Chapter 3

No way is the only way

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Setting the scene

►Ahead of the read . . .

 . . . take heed, as I invite you to enter into an experience of 'Attending, Responding, Becoming' by engaging with the strange and familiar in the pages that follow. As you proceed, hold this in mind:

> ♫♦ *No element, whatever form, alone conveys what's held by all.*
> *No wordy tomes do knowledge state, 'til human beings assimilate.*
> *All knowing flows through interchange as Beings engage with what's in range.*
> *Such knowing cannot be maintained – for each who learns is always changed.*
> *What's been has gone; there's more to come –*
> *yet none can know what will Become.*
> *I open up, welcome you in.*
> ►≈ *If you respond . . . our dance begins . . .*
>
> (Gardiner, 2021a: p. 13)

I imagine you might be thinking that this is a strange way to open a chapter about group supervision and its theoretical underpinnings! This poetic excerpt certainly sets a particular tone. Think of it as one of four ways (*statewaves*[1]) of expressing knowing that arises from within – me, in this instance, as the author. ♫**Aesthetic–Poetic** carries her message in emotional, artistic and poetic forms. ►**Navigator–Narrator** is speaking right now, offering you information about what is showing up now and what is coming. ≈**Visual–Kinaesthetic** uses visual and verbal concepts and metaphors to leverage bodily senses of seeing, feeling and moving. There is little space for her in a textbook such as this, but she comes out to play when we engage in ways of working and processing that invite us to move and notice what is manifesting through our bodies. You will get a sense of her in the scenarios I share later.

 The fourth *statewave* is the one you might be expecting. If I were writing from the perspective that dominates academic convention (based on assumptions deeply embedded in the philosophy of science), then ♦**Intellectual–Theoretic**

would dominate, drawing upon prior knowledge from other sources. In communicating through third-person forms of expression, she would absent her personhood as if there were no person there (e.g. using 'it', 'there is'); and she might be inclined to tip into strident assertions suggesting knowledge from books represents (the) truth, rather than simply recognising those contributions as different people's explanations for what they encounter in the world.

Now, if I were to only give space for ♦**Intellectual–Theoretic**, I would diminish or negate all other dimensions of what it is, for me, to be a human being, being human with all of my being. This, I believe, would not serve you as a supervisor working with coaches individually and in groups, and it would not serve our developing profession.

The burgeoning of the coaching industry[2] calls on us as supervisors to resource ourselves so we may better nurture its practitioners. Something in me shifted when my supervisees (mostly practising coaches) asked me to share what, why and how I was doing what I did. I realised I had knowing (which they wanted to access), but at the time I could not clearly express my philosophical and theoretical grounding. I wanted to be able to pass on what I was doing, and that meant being able to comprehend and talk about what has been *en*forming[3] my ever-emerging, integrating praxis. Eventually, the discomfort of the tension building in me tipped me into undertaking a doctorate.

I now find myself better equipped to manifest, represent and articulate what is mine to pass on.[4] Yet I say this humbly. If I know one thing for sure, it is this: '*No way is the only way*'. Our worldviews/paradigms (assumptions about the world, life, people, etc.) affect the way we see, understand and engage with all we encounter. We resonate with those whose worldview is similar to our own. Discordance arises when different worldviews collide, as well as when we bump up against day-to-day differences such as 'how to chop the carrots' or 'which way to hang the toilet roll – with the loose end coming over the top or round the back?' Being able to recognise our own assumptions, as well as those of others, is essential to our work as supervisors, helping us navigate our relationships wherever we are. So, when we meet the unfamiliar, engaging with curiosity and love releases generative potential and learning. This, to me, is when the power of group supervision really comes alive.

Although my praxis has been subject to myriad influences, in the next section I refer to those with which I have found greatest resonance and coherence: the philosophy of Natural Inclusionality,[5] theory lenses informing complexity thinking[6] and my living expression through primal animation.[7] In the following pages, I hope to illustrate ways in which these shape my interventions in the context of group supervision so that, perhaps, you can begin to appreciate your own praxis from different angles.

Bringing praxis alive

Serve the intention

In the poem that begins the chapter, the line beginning: '*No element, whatever form*' establishes a crucial imperative for what follows.

It lays the philosophical and theoretical ground on which all you are about to encounter stands. I am implicated in every encounter, so I use all of my being, as a living~learning[8] presence and resource, to navigate what unfolds. I do this, to honour my intention for this chapter: to serve you, as readers, and to those whose lives you will touch in the future.

Allied to this, you will notice shaded text boxes. These introduce the Seven Simple Rules of Supervision, which afford a holding frame for my practice. These are drawn from theory related to swarm behaviours in complex living systems, explained in Chapters Two and Seven of *Coaching supervision: Advancing Practice; Changing Landscapes*.[9] I use these in this first section to illustrate that Simple Rules **non-consciously manifest** and **can be used consciously** to guide individual/group behaviours across scales and situations within any given context, for example, coaching supervision. Here, I am illuminating how these showed up in and informed my writing of this chapter. In the three scenarios I share later, I invite you to see if you can spot when/where these simple rules show up!

