

Chapter 10: Conclusions

“There is another sense in which learning can be coming home, for the process of learning turns a strange context into a familiar one, and finally into a habituation of mind and heart. The world we live in is the one we are able to perceive; it becomes gradually more intelligible and more accessible with the building up of coherent mental models. Learning to know a community or a landscape is a homecoming”.

(Bateson, 1994, p.213)

In this Chapter, I set out the conclusions, discuss their contributions to the theory, their contributions to the knowledge of practice, their integration into my theory of practice, the limitations of the study and additional research opportunities. It is my homecoming as a supervisor. As I have shared, my ultimate inquiry emerged from the experiences of the combined roles of researcher and participating supervisor. These provided the unique perspectives to consider the theoretical, and the practice implications for myself as well as for the profession.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000, p.189) developed a four-part description of the narrative inquiry space, that begins with “living” and “telling” our stories. We began with “living” in supervision, in the actual sessions. This distinguishes the research – this is not based on interviews or stories after the fact. This is based on being in the room while the supervision happened. The “telling” was in our actions throughout the year and in our reflections and was enhanced with the telling of the stories of the three colleague groups.

In the discussions within the action learning meetings, the actions we took to modify how we worked going forward, and in designing the next year of supervision we were “retelling” the stories; “we see that we are changed as we retell our lived and told stories” (Clandinin, 2016, p.34). The colleague groups shared their retelling in the focus groups. The retelling continued through multiple drafts of writing the field texts and research texts, including the Chapter in the book on coaching supervision about the use of observational data (Downing, 2019). It has continued in the writing of this thesis. The fourth position is one of “reliving”, as I have relived the project, I have retold what

happened and have shifted my narratives of “the institutional, social and cultural narratives” in which I am a part (Clandinin, 2016, p.34). These broader shifts are represented in this Chapter as I set out the conclusions, the identification of the contributions to theory and practice, and in the changes to how I supervise.

Contributions to knowledge of practice and theory

The research makes two contributions to the knowledge of practice. The first is the effectiveness of virtual small group supervision—when a supervisor and coaches come together virtually in a small group, they learn and develop in their own unique ways, personally and professionally, through integration of inquiry, reflection and action. The second is a number of practitioner accounts which enables practitioners to contrast and compare with how they engage in their work. These stories are instrumental in inviting coaches with little or no supervision experience to consider how they might utilize supervision in small groups to deepen their reflective practices. This is the invitation to North American coaches. More experienced practitioners are able to engage in multi-dimensional conversations to explore and enrich the practice of small group supervision.

The contributions to theory are to the understanding of the dimensions of the supervisory relationship within the small group context, as the primacy of the supervisory relationships in the group setting were identified. The supervisory relationships included the individual relationships among the group members and the supervisor: the supervisor with each individual coach, the supervisor with the group as a whole, and the coaches with each other. This research contributes to the knowledge of the qualities required for the creation and stewardship of a safe and trusted container with a small group engaged in reflective practice. Key findings include the articulation of the process for the supervision engagement, a model of the elements the supervisor is holding, a model of reflective practice and learning opportunities, and a model of the overall supervision session.

I propose a process for the supervision engagement, a model for the elements the supervisor is holding, a model for reflective practice and learning opportunities, and a model of the overall movements within the session. These demonstrate processes and methods to respond to the challenge to supervisors by Michael Carroll (2009, p.50) to work with their supervisees to learn how to be reflective practitioners.

The research addressed five theoretical gaps in the coaching supervision literature on small group supervision in the lack of stories of the lived experiences of:

1. coaches and supervisors in small groups
2. the primary importance and complexity of supervisory relationships and the elements that contribute to relationships
3. the creation of the container, how it ebbs and flows, and the stewardship required
4. how supervision happens in the virtual world
5. the reflective and learning practices in virtual small groups.

Set out in Chapters 5, 6, and 7 are the retelling of the living we did in the groups; in Chapter 8 are the five Principles of Good Practice for creating the safe and trusted, living and vibrant garden, including tending the circumstances and situations that negatively impacted part of the garden. In Chapter 9 are the six reflective and learning practices enabled by the Principles of Good Practice, a few elements specific to group dynamics and ethical considerations.

