Murmurations emerged as a project by a community of educators who recognize that education and its results arise from interactions of historical, social, political, psychological, biological and environmental factors. As a U.S. institution, education has most reliably produced inequity. We began Murmurations with the intent of dissolving the dynamics that support and re-create inequitable educational outcomes.

We are not separate from the systems we wish to transform.

We invite you to reflect with us, examining the relationship between thought, action and the dynamics of the educational systems in which we participate.

murmurations-journal.org
murmurations.journal@gmail.com
ISSN 2637-4056 (Print) — Murmurations — ISSN 2637-4064 (Online)

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Murmurations was made possible in part by a grant from the National Science Foundation (DUE1451713). The views that are expressed represent those of their creators and not necessarily those of the National Science Foundation.
In my model...

Roger Burton
1241 Johnson Avenue, #182, San Luis Obispo, California 93401, USA

rogersburton@gmail.com
https://doi.org/10.31946/meee.v1i1.29
Pre-publication dialogue: http://murmurations-journal.org/index.php/murmurations/article/view/29

Abstract

Point of view: At the time of writing this I am 58 years old. A cis-gender, white male who grew up in the US. From my point of view, most anything I do or have done in the world can be considered produced by present day, and centuries of, systemic privilege and inequity from which I have and do benefit. I have lived much of my adult life internationally in countries and cultures other than my own culture of origin.

Value: I cannot really speak to the value of the work. I wrote this piece as the result of a very specific request from a friend and I feel it may have been valuable in some way in that context. There is no attempt here to assert some generalized or authorized model or knowledge. Whatever value this little piece may or may not have will arise between the work and the reader. It is not for me to assert something about that. In this way the primary value of the piece might be as a reflective surface that may help reveal, distinguish or elicit the reader's own models of learning and coaching.

Summary: This piece is the result of a request from a friend. We use “coaching” in conjunction with work on systems thinking, community, systems leadership, complexity and generative social fields. It is the process by which we support individuals within their own milieu. In a certain sense the piece is itself a kind of summary. I have not footnoted or attributed the work since it is really not meant to be an authorized model or definitive statement in any way.

Introduction

By Linda Vanasupa, Journal Facilitator

If you are a member of a traditional academic community, In my model... may leave you feeling disoriented as it did for some in Murmurations. What we noticed is that the piece did not conform to our tacitly-held expectations of form, citation or language. On reflection, we could also see that these shared academic norms function to silence alternative perspectives.

What is beautiful about this piece is that it precisely captures the lived experience of one particular transformational learning initiative at a university¹. In it, Roger Burton was a coach to a community of over 200 of us; we were university students, faculty, staff and community partners. This particular experience, guided by the emancipatory disposition and practices that are described here, was many things to many people: To some, it was collaborating and learning with those they would not normally encounter; to others, it was enacting meaningful community change; to others, it was liberating into a wholeness that we could not imagine. Above all, it was loving.

I hope that this piece will reveal something—that it will leave you curious about what is possible in the journey of education.

The use orientation of coaching is emancipatory. We imagine the motion toward freedom as fundamental to human being. This might mean distinguishing and exploring the areas of our attention that may have become fixed or habituated as part of our identity in ways that once served, but now may function not only as a constraint, but moreover be a part of producing the very phenomena and dynamics we experience as unsolvable problems or suffering. It means an inquiry into agency and the motion toward freedom together that includes both liberty and equity through which we encounter and transcend the self. Liberty has to do with our capacity to individually and collectively realize our aspirations. Equity has to do with a consideration of diversity and scale in the process of such realization. This is distinct from a use orientation such as the controlled manipulation of objects to produce predictable results or the discovery and production of meaning without any situated action or intent in the world. It is not an expert model, nor the collective action to learn and develop capacity and new practices. Coaching supports a motion toward equitable autonomy and transformation through dialogue and reflection. This is only possible when the coaching is grounded in specific action and outcomes immediate and meaningful to us in our local milieu.

Functionally, coaching is transformational where transformation means that we gain access to a domain of choice and action that is not simply determined by habitual tendency or legacy system. This constitutes a shift in our relationship to asserted necessity and as a result makes possible a shift in our experience of suffering. In the process new domains of action and outcome become available to us.

As a process coaching is participatory, collaborative and emergent. Process and outcomes are co-designed. The participants are co-learners with different roles and contributions to the process and outcomes. Coaching is a lived process rather than a prescriptive one. Together we work with emergence and our capacity to realize or manifest outcomes by shaping and nurturing the container. Emergence first requires immersion. Participation in a container constitutes immersion. The quality of the container is assumed to effect the quality of outcomes. This implies disciplines of attention, process, design and structure. Emergence isn’t just whatever happens. We adopt and practice together the disposition of conscious agents and participants in the entire process, actively working to realize the integration of state and attention with the realization or manifestation of particular, measurable outcomes in our lives, society and the world.

The coaching approach is constructivist, rather than objectivist, subjectivist, behavioral, etc. This means that we assume that we are active participants in the re-presentation of reality both individually and collectively. The coaching conversation explores the particular workings of this re-presentation activity from a variety of perspectives and traces them through to process, action and result across different scales of self, relationship and system. We elicit and explore the tacitly held models and assumptions that shape our re-presentation. We assume that one source of resilience is the capacity to integrate our attention and action across such scales. This means assuming that reality is radically interconnected. It means deepening our capacity to distinguish and redraw system boundaries in ways that both reveal and foster such interconnectedness. That thing happening ‘over there’ or at some other time, past or future, is not separate from us. The emancipatory process is in part an active exploration into this radical interconnectedness.

The coaching process is fundamentally loving and compassionate. It is an exploration of a loving, compassionate way of being that is functional in action and result. This means collaboratively learning, co-designing and enacting disciplines and practices related to our capacity to be loving and compassionate in the accomplishment of our daily lives together. We aspire to practice unconditional positive regard and radical acceptance throughout the process. This means adopting a disposition in which we understand our behaviors in this moment as correlated to the future we perceive. We assume that the behaviors in any moment are meant to produce a positive outcome with respect to the future we perceive.

Coaching is an invitation to participate in a partnership about being conscious designers and artists in our own lives, communities and institutions. In the process we look through many lenses and reference a diversity of models as reflective surfaces. We will talk together. Laughter or tears might be involved at times. We might co-design experiments and processes, devise strategies and then critically engage as co-learners about what has happened.

In this approach to coaching we emphasize state of being. For instance, what capacity might you already have to manifest or participate in a state of fear? From that state what capacities do you have for organization and action? Or, in contrast, what capacity might you have to be loving? From that state what capacities for organization and action? We think of these as animations. You are actively participating in the animation of the state. It is variously particular to you, collaboratively produced and larger than you. In the work to accomplish real world, transactional outcomes we also work to integrate a consciousness of and capacity with our individual and collective states.
The form of our process is similar to emancipatory action research. This means there is a cyclic, critical review of our theory integrated with our action and practice across different scales, e.g., individual, collective, planetary, etc. It means that the process inspires appropriate social action and intervention.

The basic cycle is:

- discovery and elicitation of models, assumptions and theories related to a situated lived experience of a problem, inquiry or aspiration;
- reflect on and integrate insights, observations, perceptual changes, areas of energetic or emotional intensity;
- co-design structure, process and action; carry out design;
- after action review and reflection.... and back to the top of the process.

The process is non-linear and is fractal in the sense that this cycle is taking place at different scales throughout the process. It is also a growth or deepening cycle. Because it is emancipatory and transformational it may also involve radical step change.

Roger Burton, 2018