| Hold the space, work with the edges |

In undertaking my doctorate,[10] as a mature practitioner–researcher with 30-plus years of working in the realm of people development, I found myself called to hold the space for my inquiry and to work with the edges that were characterising it and me. I attuned to what had a bearing on what I experience, feel, think, know and do. This was not about a 'doctorate'. It was about the integrity of my living–learning, emerging praxis, so I needed to be clear about what I was willing to relinquish and unwilling to set aside. This became a hugely creative and productive undertaking, exploring my resistance, receptivity and responsivity. ♦**Intellectual–Theoretic** wanted to know more; yet all other aspects of myself were showing up with something to offer that had yet to find visual and verbal expression. So, when my *state-waves* showed up, I listened. I attended to what they were bringing. I **admitted**[11] and gave diligent attention to them. In return, they gave of their unique capacities, in ways I could neither have foreseen nor demanded.[12]

| Engage with love |

I invite you to see this experience of mine as an analogy for the generative potential that can be invoked when we invite differences to show up each time we open a shared supervision space. In each gathering of individuals, the possibility for mutual contextual learning – a key condition of living, learning systems or 'symmathesies'[13] – comes alive through everyone's differences, not their similarities. There is no guarantee that this learning potential will be released, but we can become better at establishing conditions to enhance the likelihood. Its release begins with unconditional acceptance – love of self and other.

| Illuminate and explore what is calling for attention |

Trusting whatever was showing up in me signalled something latent, something ready to be surfaced and **admitted**. I had no idea what was coming and so had no attachment to a specified outcome. This meant all of my being came out to 'play'

freely, without being attached to pre-determined outcomes nor trying to prove or protect[14] myself. I wanted to meet not-knowing with not-knowing. I wanted to enter each encounter with the playful spirit of childlike curiosity and to invite others to join me, accepting all that showed up between us. In so doing, I found myself aligning to my deeply held commitment to safeguard my own trustworthiness.[15] Allowing my different *statewaves* to express freely opened the space for me to experience and recognise first-hand the essence and living expression of Natural Inclusionality.[16]

Later, I came to appreciate how opening receptive spaces, **admitting** differences, responding to invitations and working with not-knowing were already playing out in my relationships with others, in my supervision groups and in other group-work. Along the way, I found myself drawing upon other disciplines. Amidst well-known names and familiar models, approaches and theories, I delighted in discovering relatively unknown figures whose work somehow resonated far more strongly than many conventional sources. I cannot begin to do justice to the terrain I have covered. Neither can I present the entirety of the fruits of my research here.[17] Instead, I introduce you to some that serve the work of supervision in group contexts. Each draws upon the synthesis of my personal knowing (first-person), relational (second-person) and theoretical (third-person) explorations.

> Attend to the individuals, relationships and situational context

> Dare to call it out

In taking this naturally inclusional approach, I am tickling at the bedrock of the philosophy of science, which advocates taking a singular epistemological[18] stance in relation to what may be accepted as valid 'knowledge', that is, objective **or** subjective **or** inter-subjective/ constructionist. There are times when the dominance of one of these is fit-for-purpose.[19] However, in my undertaking, I realised that all three are necessary and interdependent. None can 'be' without the others. My *statewaves* cut across these false divisions, bringing alive the inseparability of these philosophical stances. All *statewaves* flow through this chapter, sometimes as discrete streams, as in the poetic piece at the outset. Mostly they ebb, flow and mingle together in varying concentrations, tumbling forth and then receding, when each unique voice is called to be stronger.

Moreover, I have been confronted with something that, when caught in my most reactive states, I find hard to admit – my partiality. When activated, I access and act upon only that which finds its way through me. This confronts me starkly with what is my responsibility. When I engage as a supervisor accompanying others, I need to leverage all that I can in service to them, their clients, our profession, the wider world and, indeed, myself. This means accessing all sources of knowing and knowledge that are within my range, using 'all of my being' when process(ing). Yet subjectivity – first-person sense-making – is often judged pejoratively. Because it is unverifiable by others, its validity is considered unreliable

and therefore inadmissible. Being unverifiable by another is not what makes subjectivity unreliable. It is our inherent partiality – being unaware of what and how much we are not noticing. The challenge, therefore, is not to ditch subjectivity but to enrich it with what else is available and to hone it by developing our reflective–reflexive[20] capacities.

| Attune to self |

We are the instruments of our work. As with any instrument, it takes practice to develop our art and artistry. Every time we play an instrument, we need to tune it. As an aspiring manager in the mid-1980s, I confronted myself. I was an 'emotional mess', and, one day writing in my journal, I found myself asking: '*How can you presume to manage another, when you cannot even manage yourself?*' The tone of my question was accusatory, yet it did galvanise me to step up to becoming 'the manager I wanted but never had'. Attuning to myself came to be about safeguarding my trustworthiness in all I do, as a practitioner serving others and in trying to be a better human being. *Everywhere I am, I am*, which means, before I attend to you, I must attend to what in *me* might get in the way of *us*.

Folding in before stretching out

Before proceeding, I invite you to pause to check in with yourself.

*   *What are you feeling?*
*   *What are you thinking, imagining, remembering?*
*   *What are you learning about your philosophical leanings?*
*   *How do these show up in your life and your supervision practice with individuals and within groups . . . when you are activated . . . and when you are grounded?*

Write down everything that comes up for you . . . and then return here.

What to expect, amidst the unexpected

First, I lay the groundwork by clarifying my use of particular terminology and how this explicitly reflects my philosophical stance (worldview). In setting out mine, I hope to help you clarify yours. This will help you make sense of what you do and why you do it, in contrast to what I do and why.