[Original Purposes and Aims Achieved](#)

My overall purpose was to favorably influence the adoption of coaching supervision within North America by sharing the opportunities and possibilities for growth and development through small group reflective practice with a certified supervisor. I wanted to make contributions to the practice of virtual small group coaching supervision by elucidating what actually happened in the groups; and to contribute to addressing the gap in research-based literature.

My personal motivations were to engage in a higher level of challenge in my personal and professional development; and to articulate my theory of practice through intentional exploration, in a formal research setting, of who I was, how I was and what I did as a supervisor.

My aims were to utilize the research experience to

- enhance my capacities as a supervisor
- to become an inquiring practitioner, to embody the interplay of academia and knowledge areas with my practice experiences
- to influence how supervision is conducted in my community
- to share with the global supervisor communities what was learned; and
- as a platform to invite North American coaches to consider supervision as part of their development

As shared in this Chapter, and in the final Chapter, my capabilities and capacities as a supervisor have been enhanced and continue to develop through my inquiring practitioner stance. As I share the results of my research, and undertake faculty positions within certification programmes, I am enriching the dialogues and thinking about group supervision. I am beginning to engage as a supervisor and supervision trainer in North America and will do so robustly with the publication of my first book which explores how inquiries happen in small groups. This is the focus for my invitation for North American coaches to learn more about supervision and the benefits of group co-inquiry.

With respect to changes within the Sponsor's Supervision Center through dialogue and discussion with my colleagues, the following themes emerged:

- some of the supervisors are using the recordings of their sessions to review, reflect and learn
- several of us are now inviting coaches to bring moments of sessions when they feel in flow to identify what shifts they notice in the journey toward mastery
- we have agreement that there are times when one-to-one communication outside of the full group are appropriate and we contract for that with the group

- some of the supervisors are experimenting in the sessions, with the permission of the group

Aims

Over the year of research with the supervision groups, the aims of this project evolved to these two inquiries: What are the qualities and conditions that create enough safety in the supervision relationships within a group to enable self-disclosure, reflection and learning? How are these qualities and conditions designed and brought forth?

These two inquiries have been robustly answered. Figure 29 below sets out the full process.

