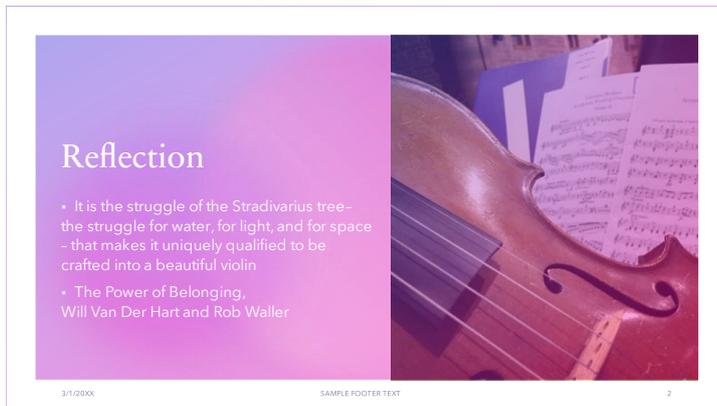


Creativity in Pastoral Supervision

Liz Crumlish

A presentation for the Association for Pastoral Supervision and Education Conference, Glasgow June 2022.



It is the struggle of the Stradivarius tree—the struggle for water, for light, and for space—that makes it uniquely qualified to be crafted into a beautiful violin. (The Power of Belonging Will Van Der Hart, Rob Waller)¹

The trees at the edge of the forest
 that have not had to struggle for water and air
 whose branches are plentiful, whose leaves are many
 are too full of knots to make beautiful instruments.
 Only those that have struggled
 Forced to endure darkness
 Forced to grow thin and tall
 Forced to eschew branches to occupy less space
 Forced to seek the light
 Those are the trees
 Chosen
 to be fashioned into beautiful instruments
 For beauty insists that we go beyond what we see
 that we persistently look
 for that which is considered impossible
 Beauty insists that we look deep within and call forth
 an ancient wisdom that refuses to settle for ordinary
 And beautiful music requires discipline
 many hours of patiently rehearsing
 the notes on the page laying each one down
 allowing even the discords to find their place
 Until
 from the grit of persistence
 transformation occurs
 and out of brokenness
 emerges beauty
 forged in love
 sustained by care.
 A wholehearted offering
 to beautify the world.

(Liz Crumlish 2022)

¹ The Power of Belonging, Will van der Hart, Rob Waller, Pub. David C Cook TBG 2019



It probably won't surprise you to hear that I believe all pastoral supervision has the potential to be creative. Our supervisees constantly bring us clues and cues that are gifts for working creatively, taking the reflective work we do together onto another level. When we, as supervisors listen for what ignites, noticing where there is energy, and offer our supervisees a reflective space that picks up on their richly nuanced presentation of work, there is potential to bring the unconscious that sits on the periphery into the spotlight and bring about transformation in the supervisory space.

Back in February, a group of folk who'd been practicing Supervision in various contexts throughout the Covid pandemic got together for a couple of nights at a retreat centre just a bit north of here.

We didn't all know one another - most had a connection to the Institute Diploma Courses, though not all from the same cohort.

We had no fixed agenda. But we wanted to get together just to chill and to share with one another how the last couple of years had been.

As you might imagine, the make up of the group went through several iterations as the time approached - with folk testing positive or having to shield - but, eventually, 9 of us pitched up to spend 48 hours together.

For once, we refused to let the absent dominate our time together - you know that strange dynamic that happens when those not present take up more space than those who are. And, having simply agreed a co-created contract that ensured a kind of spacious container for our time together, we told our stories, our stories were held, and the work of transformation began.

Even though it was February in Scotland, one evening saw us gathered around a bonfire, toasting marshmallows and telling folk tales.

I am certainly not at liberty to share anyone else's story of that night but, being offered the accolade of chief witch in the proceedings, I can say that the experience for me was restorative.

We don't need to have
written (or told) the story
to find ourselves in it



This much is true - we don't need to have written (or told) the story to find ourselves in it.

And so, as I think about creativity in supervision, it's not all about psycho-drama, socio-drama or small world resources. It's not all about skills or lack thereof in music or art. All of these have their place - and are included in the book.

So ,too, in creative supervision, the hearing and telling of stories has the potential to unlock transformation.

And - we don't need to have written (or told) the story to find ourselves in it.

When 9 of us gathered back in February, from all our differing supervision contexts, what might have been an occasion to lament the last two years - and that has its place too - became instead an opportunity to hear one another's stories and in the hearing and being heard, to move from

Empathy to Engagement
Collusion to Challenge
Resilience to Resistance



Empathy to Engagement
from Collusion to Challenge
and from Resilience to Resistance

It's long been a bit of a complaint of mine that Pastoral Supervision is judged and found wanting, as a nice pursuit for people involved in caring professions when my assertion - and my experience - is that Pastoral Supervision has the potential, if we have the courage, to affect positively systemic wellbeing.

When we have the courage to move from
Empathy to Engagement
from Collusion to Challenge
and from Resilience to Resistance

And that is achieved by not just hearing or telling stories but by working with those stories, creatively, to effect change.

What happens when we listen to the stories our supervisees bring - AND THEN engage with our supervisees to imagine a different ending? That's moving from empathy to engagement.

What happens when we listen to somewhat familiar stories and don't just commiserate but challenge our supervisees to begin to push back - to challenge the environment in which they are expected to work? That's moving from collusion to challenge.