In embarking on this exchange, I offer due warning. Though I hope you find this fascinating, it may not always be comfortable! So much of what goes on within us occurs outside of our awareness – none more so than the fundamental assumptions about what we believe 'is' or 'should' be; and about 'how things (should) work'. Such assumptions shape what we notice and the meanings we make of that. Becoming ever-more attuned to ourselves helps us surface what is non-consciously activating us.

I bring attention to some assumptions that routinely pervade and disrupt our potential for generative inquiry: 'either/or' polarities and beliefs that we can predict and control desired outcomes. These are tied to 'objectivity' and the scientific method of invoking linear causality through traditional experimentation[21] (e.g., if I do X then Y will happen). This is not fit-for-purpose in complex living systems.[22] Early coaching tools like GROW are infused by this mechanistic type of thinking which persists in the profession. Certainly we can increase the chances of reaching some goals if we remove or reduce variables over which we have some control. But as complex living beings, in complex community and organisational systems within our wider world, effecting change is neither predictable nor controllable. If it were, arguably many more of us might be living happily and productively flourishing!

In contrast, systems and complexity sciences help us recognise a different kind of causality that is nonlinear – where an infinite number of unknown and unknowable variables affect all known variables in unpredictable ways. This means we cannot predict outcomes with any degree of certainty because we simply do not know most of what is actually affecting us. Principles have been extrapolated from these newer sciences (e.g., quantum mechanics, thermodynamics, complex adaptive systems, swarm behaviour, bijective physics) which seem to apply from the quantum to human to cosmic scales. I became fascinated how such principles reflected my day-to-day experiences of living and engaging at this human scale; over time, I found my praxis transforming in light of my insights.

Recognising our assumptions and relinquishing those that are outdated or no longer fit-for-purpose brings agility. Acuity of this order liberates us in compelling, creative and joyful ways. Many of us have found ways of doing this without necessarily being able to verbally articulate what is in play when we do what we do. If this chapter helps you make your own tacit knowing explicit, that would be a wonderful outcome indeed!

Making distinctions: 3Fs

I continue by sharing where I have arrived in my own supervision praxis[23] as a way to bring your own into relief. In sharing aspects of my living theories,[24] I reflect on practical examples drawing upon the bodies of knowledge that inform how I respond.

Three simple words – *Facts, Feelings, Fictions* – are core to the praxis of Presence in Action,[25] held by the P6 Constellation framework.[26] These three words link directly to the philosophical distinctions mentioned earlier: *Facts* – objectivity; *Feelings* – subjectivity; *Fictions* – subjectivity and inter-subjectivity.

I offer descriptions of the 3Fs (Gardiner, 2021b, PhD pending publication: p. 123) before considering some group supervision examples:

> *Facts*: The presence of a thing or person (material objects) that can be named; events/happenings; what someone says or does (transient happenings) that

Figure 3.1 3Fs within the P6 constellation

can/may be recorded, noted or measured, such as that which is considered to be 'objectively' available to all, though not necessarily accessible by all, by virtue of personal perspective/position, proximity/scale or perceptual filtering.

Feelings: Physical/physiological bodily sensations are experienced in our bodies and are usually located 'somewhere', for example, e.g. 'my skin is tingling', 'my lips are dry', 'my hands are shaking'. Other outwardly imperceptible sensations are also accepted as empirical if they can be measured, for example heartbeat, sweating and liver function. 'Unmeasurable' affective states are considered 'subjective' (which means that an outsider cannot know what goes on inside another), emotions such as anger, disappointment, frustration, delight and so on. In the midst of experiencing, we simply need to recognise all the feelings we are feeling – and often there are several to many, rarely just one!

Fictions: *'What my mind does with'*, in other words, the meanings we make of all that we consciously and non-consciously encounter and experience. We make assumptions, interpretations, judgements, conclusions, myths, stories, metaphors, imaginings and so on. Meanings do not exist outside a relational and wider-world context. They are constructed and shared

'inter-subjectively' through language and symbols. However, my meaning-making is mine, accessed through me; yours is yours through you. Sometimes our meaning-making coincides and sometimes it collides.

The *3Fs* are distinct data types[27] which show up together in dynamical (nonlinear) interplay within each of us. In recognising this interdependency, I found myself sitting comfortably with the philosophy of Natural Inclusionality rather than being cognitively split apart by the assumptions embedded within the philosophy of science, which would have had me separate and elevate one above all others. *Everything is interrelating, tangibly or intangibly.*

Favouring any one of the *3Fs* and disregarding the others will have us non-consciously slide towards one or other of the philosophical positions. For example, if you were to draw upon approaches anchored in storytelling/narrative and metaphor, you would be amplifying the *Fictions* portal. If your meaning-making is not at some point grounded in the context of what has been and is now (*Facts*) and the *Feelings* showing up in you in relation to those stories/narratives, then your sense-making could turn out to be 'non-sense'. Even though you may be unaware of the *Facts* and *Feelings* implicated in your approach, **they will be there**. I have found that surfacing all three brings about surprising and rapid transformational shifts and insights.