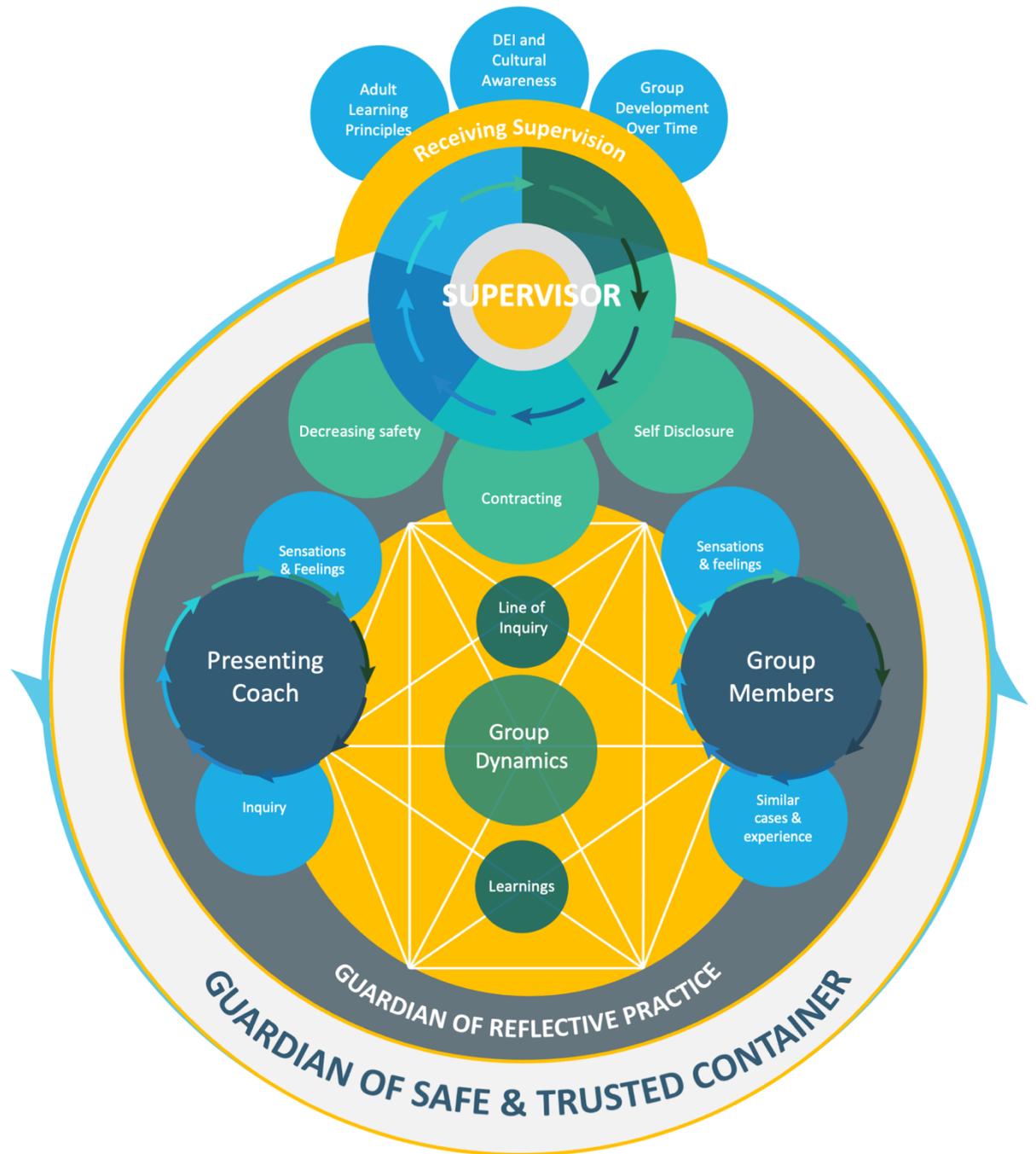


Figure 29: Full Process View of Group Supervision

Supervisor and coaches came together virtually, in a small group, and learned and developed personally and professionally through integration of inquiry, reflection, experimentation, and action.

The supervisor invited the collaborative co-creation of the qualities and conditions of the container for self-disclosure, reflection and learning based on their relationships, contracting, shared purpose, and interactions. That invitation was the beginning of the creation of the container. The responsive moves by each member contributed to the design and were early glimpses into their needs and expectations.

The supervisory relationships were the most important element in the co-creation of the garden. They were complex and variable, requiring artful facilitation and navigation of inter-relational dynamics among each group member, the group and the supervisor. Artful meant attention and awareness of what was in play. The supervisor was an in-the-moment observer, witness and participant in the shaping and reshaping of the garden. The supervisees had important roles and responsibilities as co-inquirers and were ultimately learning to be co-supervisors.

It was a living container over the course of the 18 months of research. The structures and processes were crafted through initial and continuous contracting. The container was shaped and reshaped by experiences: individual narratives and circumstances prior to and within the group; interactions, content and processes within the session; length of time together and the influence of societal, national and global developments. In the reshaping, one or more coaches or the supervisor experienced a change in the level of trust or safety. The felt sense of safety could shift in distinct ways, e.g., one coach could feel safer, another could feel unsafe, and another could have no sense of a change.

As part of the overall findings and conclusions on the co-creation and stewardship of the container, I offered six theoretical concepts, set out in Chapters 8 and 9, that were developed from the experiences of the participants:

1. the supervisory relationships in small groups
2. the elements the supervisor is holding within the groups
3. multiple levels of contracting required
4. process and structure of small group supervision
5. the reflective and learning practices model
6. The full process model

Contrast and Comparison for Supervisors and Coaches

Our hope is to create research texts that allow audiences to engage in resonant remembering as they lay their experiences alongside the inquiry experiences, to wonder alongside participants and researchers..." (Clandinin, 2016, p.51)

There are four groups of coaching supervision practitioners who may be enriched in thoughts, ideas and reflections, by this research.

First, for supervisors. Experienced supervisors will have the opportunity to be in the room with these two groups and consider their practices, how they view supervisory relationships, facilitate group dynamics, structure the sessions, or explain what is happening in the sessions. By comparing and contrasting with all five groups, they are able to see more about how they supervise and consider a reflective inquiry into their theories of practice.

