Reflections in the Lake

Written by Felix Brianton.

I stand at the gates to a park that abounds with glistening greenery. This morning had been dreary and grey, but the sun seemed to come out to greet me just as I stepped out from my office. This is the perfect place for my work today, and not just because the lingering dewdrops on the first flower buds of spring draw out their dainty colours. There is a reason I am here today. It is important to me.

It is as I start to get lost in this thought that a voice calls from somewhere beside me.

"Razel?"

I turn around to see who is walking up to my side. He is short, and his face is plump and pleasant. He wears a beanie and glasses, and nestled between the zip lines of his open rain jacket is a pink lanyard, just like mine. I am glad to see him, and today that gladness is accompanied by an expanding sense of purpose.

"Ano," I call back to him, "It's so good to see you. Good thing the rain's stopped, isn't it? We didn't think of where we might meet if the weather wasn't right for the park."

"Yeah, what a relief! I would have felt really awkward if we had to do supervision in the office. It just feels more like I can talk freely out here, you know?"

"Of course. We're not limited just to the office and the park. How about we come up with a backup location in today's session?"

"Wait, so it's not just here or the office?"

"Not at all," I assure him. I go on to explain that this is related to the core principles of consumer perspective supervision. One of them is that the location of supervision is not restricted to the service of the supervisor or the supervisee. I know a little about Ano and why this might be important to him in particular. I might assume the rest, but I choose instead to be curious.

"Ano, can you tell me a bit about what experiences of supervision you've had so far?"

"I've been having supervision with my manager so far. It's nice to have it as a reflective space, but because she has a clinical background, sometimes I feel like she doesn't really get the work that I do. She's also my boss, so there are some things we don't actually get to reflect on. She just tells me what to do."

"Well Ano, I can happily say we'll be doing things a bit differently to that!"

He gives a glad chuckle and says, "How's that?"

"Well for a start," I say to him as we begin our walk, "I'm a consumer worker like you, and I'm not your line manager. That's not by coincidence. Consumer Perspective Supervision is discipline specific, and it's distinct from line management. It's not about performance or clinical guidelines, it's a reflective space that suits our needs as consumer workers. Or as I often say, a reflexive space."

"Reflexive?"

"Yeah, a reflexive space. That's a space with all the attributes of a reflective space, but where we also pay attention to the power dynamics here and around us. This model of supervision is really rooted in the consumer movement that's stood up to sanist and ableist systems over the years. There's plenty of other ways that power and oppression play out in the world and our work, so I really welcome you to notice those, point them out, and challenge them."

"So, it's more about mentoring then?"

"That can come into it sometimes, but it's not what it's all about. Mentoring kind of has that feel of… One person being the expert, don't you think?"

"Yeah, I guess it does. So, I shouldn't think of you like an expert?"

I thought about this take for a second. "Maybe," I posed to him "we can both think of ourselves as experts, and

at the same time, people who have everything in the world to learn."

"Meaning you'll learn in our supervision as well?"

"Absolutely. This kind of supervision is informed by many of the same values and historical contexts as our work at large, mutuality being a big one."

"Makes sense. What kind of things would you learn from this?"

"Well to start with, I want to learn about you!"

He gives a shy chuckle. "What do you want to know?"

This being our first session, I choose to ask about his values. It will help us to connect, opening up more possibilities for our supervision in the future. We compare his values with mine, and with those that underpin CPS. There's a lot of overlap. Soon enough, one stands out for us.

"I guess I really value honesty," says Ano.

"I'd say the same. What does honesty mean to you?"

"Honestly? It's just about being human. I feel like everything's so much better when we're not masking so much, or hiding things from each other."

"That's around about what it means to me as well. It aligns well with the values of CPS as well. The framework speaks to that in terms of 'Authenticity' and

'Transparency'. Here's a question for you: For our supervision, how honest is too honest?"

We stop for a moment by white chrysanthemums, and skeleton flowers whose petals have turned glassy in the rain. "I guess," he says with a ponderous expression, "If we're not hiding things from each other, I still wouldn't want what we talk about to be everyone's knowledge. It'd help me to feel like I can talk to you about the things I need to if it stays between us."