To illustrate this, I might suddenly become aware that I am feeling something but may struggle to access what is going on. I reach for my Emotions Palette© – a set of colourful cards that help me discern the variety of feelings I am experiencing right now as I write:

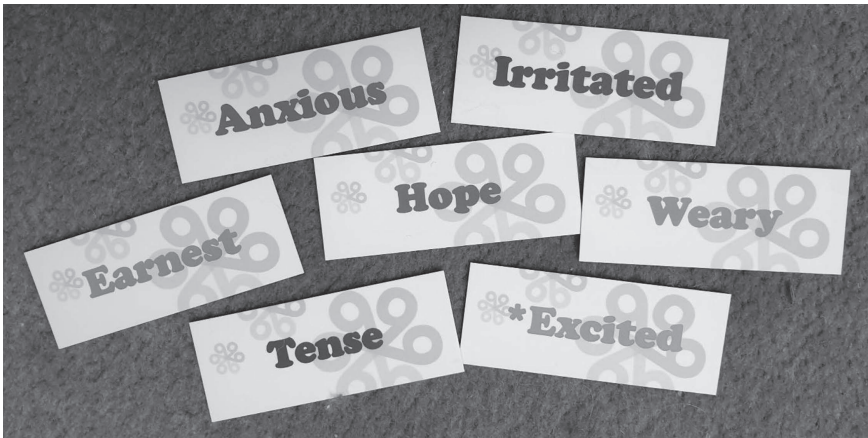*Tense, irritated, excited, earnest, anxious, hope, weary.*

Figure 3.2 What I am feeling right now

Notice these are single words. What happens in you when you read my list of current *Feelings*? Where has your focus of attention moved to? Have you gone to you and lost awareness of me? What are you feeling? What are you thinking and remembering? Are you wondering if I have experienced what you experienced?

With very little context about me and my life, you may start trying to fill the gaps. You may start imagining what might be going on for me. You may try to put *Facts* in place. You might even recognise that by the time you read – these words, many months will have passed – so are you wondering what I am feeling now? Which feelings were to do with this chapter? What else might have been going on in my life that might be related to these feelings? Of course, beyond what I actually shared, everything you are imagining about me that is showing up in you, will be created by you. Without any *Facts* as back-up, your *Fictions* may be running riot, signalling what, **in you**, has been activated. Groundless *Fictions* serve no one, other than indicating to the person generating them, that they may have something to attend to!

Our *Feelings* are related to exterior and interior happenings, affected by past memories and future imaginings, collapsing into our present-moment sensing and processing. Only the person experiencing their feelings, knows what it is like for them to feel those feelings. Added to which, without context, they 'mean' nothing. They just are. *Facts* and *Fictions*, when dismembered from context and from the person in whom they originated, are similarly devoid of meaning.

Crucially, this means that no one can know what another person feels, what they are thinking or what they could or should do in any given situation. What goes on within each of us is inaccessible to, and unverifiable by, anyone outside of us. On at least two counts, the import of this cannot be overstated: firstly, as one human impacting and being impacted by others in the world and, secondly, as a professional supervisor supporting others in supporting others. Being both of these means I cannot in all conscience proceed under the delusion that I know what goes on for others, nor can I reliably serve them without robustly, boldly and compassionately attending to myself.

The responsibility for attending to my interior realm, and how this tips me out into the exterior realms we share, lies entirely with me. When I was unclear about the *3F* distinctions and how they play out in me, I found that my sense-making (and therefore action-taking) was frequently flawed – sometimes disastrously so. Recovering from the deep shame I felt about things I had done that had damaged several precious relationships brought alive a deep resolve in me to resource and equip myself to become more aware of what was activating me.

My passionate, lifelong quest delivered the P6 Constellation (in which the *3Fs* find their place) – scaffolding[28] my personal and professional praxis. Noticing all that is roiling within me, and being able to recognise the distinct 'data-types' and patterns arising from their interplay, has transformed my pain-ridden struggling into journeying and generative encounters fuelled by presence-ful, childlike curiosity and creativity.

The difference that makes a difference in all this is the stunningly simple *Acuity Practice* that sits at the heart of it, which opens with, and iterates around, this single question:

What am I/are you noticing?

Presence holds a space open in me, for **admitting** (acknowledging, accepting, letting in) all without judgment – including all feelings, all fictions, all facts, 'imaginings' and 'rememberings' that come 'alive' or are 'current' for me in that moment. This is what Natural Inclusionality means in practice: admitting tangibles and intangibles, recognising that all are implicated in whatever dynamics play out within, between and beyond us. When I remember the fact of my Dad dying in 2018, my eyes fill with tears. I feel grief rise in me instantly . . . and then huge relief and gratitude as I return to this present moment. He is not here to suffer from the impact that COVID-19 would inevitably have had on him. He was a fun-loving, gregarious, social being with countless friends he saw every day of the week. Being forced into isolation would have been extremely difficult for him. If all I had said to you was: 'My Dad is dead and I feel gratitude' . . . I wonder what might have become activated in you?

In embracing a naturally inclusive paradigm, I hold that *Facts*, *Feelings* and *Fictions* are neither good nor bad, right nor wrong. This might appear to challenge our usual ways of thinking about ethics and morality which rely heavily on *Fictions* – the judgements/meanings we make. In actuality, seeing the *3Fs* as distinct 'data-types' enables a more discerning, self-centering and stretching, ethical inquiry. It becomes clear that ethics cannot be treated from a singularly objectivist, subjectivist nor inter-subjectivist position. Bringing what is showing up alongside what else is running or 'current' within us and in the actual situation we are in delivers us to a state of coherence: bringing insight and personal knowing about what is ours and what is ours to do something about.

Self-centering is paradoxically expansive. In discovering more about what is going on within us, different options for action are revealed. Whereas denying or disregarding what is current means getting caught in old repeating patterns of thinking and doing, which generally reap unwanted consequences.

With all this brewing within you, let's launch into a few scenarios!

