

Some thoughts on practitioner writing

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“Now don’t start to write until you know what you are going to say.” For those of us who learned to write on paper – in pencil – with erasers – we were taught to avoid messy presentation by planning what we were going to say before putting pencil to paper. Later, when allowed to write in ink, we learned we must avoid the scars of crossing out. Then there was the era of using strips of Tippex in typewriters to hide our mistakes. We went on to buy small bottles of corrector fluid to use on our hand written papers to paint over errors and present clean texts.

But writing is a messy business. And actually, so is speaking. Mess is part of our everyday lives. It’s unavoidable. And perhaps most importantly, navigating mess is part of our everyday relational skill set. Our self-correcting – and being corrected by others – is what we expect to happen as part of our everyday practice. And it takes place on a moment by moment basis, in the busy and moving space between people, between in-breaths and out-breaths. We are fast movers, swervers and always improvising in response to inner and outer noticings. This is orientational activity. It is ethical activity. We are guided by what feels right or “right enough” in each interaction rather than using a one-size-must-fit-all method. Reflexivity is our ethical guiding light. Our commitment to reflexivity means that we hear ourselves and we notice others in order to re-calibrate and find mutually accommodating ways of going forward.

Interestingly, most people don’t speak in “clean”, whole or finished sentences. You see that from transcripts of conversations. We often change what we are saying and how we are saying it half way through a sentence. We re-visit and re-phrase what we have just said because we orientate ourselves to the people with whom we are talking. We check if what we are trying to communicate is heard in the way we hope it will be received. We check if what we have heard has arrived in the shape it was sent. We add or ask for more context. We want to use a different word, or we turn the statement into a question and shift to speak to another person than the one we started to address. We realise our tone is too accusatory, we sound presumptive, we try to side-step professional jargon and switch, mid-sentence, to a more appreciative or neutral wording or tone, or use the terminology of our conversational partners. In fact, on paper, people appear to speak quite incomprehensively much of the time. How fascinating is it that listeners know how to follow what the other is saying despite such messy conversation with so many crossings out? We have learned, it seems, to listen to each other across changes in direction, in unfinished sentences, and stay in the pause with patient ears sensitised to context and body language.

What has this to do with writing? Well, the long and the short of it is that we have so much to say! So many interesting things to share with each other. Whether paper is the right medium or only medium for the stories you could tell, is for you to decide. We use a variety of media on our phones and tablets as part of our everyday communications. Funny that so many areas of systemic practice still use static chairs that could almost be nailed to the floor, and a particular formula for in-room talk. Some still use video. That use of video in systemic therapy and leadership training was ground-breaking in its day. How are we ground-breaking now? How are we/you using technology or space or sound or the arts or something else in ways that draw on existing systemic theory or create new theories and discursive practices? We are interested to hear.

Murmurations: Journal of Transformative Systemic Practice isn't just another journal. It's a professional movement to encourage practitioners to do what our professional ancestors and relatives have done before us, in the days before we were winded by the culture of dry academic writing. *Murmurations* encourages the use writing as a form of dialogue; to write for ourselves as a learning community, as a reading community, as a responsive and elaborative profession which values our on-the-hoof knowledge, knowing and know-how.

People often say, "I don't know what I think until I write it down." Or "I didn't know what I was going to say until I started to write. And then, it was like the story told itself." Or "Poetry lets me says things I can't find a way of expressing in prose."

So, find the right place, space, environment for you. Maybe come to one of the writing workshops or writing retreats run by *Murmurations: Journal of Transformative Systemic Practice*. Find your inner writer, outer storyteller! Make space for stories from practice to be told. And heard. And felt. And valued.

In this issue, the **Articles** are both varied and connected. This is to do with the timing of those getting through the review process at this stage rather than intentional clustering. You might make your own connections between papers as we have done. The place of *daring* has made an impression on us as editors: writers developing new practice, new connections and new theory. Also there is a striking degree of generosity and transparency: sharing the person in the professional, showing learning or change in progress, offering moving inner and outer dialogue.

We are pleased to introduce three new standing sections. **Revivals** is a space in each issue for revisiting an "old", previously published paper. There will be some reflection with it each time either by the writer or readers or both. **Reflective Turns** is a section for pieces in a variety of formats which arise out of and invite reflection on transformative moments, places, episodes and so on. Then we have **M Talks**, video talks made for *Murmurations: Journal of Transformative Systemic Practice*. And we are very pleased to hear Professor Desa Markovic talking about her practice and writing on thinking about how we can open up dialogue about sex in therapy.

Our thanks to the deputy editors and reviewers who worked hard to support the development of all the papers and our thanks to the contributors and their support systems for whatever it took to get your work to this place.

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