What happens when we listen to stories of work that requires resilience to stay in the game and help our supervisees to find ways to push back on the notion that they are weak if they are not prepared to stick with the toxicity often found in that kind of work? That's moving from resilience to resistance.

Is well-being flourishing?

Another nudge that took me into working creatively with stories was a question I was asked when working with another group of Supervisors. And that was: Is well-being flourishing?



WOMAN AT THE WELL
ARTIST: Bryn Gillette

Drawing from my faith tradition, that question immediately conjured up, for me, a picture of those ancient places, where women gathered, to draw water from the well and to gather up wisdom for living. Water and stories. The very elements of survival.

Communities have always gathered to tell stories, passing on wisdom from one generation to another.

That is well being.

This year, in Scotland has been designated "The year of stories".

There are numerous community events happening where folk are invited to come together and revive that tradition of passing on a community's story.

So - that question - Is well being flourishing?

Let me approach it from two different angles: is well-being **flourishing?**

In other words, in paying attention to wellbeing, are we aiming for flourishing?

Is that the measure of success?

It's certainly been my assumption for some time.

In any time of adversity, I've often articulated - I don't want just to survive, I want to flourish.

And then I was challenged by these words from Audre Lord, that I read - from an address she gave (in 1982:)



" I have heard people say, oh but I'm not content to survive, implicit in that response is a certain kind of denigration of what survival is, that is to say, they reduce survival to mere existence, and that is not survival. No, it is certainly not. Implicit in survival is joy, mobility and effectiveness.

Seen in that light, wellbeing may indeed be survival rather than flourishing.

And perhaps in time of trauma, particularly the kinds of global trauma through which we are living, wellbeing consists in having our stories heard – again and again as may be needed - stories of agony and stories of joy - and in surviving the telling.

Gathering around the well to tell our stories.

The well is not necessarily a place of flourishing but a source for survival – perhaps even joyful survival.

As pastoral supervisors, we bear witness to the stories told, enabling others to survive the telling.



Coming from another angle - Is **well-being** flourishing?

I've also been very conscious of the growth in the well-being industry.

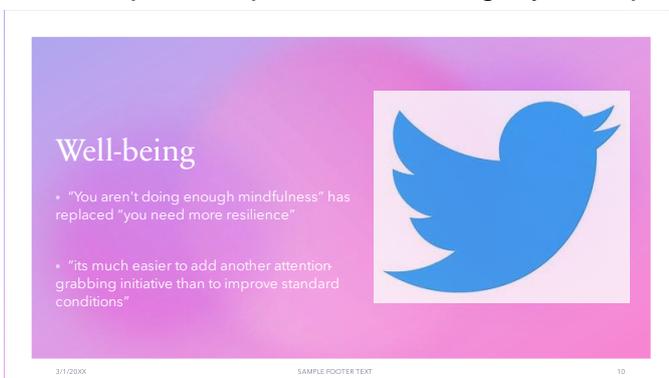
Throughout the pandemic, I've been working with teams of Spiritual Care providers in Health Care.

And much of the work that they typically did in the past has been taken over by well-being practitioners. The focus has been on the well-being of staff - of course that's a good thing. It does, however, leave providers of Spiritual care wondering what is it that is distinctive that they bring to their role as well as the quandary of how to manage a whole other expectation of their service when roles and services are confused as they so often are.

I've also noticed on Social Media something of a protest by an assortment of Health Care Professionals that, while funds are being found to resource Staff well-being spaces and recruit and train staff care practitioners, the very things that make those resources necessary - like under staffing and underfunding departments involved in basic care is not improving but, in fact, deteriorating.

And I wonder, - Is being seen to have the best staff care provision exacerbating the cost to already depleted resources?

I've also picked up on some ambiguity and questioning this on social media:



A recent tweet from a health care professional said: "you aren't doing enough mindfulness" has replaced "you need more resilience."

Another, from a clinical psychologist said: "it's much easier to add an attention grabbing initiative than to improve standard conditions".

So - Returning to our question - Is wellbeing flourishing?

Let's consider the part we might play in that by asking - What does Pastoral Supervision contribute to well-being?



As we gather folk at the well, without agenda other than to hear their stories, how might we empower others, through their reflecting on their stories to move from
Empathy to Engagement
Collusion to Challenge
Resilience to Resistance

At the well, I believe Pastoral Supervisors bear witness to the stories told - we make space and time to hear those stories.

When so many people and institutions are champing at the bit to move on from the trauma of global pandemic, Pastoral Supervisors provide places for stories to be heard. And then, gathering up those stories, engaging creatively with them, we facilitate realisation in our supervisees of how they might move from
Empathy to Engagement
Collusion to Challenge
Resilience to Resistance

And I return to that mantra: **we don't need to have written (or told) the story to find ourselves in it.**

SO LETS LISTEN AGAIN TO THAT REFLECTION I SHARED AT THE BEGINNING.

As you listen, I invite you to reflect on how it resonates with your work. And then, immediately we've heard it again, we'll move to reflective groups, where we'll be able to share those resonances and reflect on the work that we do.

Reflection

- It is the struggle of the Stradivarius tree—
the struggle for water, for light, and for space
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- The Power of Belonging,
Will Van Der Hart and Rob Waller



3/1/20XX SAMPLE FOOTER TEXT 2

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Thank you

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