Supervisors who have not supervised in the small group setting will have the opportunity to experience the rich details of the vignettes, consider the findings and take ideas and approaches to consider, to evaluate in the context of their supervision models and to experiment within their setting.

Second, for coaches who are considering or already in small group supervision, this research may open up possibilities for them to engage differently, perhaps more robustly as they consider the co-creation of the container, the relationships within the group and with the supervisor. They may select a practice, such as having a reflection question ahead of the session, or experimenting with live-action coaching, or journaling following the session to explore the impact on their reflection and learning.

Third, for both supervisors and coaches who are new to virtual small group work, this provides an approach to virtual supervision that can be tailored to the learning needs of the participants.

Fourth, for supervisor training programs. In my role as faculty at a supervisor certification program in the UK I have been asked to incorporate my research into teaching the module and the webinar on group supervision. Others, with supervisor training responsibilities may find useful theories and practice ideas.

I hope that this may also provide useful food for thought to supervisors working in small groups in other professions.

[My theory of practice](#)

In setting out my theory of practice I am “reliving” the full inquiry of the project, taking in all of the living, telling and retelling (Clandinin, 2016, p.34). I am living fully into “Who you are is how you supervise” (Murdoch and Arnold, 2013). My new ways of being are infusing my stance as supervisor with more aliveness, vitality, playfulness, lightness, humor, and courage. When I started at Middlesex, I was a new supervisor and a new researcher. Today, almost five years later, I am settled into the journey.

I am emerging as a very different lifelong learner, one who is integrating practice and research. I am awake in different ways than ever before. My gifts, as a supervisor, have become more visible, more integrated, more embodied. They are grace, gratitude, attentiveness, awake-ness, finely tuned empathy, ability to be in relationship, lifelong learner and curious inquirer of my professional and personal endeavors. Still in my shadow are deference, performance, self-doubt, and a quieter inner critic. These continue to be my development edges; I hold them with affection as I move forward. I know that as long as I practice, I will be in supervision of my work.

[Explication of the process of supervision—my theory of practice](#)

I know how to co-create, with the coaches, a flexible, robust, and living container. My definition is that it includes collaboration, meaningful dialogue and robust inquiry into the coaches’ practices, while providing ethical guardrails, and assisting coaches who need resourcing. Here is what I do in supervision. I take the time to contract with the coaches

on their needs, I use experimentation and exploration about how we learn together, what processes serve our learning, and facilitating how the coaches interact with each other.

I believe in the importance of how long we have been together, our past and current relationships and our commitment to our own participation. My preference is to constitute groups that are comprised of coaches with approximately equivalent engagement in coaching.

The process invited coaches to bring their work into the sessions. The self-exploration provided space for them to bring issues of stress, depletion, burn-out, and other concerns. Since the research groups concluded the year, I have increasingly invited coaches to bring their good work into the sessions.

As another way of presenting who I am as a supervisor, I have written the stories of my current theory of practice, using the metaphor of a play “Acts of Love”. It is set out in Appendix 15.

Limitations

This is small scale qualitative research.

All of the coaches had only experienced supervision virtually; the four supervisors had only supervised virtually. There may be distinctions that could be made by those who have worked in person.

All of the participants were trained and certified as coaches by the same organization. There may be limitations because we shared one collective approach to coaching.

Potential research

There are a number of other field texts analyses that are possible. A few examples—what were the categories of inquiries brought by the coaches and how did they change or

evolve during the inquiry, what might be discovered if the experiences were interpreted through the lens of other models such as the 7 eyed model (Hawkins, 2011), the coaching maturity model (Clutterbuck and Megginson, 2011), a comparative analysis of the approaches, structures and processes across the four supervisors; the self as coach domains (McLean, 2019).

There is a need for additional research on small group coaching supervision that could include:

- Studies of in-person small group coaching supervision
- Studies of virtual small group coaching supervision with coaches who were trained and certified by other organizations
- Studies from the perspectives of coaching supervisors – what are their challenges, training, key issues with small groups
- Studies from the perspectives of the clients of the coaches – did they perceive shifts in the coach’s approach or relationship with them

In the next and final Chapter, I reflect on this journey.