"That's pretty reasonable, and I'd like that too. There might also be times when you or I find it hard to hold things on our own."

"Like if we talk about something heavy, or that's personal for you?"

"Yes, those are both possibilities. I think in that case I might like to bring what we talk about to my own supervision as well, but I don't have to identify you when I do. Would that be alright with you?"

"Yeah, that's okay. Thanks for asking. Are there other possibilities you're thinking of as well?"

This is going well, I think to myself. This conversation feels quite mutual so far, and I appreciate Ano's curiosity. "How about," I posit to him as we pass by buttercups, "If I'm concerned for your wellbeing, and I feel like just our supervision might not be enough for you in a particular moment. Would you be open to me saying so?"

"Please do, actually! I sometimes find it hard to notice on my own when things are taking a turn for the worse for me."

"Great, I'll speak up if that ever happens, then. What else would you like to happen in that case? Would we tell someone else about what's going on?"

"I mean, once I know that things are starting to slip for me, I usually have a pretty good idea of what to do. I've actually got a few step-by-step things for myself in my notes app. I think it might help if you had those too, so we can go through them together."

Stopping again by delphiniums, I copy down Ano's guides for himself into my notebook. We discuss also who we share these notes, and any others we take in supervision with, and when. There are complexities to this topic. He mentions that he worries about others at work, particularly his seniors and colleagues in other disciplines, becoming aware of specific details about his wellbeing and the way he manages it. He speaks to the real possibility that this might cause them to see him differently, and make his workplace uncomfortable to be in.

I share with him that I would also find it compromising to speak openly within our organisation about how we handle situations like this. I have tended to find that my manager is only supportive of a narrow range of approaches to concerns about wellbeing, and can come down hard on me when I do things differently. He nods

thoughtfully as I tell him, and I am sure he is listening well.

We agree that they can stay between us, but if one of us feels like it would be helpful to show someone else at some stage, we ask about doing so. Like the delphiniums, I feel that we are on our way to standing tall and proud together, responsible for ourselves.

By this point, we are walking beside a lake. Its surface holds the same view of trees and sky, but upside-down and distorted by water's surface. In that rippled reflection, I see the world in different detail. The lake is a lens of sorts in this way, showing me more than I would see otherwise.

"Okay, so," says Ano, "This is reflective- or uh, reflexive. What exactly should we be reflecting on?"

"Well, there's lots we can reflect on! It's whatever you bring to these sessions, really. You might have challenges and tensions that you want to talk about, to debrief about things that have happened, or to lean more into a consumer perspective. Is there anything else you can think of?"

"Oh yeah, those are good points. Um, I guess self-care is one for me. I'm definitely still figuring out how that looks for me, especially in this job. I also feel pretty isolated at work. Everyone on my team is amazing, but I'm the only peer worker. This feels like a way for me to be less isolated."

"Hey, I'm glad that you're already feeling like we're doing something good here. Those are both really good uses for our supervision. Some others might be giving some space to talk about your safety at work, building up your confidence, and exploring the best ways that we can show up for the consumers we're working with on a daily basis."

"Okay, this is all so cool to me. I kinda wish every peer worker had supervision like this."

"That's the idea of it, actually. It's a fundamental principle of CPS that it should be something every consumer perspective worker has access to."

We are quiet on that thought for a moment. The word 'should' holds particular weight here. I was lucky to be one of the first in my organisation to access consumer perspective supervision, and at that time there was no plan to make it available to anyone else. I used my own supervision often to talk about systemic issues like this. It is what bolsters me, helps me to feel sure of myself and what I want to achieve.

Today is one achievement I am proud of. Others in my organisation are still without supervision, until we find funding for the external supervision that they opt for and are entitled to. But today, Ano and I walk through this special place of mine, creating our own special space as we go. We are reflected in the lake, on the dewdrops, and in each other's minds. Like the flower

buds that those dewdrops cling to, I feel we are soon to bloom with purpose.

Reflections in the Lake © 2025 by Felix Brianton is licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0.

To view a copy of this license, visit https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/