Playing with scenarios

The rest of this chapter is offered as a series of mini-scenarios from group supervision sessions.[29] I recount an incident. On reading it, I invite you to notice what happens within you and to note your immediate reactions.

I then share what I did, illuminating the worldview and theoretical perspectives manifesting through my actions. As you read, I encourage you to reflect more deeply and expansively on the nature of the micro and macro assumptions affecting what you do and how you do it and also what lenses you draw upon that inform your own sense-making. Notice where we coincide and collide.

Box 3.1: I just want to lie down

Two of the group are in their seats, ready to start. Sarah opens the door, takes a step over the threshold of the doorway. Stops. Looks at the rug in the middle of the room and says:
 '*I just want to lie down there and close my eyes'.*

What are you noticing within you?

- *What are you thinking/imagining/remembering?*
- *What are you feeling?*
- *What are you imagining you would have done if you had been faced with the same scenario?*
- *What is your rationale for this?*

What actually happened next?

I witnessed Sarah's entry into the cabin. I visually met the eyes of each of the others in the room then turned to her and said, 'Well, Sarah, you best lie down then!' She dropped her bag and coat on the floor, took off her shoes and lay down on her back in the centre of the rug with her eyes closed. She lay in silence whilst the rest of us in the room held her in our gaze, quietly witnessing her being and breathing. In the time she lay on the rug, her breathing settled. At some point, she opened her eyes, thanked us, stood up and went to sit in a chair. She did not tell us what had transpired for her.

In complex adaptive systems (e.g., the weather, human beings), it helps to understand 'tension' as concentrating energy generated, either by an accumulation of differences (e.g., ideas, people) flooding into a 'system' or by the constraints around a system tightening. Tension-building signals a system moving towards a threshold of changing. One tiny addition can catalyse that tension to tip one way or another, outwards or inwards. When it tips outward, the system might disintegrate/explode or empty itself, experiencing a temporary relief before tension begins to build again. Tipping inwards means the energy has a chance to convert to something more sophisticated and complex. This is made possible if/when we as human beings hold our internal tension long enough for a more generative conversion to occur.

Tension-tipping outwards includes: the process triggering a bomb exploding; water bursting through a crack in a reservoir wall; a young man setting himself alight in a public square; a woman erupting into laughter; a child bursting into tears; a verbal tirade from the manager of a sports team; a person shoplifting; a toddler hitting another; a teenager cutting themselves on their body, where no one else will see; an executive coach telling another coach about a difficult interaction with a client.

With Sarah, I noticed her entrance and saw it as a sign that she was carrying a lot of internal tension and was on the edge of tipping. Her *being~doing* body had expressed what it wanted, and I invited her to 'go there'. As a group, we held the space long enough for her to hold and meet the tension she was experiencing within herself. Whatever was spinning reconfigured and found resolution, enabling her to settle and join the circle when she was ready. We played our part as silent, receptive witnesses. What matters in this scenario is recognising that her process was hers, not ours. For us to serve her well, none of us needed to know what was going on for her. If we had asked her what had happened, that would have served our own curiosity, not any need of hers.

There are some 'things' I rarely do in supervision sessions. I rarely open a space with a pre-determined schedule – not even a formal check-in. I am cognisant that the moment I open my mouth, I start shaping the space. Instead, I wait for signals that enter/open the encounter (e.g., someone speaking first and others reacting). This presenting data attunes me to what is alive in each person, giving clues about what is calling for attention, what, when or whom to follow.

One exception to this is when commencing a new group or training. In those first encounters, I briefly set the stage for participants to anchor the difference between linear and nonlinear engagement. I help them attune to their experiences of both and to reflect on how these ways of perceiving the world show up in their lives, relationships and work. In exploring this, I illuminate a crucial principle – even though, initially, this is deeply uncomfortable for some: we cannot learn about working with not-knowing by following a fixed schedule that sets out what we are going to learn! Having a repeating format for how to run sessions is entirely fit-for-purpose in many group encounters, but we need to discern when to plan and organise with precision and when not to. But if we only ever do something one way, that is a clear sign we may be serving some non-conscious need or fear of our own. We need to experience not-knowing to be able to notice what goes on for us, what shows up in others and what happens between us. Being it and being in it establishes conditions for developing our capacities from the inside, to engage with it, with acuity and agility.

Box 3.2: Emotions she did not want

The group sits in a circle around the floor mat which is encircled by Emotions cards. Each member is taking their turn to bring something to work on.

Billie steps into the space. She stands silently on the mat with her eyes closed, facing downwards. I ask her, 'What brought you to the mat?' She shakes her head. I recall something about what happened to her in the past and wonder if this is what she is bringing. I know she has not told

anyone else. Hmmm. I am not sure this is for this context, but I can see she has already 'gone there'. I choose to trust her, me and the group. I ask, 'Which emotions do you wish you could avoid ever feeling again?' I invite her to walk within the circle choosing emotions that come up. She walks clockwise, looking at each emotion in turn. Using her foot, she slides one, then another, and another into the circle. When she is done, I ask her to walk round, reading out loud what she has selected . . .
    'Awe, wonder, joy, delight, passion, love, excitement, hope'.

What are you noticing within you?

- *What are you thinking/imagining/remembering?*
- *What are you feeling?*
- *What are you imagining you would have done, if you had been faced with the same scenario?*
- *What is your rationale for this?*

What actually happened next?

