

The Power of Presence in Relationships

by Tracey Emerson.

On Tuesday 12th June 2018, I took part in a workshop facilitated by Louie Gardiner, founder of the P6 Constellation©, and Karen Beveridge, one of its three pioneer practitioners. The workshop, *The Power of Presence in Relationships*, took place at the Children in Scotland headquarters. The workshop participants were professionals working with children in various capacities, and the group included teachers, play therapists, counsellors and charity workers. I attended in my role as a writer, both to experience the workshop and to reflect upon how the techniques I have found so useful in my personal life translate into a group setting.

The workshop had its basis in the P6 Constellation, described by Louie as a systemic framework that illuminates and transforms our relationships with ourselves and others. This framework is the result of Louie's extensive Masters and Doctoral research and is underpinned by systemic thinking, complexity sciences and decades of personal and professional practice. In simple terms, the P6 Constellation facilitates awareness of our own internal sensing and sense-making, providing insight into what we notice, feel and think (e.g. our beliefs and values); and how all these combined can influence our behaviour. By working with the six 'portals' of the P6 Constellation—Facts, Feelings, Fictions, Purpose, Outcomes and Decisions—we can, as Louie explained, notice what we are (not) noticing and what meanings we are making about what we notice. We can become more present to what is going on in ourselves and others.

Previous group work had shown Louie and Karen that, for a one-day workshop, it was only possible to introduce three of the six portals—Facts, Feelings and Fictions or the 3Fs. This workshop was not designed to train us to use the P6 Constellation with others, but instead to give us a taste of the 3Fs as a way to embark upon our own self-practice and to see how we could improve the clarity and effectiveness of our communication exchanges.

My experience with the P6 Constellation has come through my life-coaching sessions with Karen, which I began as a way to tackle self-esteem issues I believed were hampering my creativity. As a fiction writer, it is my job to make up stories and to productively blur the boundary between fact and fiction. I write characters who are often obsessive and delusional. Characters driven by



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their own fictions. Yet through my sessions with Karen, I came to see that my own failure to notice the connections between Facts, Feelings and Fictions had a daily impact on both my productivity and self-confidence.

The workshop enabled us to explore the 3Fs both through experiential learning and through a brief introduction to some of the theories underpinning the P6 Constellation. A short creative writing exercise, in which we had to free-write for 90 seconds about our journey to the workshop, helped us begin to identify the Facts, Fictions and Feelings in the short pieces we created. We experienced how difficult it was to disentangle the 3Fs. Facts without Fictions seemed unnatural, and all our Fictions pointed to a kernel of Fact, which was often distorted or masked from view. This revelation of the interconnectedness of the 3Fs exemplified our discussion of how, in order to be fully present, we must improve what Louie described as our capacity to illuminate what is present in each moment. Facts, Fictions and Feelings are all operating at the same time. I found that the act



of slowing down to notice the 3Fs, to notice what was 'illuminated', drew me naturally into a mindful, curious state.

The use of the 3F portals as a way into 'Presence' resonated with all the workshop participants. Alison Lambie, a counsellor working in education, said: 'Being present in relationships is part of my ethos of awareness, working with children and teachers at Primary school and counselling with adults. I liked the language of Illumination.' When discussing this concept of illumination, Louie particularly emphasised the importance of training ourselves to notice and reflect back to others with nothing added and nothing taken away.

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Through my own work with the P6 Constellation, I have discovered it is often my inability to acknowledge and understand my feelings that blocks my ability to be present, and this workshop delved further into the Feelings portal. Feelings include both emotions and physical sensations, which are seen as the body's reaction to what has happened *and* what we think about what has happened. They can manifest as physical sensations such as a tightness in the chest or tension in the stomach, and often we discover many emotions are activated in any situation.

Another exercise asked us to consider what we felt when told we were about to do the creative writing exercise. To help us articulate our emotional response, we used Louie's Emotions Palette©, a tool devised to increase emotional literacy. The Emotions Palette is a set of cards, each with an emotion written on it. What surprised all of us was the number and variety of emotional responses each of us had, all arising from this seemingly simple question. When using the P6 Constellation, we accept all emotions as useful. Louie described emotions as signals, informing us about something that has happened which is affecting us. Paying attention to our emotions can help us make sense of our reactions to a situation.

Often, we find ourselves unable to notice and be present to our emotions in a constructive way because, as Louie and Karen explained, we have a habit of judging emotions as either 'good' or 'bad', and in so doing, try to avoid the 'bad' ones. We were encouraged to see this as unhelpful framing and to view all emotions as helpful signals—simply data.

When we shared our emotions with other participants, we were all amazed by the wide variety we had selected. In my group of three, we only had one in common. It gave us a clear reminder that each person involved in a situation will experience it differently. When we delved deeper into these responses, we found ourselves sharing with each other the past events that could have shaped our reactions and thus we gained a deeper understanding both of ourselves and each other. All this occurred with no emphasis on having to 'do' anything about these



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insights. Instead we had the opportunity to simply 'be' with them. Once again, we were able to illuminate what was present.

Nick Thorpe from Fathers Network Scotland said: 'I loved the emphasis on working in the present moment, coming back to that central focus of the here and now in order to process what's going on in relationships.'

All of us could see the potential of the Emotions Palette, both for personal and professional use. Chris Maxwell, a teacher, said she was, 'particularly interested in the cards that we used with the emotions written on, and I would like to use them with the children I see one-to-one. I think they would be a good compliment to other resources that I use, especially for children with either limited vocabulary or who are really bottling things up.'

At the start of the day, when we shared our reasons for attending the workshop, many participants cited friction with colleagues as an important factor. During the discussion that followed the 'Feelings' exercise, we acknowledged that the kind of self-practice encouraged by the 3Fs could enable us to be present in challenging interpersonal relationships and to have more empathy for the other individuals involved, each of whom would also be experiencing a complex interplay of Facts, Fictions and Feelings. Further discussion touched on how our minds make Fictions out of the Facts and Feelings that occur and how all of these combined generate in us behaviours that are often unhelpful and sometimes inexplicable! Again, this provided insights for many of us that illuminated our experience not just of difficult team dynamics but also our personal relationships. Nick Thorpe said: 'The process of stepping consciously between Facts, Feelings or Fictions in order to work out what's happening in moments of 'stuckness', is a tool I'll be using in my personal life, as well as professionally.'

Both Louie and Karen are finding that the P6 Constellation can be of benefit to a wide range of organisations and individuals. Louie coaches, supervises and trains people who live and work in diverse local to global contexts, as well as offering change-consultancy services in organisations. Karen too works with clients of all ages and from all walks of life. Her experience as a former teacher and head teacher has enabled her to use the 3Fs with younger clients and their parents to great effect. She has worked with fostering organisations and primary schools, and she and Louie believe that the P6 Constellation could offer schools, teachers and parents a new way of helping all children, especially those facing particular struggles with mental health and wellbeing.

The P6 Constellation is a practical approach that encourages and enables the self-management of stress and challenges in all areas of life. I have found this resource invaluable in my

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personal development. My self-awareness and emotional literacy have improved. I realised that the negative self-talk I had come to think of as Fact was actually Fiction, driven by experiences and Feelings I had not taken time to understand and unravel. Taking part in *The Power of Presence in Relationships* workshop not only reaffirmed the benefits of the P6 Constellation for self-growth, it also demonstrated the huge potential for enhancing the professional life of individuals and the organisations to which they belong.

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