-Dialogic practice. Differences are merely perspectives, interpretations, and punctuations. What is important is how *we* are in a unique and powerful position in which singularly and collectively *we can make a difference* in our world.

We are collectors of grains of sand, creating a beach, and as the water flows over it the grains of sand are repositied and a new beach emerges. I am hopeful that we are creating a better world, one day, one occasion, one drop of sand at a time. *It’s now or never.*

For more information on the ICCP program visit:
www.collaborative-dialogic-practices.net/