When I saw the emotions cards Billie had selected, I felt surprise and shock. I also felt irritated with myself about my question. Which question? I had made a bunch of assumptions. Clocking myself, I brought my attention back to her. She had actually responded to something that had meaning for her, even if it did not seem to fit with my question.

I said that she did not have to tell us what happened to her, then asked what it was about those emotions that had her 'never want to experience them again'.

She replied, 'Because when I have those kinds of feelings, really bad things happen to me'.

I reflected her words back: 'So when you have those kinds of feelings, really bad things happen to you?'

'Yes'.

I said 'Now you don't have to say what happened, but can you say **when** the really bad things happened?'

'Two years ago'.

'How long did they last?'

'About 4 days'.

'In your whole life, you only ever felt those particular feelings two years ago?'

For the first time in the session, she looked up at me, with her brow slightly furrowed, and said 'No!'

'No?' I reflected back. Then she smiled . . . and I smiled back.

Billie did not speak when I asked what had brought her to the mat. I assumed that something big from her past had been activated in the session, which I knew about, but others in the room did not. I noticed suddenly feeling hyper-vigilant. Was this mine or hers? I reminded myself that she had taken that step onto the mat and that she was in charge of anything she disclosed. I trusted Billie. This process was hers, and my role was to support her in a way that also served the group.

Even though Billie had moved herself onto the mat, her silence signalled she was not quite ready to speak. She was able to move and to engage with her feelings.[30] Through my own living–learning inquiry, I recognise this in myself – that my feelings and body move me, long before my mind comprehends what is happening and why, and certainly ahead of my ability to talk about it. This played out in Billie's process. She moved onto the mat. She walked through her emotions; she used her feet to slide the emotions clearly into view. Only then was she able to speak them out loud and to engage with my questions.

In this short encounter, she accessed crucial factual 'data' that had previously been out of reach. The moment she said 'No!' and then smiled, was the moment her *Fiction* lost its grip. She did not need to talk about the details of what happened to her in the past, because her meaning-making had become 'stuck' on a false causal link that disintegrated in light of her irrefutable lived experience: she had felt 'those *Feelings*' many, many times in her life without other 'really bad things' occurring as a consequence. My odd question brought this locked-in causal relationship into view. This provided a clue to seeking out other 'data' – *Facts*, in this instance – which, in turn, disrupted what was stuck, enabling a new meaning-making pattern to arise.

As a group, we later explored what I had done, as well as what went on for the other's witnessing. Here I offer what I shared of my process, to illuminate some of the underpinning dynamics playing out in the approach. I spoke of being slightly thrown when Billie shook her head in response to my first question, and how my prior knowledge had me jump to assumptions. I fell into *Fictions* about what Billie would be *Feeling*; and *Fictions* about what she would 'want to feel' and 'not feel'. Whatever was going on in me came out in my asking her a somewhat 'odd' question about her feelings . . . and yet, I noted that it had actually opened up something for Billie. I reminded myself that in working with not-knowing, *interventions are simply experiments with uncertain consequences*. And, because she was slowly moving around the circle in silence with me accompanying her, I had time to process what was going in me, without disrupting her. Irrespective of my question, she was actually processing something, and my task was simple: attune to her and follow her lead! My early intervention was imperfect, yet because I did not get caught by *Fictions* about myself, I was able to stay in the present and work with each unfolding, until her moment of release.

Complexity thinking and primal animation,[31] were alive in what played out for her and me as well as for the group. Working with such complex entanglements in this group supervision space is made possible because everyone engaged (host/supervisor, person on the mat, witnesses) is held by the same self-centering, motion-oriented praxis. So, although all our processing dynamics are nonlinear and

unpredictable, the P6 Constellation provides a universal framework that brings constancy to the holding space, with a place for everything that shows up. Everyone is doing their own personal work, whether or not the group focus and supervisor's attention is explicitly on them.

Natural Inclusionality comes alive in drawing upon all of our being when processing, that is, through our sensing and sense-making faculties. However, we can become confused if everything roils around within us in an undifferentiated muddle. The scenario with Billie reminds me how easy it is to slide into pervasive ways of referring to feelings, for example, when someone asks us 'how' we feel, we may say 'good or fine or bad!' These are not feelings, they are *Fictions*. And notice this: I am **not** saying *Fictions* are bad! I am saying *Fictions* are *Fictions* (meaning-making is meaning-making, and it is essential to life). *Feelings* are *Feelings*. They are not 'good/bad', 'right/wrong' or 'light/shadow'; they are essential to life. Knowing this to be so, I still slid into assuming (*Fictions*) that Billie would not want to feel feelings she might judge as 'bad' like shame, guilt, fear, panic, rage, resentment, and so on.

She went somewhere I did not expect. I could have tipped into a cascade of *Fictions*/self-accusations about myself: 'I got that so wrong', 'I feel like I messed up with Billie', 'I feel like I made a fool of myself in front of the group', 'I feel really stupid!' Thankfully, I didn't. But in offering these possible examples, you can see that none of them mentions a single *Feeling* nor indeed any *Facts*. Our common vernacular is often imprecise. These two data types are tightly coupled in our interior processing and, when trying to express *Feelings*, our phrasing commonly collapses into *Fictions*. Our imprecision can precipitate confusion, misunderstanding and sometimes even conflict.

A presence-ful inquiry invites a naturally inclusional stance, which means accepting whatever is showing up so we may attend to it. Noticing **that** we are making judgements is not the same as believing those judgements! Noticing and **admitting** our *Fictions*, *Feelings* and the *Facts* of a situation is key to accessing the insights that free us into more generative patterns of being~doing in the world. So, for example, when I feel shame or embarrassment, rather than suppressing or trying to run from them, I turn to meet them. I have become intensely curious about what might be revealed to me. What have I done or am I believing I have done? What else is in the mix? These questions open me up to discovery.

I have come to realise that the only pro-active thing we can do to support ourselves is to embark on making conscious what has been non-conscious. Accessing and leveraging all of our faculties helps us to notice what we notice, and the more we do this, the more we develop our capacities to notice more than we did before. All else that transpires – insights, learning, transformational shifts – becomes more coherent and generative as we become more adept at supporting our natural living–learning, nonlinear processing dynamics. Doing this solo takes practice and initially is challenging because it is harder to catch our blind spots. Group supervision, with those who are committed to self-inquiry, holds the potential for accelerated, personal and relational learning.

Box 3.3: Not enough time

We are one hour and 40 minutes into a two-hour group supervision with three people. I invited Susan first, then Mary. We focused on what was coming up for the two of them. We spent 40 minutes with Susan and the last hour with Mary. With 20 minutes left, I turned to Fliss and asked her what she was bringing. She fidgeted in her chair, looked up at the clock and said:

'There's only 20 minutes left, we're not going to have enough time!'

What are you noticing within you?

- *What are you thinking/imagining/remembering?*
- *What are you feeling?*
- *What are you imagining you would have done if you had been faced with the same scenario?*
- *What is your rationale for this?*

What actually happened next?

Fliss stood up and started talking quickly about all the things that were going on and going wrong. I asked her to pause, and she kept going. I spoke a bit louder, asking her to take a breath. She kept going. On the third time, I said even more loudly, 'Fliss, stop. Of everything that is going on, what is common to them all that is bothering you most?' She stopped talking, eyes wide open. Blinked at me, then burst into tears. . . . Out tumbled the accusations she was believing about herself. . . . And within minutes, she realised that she could remember nothing in her life that substantiated those accusations. The grip of another *Fiction* was broken, and having been released from it, Fliss sat back down in her chair. We all looked at the clock. Fifteen minutes had passed. Susan leaned forward to Fliss, saying, 'So there wasn't enough time to work on your stuff then?' We all erupted into hysterical laughter.

In this last scenario, I was attuning to the levels of tension present in Fliss. This was a repeating pattern of hers. Usually, she would speak first – to get whatever was going on in her out, as soon as possible. Mary had a tendency to hold back 'so there would not be time for her'. On this day, sensing that this pattern was about to play out again, I intervened by inviting the others in the group to bring their issues first. In so doing, I created the conditions for her to experience holding her tension longer than usual and for Mary to tip out sooner. Systemically, I was attending to both of their patterns in a single intervention.

The mechanistic (linear causality) worldview infusing Fliss' comment would have us believe that change requires 'lots of time', and this was no longer available. Added to this, you can imagine a tumble of possible *Fictions* that might have surfaced for Fliss. Rather than me speculating on what they might have been, I invite you to imagine being in her position and to tune in to your *Fictions*. Or perhaps you find yourself resonating with Mary. What gets activated in you?

What happened for Fliss is a wonderful example of nonlinear processing. *Emergence emerges beyond reason or control*. When conditions align, an internal reconfiguration happens incredibly quickly, literally from one moment to the next. Witnessing a person's shift is quite something to behold. That moment when a person's state changes from deep distress to calm serenity or unbridled laughter is breath-taking, awe-inspiring. This encounter surfaced the patterns playing out in the individuals and within the group. It proved a turning point in catalysing new levels of acuity, intimacy and daring amongst them. Yet none of us can predict what will catalyse such shifts, nor when or how. The only active contribution we can make when hosting ourselves or others, is to open and scaffold the space, and to facilitate noticing what is current. That. Is. It.

How else does this fit with my theoretical grounding? Firstly, the fundamental principle of natural inclusion expressed succinctly is that *receptive space invokes the in-flow of responsive energy*. So, in supervision, I am creating a receptive space into which others can flow; in a group, we hold this space together. This quality of receptivity is everything and it turns typical mechanistic notions of power, agency, leadership and proactivity upside down and back to front. In nature, receptive space is far from passive; it is a potent presence into and through which all energy flows. Without it there can be no motion. The heart, when it relaxes, draws in blood; the lungs, when the surrounding muscles relax, draw in air; the female egg opens up and admits a sperm cell – the sperm does not and cannot force its way in! Our human-made conceptions of 'leading' are contrary to nature's way. To re-align ourselves with nature, we simply need to recognise this receptive–responsive dance and to follow and flow when and where receptive space opens up for us.

So, when I invited Fliss, she flowed in, ready and full of her own latent transformative potential. I and the group held the space for her being~doing body to show up and literally move/walk through what was roiling within her. The P6 Constellation served as an external framing of her interior realm. The power of metaphorically stepping inside our Selves and literally experiencing our bodies walking from portal to portal in attunement with what comes out of our mouths or shows up in our beings un-spoken is where the theory of primal animation comes alive in this way of working. We find our emotions moving through us as they move us to move, and we find ourselves thinking in movement, which

> Means that a particular situation is unfolding as it is being created by a mindful body; a kinetic energy is forging its way in the world, shaping and being shaped by the developing patterns surrounding it.[32]

Having a shared framework as a resource makes an incredibly complex processing dynamic seem so very simple. How does it do that? Because it reduces one-dimensional cognitive overload by bringing all of our being~doing moving bodies into the inquiry. It opens us up to using our aesthetic, affective, auditory, kinaesthetic, kinetic, spatial, verbal and visual faculties, as well as our rational thinking, past recall and imaginations.

Closing comments

I am keenly aware that what you have encountered in these pages may be unfamiliar, surprising – and perhaps, at times, perturbing. In these pages, I have opened a window into how my worldview and theoretical grounding shows up in my praxis. My deepest hope is that in this account you may have found something that affirms, excites, aerates, inspires and enriches your own practice and, ultimately, our evolving profession – remembering that

   No way is the only way!

Notes

1 In my thesis I use four icons (▶ ♫ ♦ ≈) to represent these four statewaves (Gardiner, 2021, PhD pending publication)
2 (Birch & Gardiner, 2019).
3 Enform means to form, shape or fashion.
4 (Gardiner, 2019, 2021b, PhD pending publication).
5 Natural Inclusionality (Rayner, 2017: pp. 55–59) is comprehensible only through modes of inquiry that attend to our actual experiences of natural phenomena:
   'combine intimate (first person) with distanced (third person) modes of perception, to enable relational/empathetic (second person) perception . . . Intuitive, aesthetic, imaginative, empathetic, poetic modes of enquiry and expression are all valid, so long as these are experience-based' (Rayner, 2020: online).
6 In referring to 'complexity thinking', I bring together complexity science ('objective') and systems thinking (including meaning-making and perspectives typical in inter-subjective domains).
7 Animation is 'the fundamental, essential, and properly descriptive concept to understanding animal life' (Sheets-Johnstone, 2009: p. 375).
8 Living Theory Action Research (Whitehead, 1985, 2000, 2010).
9 These chapters offer more in-depth explanation of swarm behaviour, complex adaptive systems and natural inclusionality (Birch & Gardiner, 2019).
10 In the School of Systems Sciences in Hull University Business School.
11 I use **'admit'** in a very particular way. When I **embolden** the word, I invoke the complex of its meanings: '**Admit**: acknowledge/recognise; allow/take in, allow the possibility/validity of; accept as valid/possible' (Gardiner, 2021b, PhD pending publication: Appendix, p. 133).
12 Aesthetic–Poetic gave birth to 34 poems during my doctoral inquiry. Additionally, I have created several approaches, frameworks and models (Gardiner, 2021b, PhD pending publication).
13 (Bateson, 2016: p. 169).
14 Self-protection is one of two primal purposes I see playing out repeatedly in myself and others. This shows up, often inappropriately – not when I am **actually** under threat, but

when I am **believing** I am; that is, when something from my past that is not grounded in present actualities becomes activated and begins to play out through me, often precipitating outcomes I am trying to avert (Gardiner, 2021b, PhD pending publication).

15 This behaviour sits at the heart of my praxis, keeping me alert to my ethical commitment to act for the well-being of myself, others and the wider world (Gardiner, 2019).

16 (Rayner, 2017, 2018).

17 My composite doctoral submission will be in the public domain 2021/2022.

18 Epistemology refers to how knowledge is 'created' and what is knowable. Simplistically, this is delineated in three ways: objective (that which exists independent of an individual; factual, tangible, quantifiable); subjective (personal: meaning a person makes of something, unverifiable by anyone except the individual whose meaning it is); inter-subjective/constructionist (that which arises between subject–object where the object can also be other persons; meaning-making conveyed in and through language/symbols and taken to be real, amongst those who agree it to be so).

19 (Crotty, 1998; Evely et al., 2008; Moon & Blackman, 2014).

20 By '**reflective**', I mean looking back to the past to better understand what we did, how and why and referring to other knowledge sources to see if/how they may illuminate what we experienced. It also means reflecting back 'mirror-like', with nothing added, and nothing taken away. '**Reflexive**' refers to in-the-moment **noticing** and **attending** to what is happening in the here and now (Gardiner, 2019, 2021b, PhD pending publication).

21 Scientific experiments rely on creating stable experimental conditions, for example, by introducing fixed protocols (not possible in 'real life'), attempting to remove variables (that are inextricably linked in 'real life' so cannot actually be removed) and then assuming that if we do the **exact** same thing over and over again we will get guaranteed results (which, in real life, we know rarely happens, because everything is always changing and we are adapting accordingly).

22 In complex living systems, there are infinite, entangled interdependencies. When we 'remove' variables to try to make a situation more 'stable'(i.e., more predictable and manageable), we may inadvertently introduce far greater instability. This is why many change programmes fail.

23 Praxis: the generative fusion of practice and theory informing and enhancing each other.

24 (Whitehead, 1985).

25 The praxis of Presence in Action is scaffolded by a framework called the P6 Constellation, a practice called the Acuity Practice; and set of paradigm-attuned behaviours through which our embodied knowing is expressed. These are called Symmathesic Agency Behaviours (Gardiner, 2019, 2021b, PhD pending publication).

26 See Chapter 7 herein; and also Gardiner (2014, 2019, 2021b, PhD pending publication).

27 In using this term 'data', I am expanding its meaning to include intangible as well as tangible data.

28 (Andersson, 2018).

29 All names are made up and some details are brought together from different cases to safeguard anonymity.

30 (Sheets-Johnstone, 1999).

31 See Chapter 7 herein (Sheets-Johnstone, 1999, 2009, 2011).

32 (Sheets-Johnstone, 1981: p. 405).

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