Silvia Purdie's talk at the Supervision Hui, Manurewa, 10 March 2025

Here is a list of things that I have observed and have been pondering on and talking with people about during 2024

This thing called supervision grew step by step with the growth of the 'People professions' through the 20th century. The term supervision was chosen in America in the early 1900s to give a middle management feel, as they established social work as a profession in its own right. And the concept of 'professional' or 'clinical'supervision has been integrated into all branches of therapeutic, social and pastoral work. Why? Because people-skills can't just be learned from a book, or taught in a classroom. Becoming awesome at helping others is an ongoing process. You have to hear it and see it and feel it in order to do it. And it is simply obvious that you can only keep giving out to others if you are yourself receiving care. Every culture has ways of imparting these skills and raising up leaders.
From America and Europe, Aotearoa has inherited a Western framework for addressing human need. We have our distinct professions: On one side the complex hierarchy of the Health system, on another side Social Work, and in the middle the 'Allied Health' fields like Occupational Therapy and Physio, and on the other side the array of talk therapies, with the distinct professions of counselling, psychotherapy, clinical psych. And then on yet another side is the world of the church, ministry, chaplaincy, youth ministry. Each of these have models of authority, training and mentoring with Western foundations, white Western assumptions about what it means to be 'professional' and 'ethical'. All of this says it aims to meet the needs of all cultures of people but, in reality, we meet needs only as much as 'other' cultures engage in a 'white' way of working. At its most basic we see people firstly as individuals. So Supervision is an individual thing.

My husband likes to say that my favourite illegal activity is trespass. I grew up climbing fences, exploring, wanting to know what was down that path, trying to find a way down to a little beach in Tonga, picking mushrooms on hillsides around Ruatoria.
As I helped write supervision policy for the Presbyterian Church, and as I became a supervisor myself, I could see the fences and the power they had. I could see how our categories of professional practice priviledge white people, making it easier for me and harder for my Pasifika friends. I could see Maori operating both inside and outside the fences, working twice as hard in order to be present for their communities.
I shared this with David Moko over dinner on Friday night and he said this: (I asked him if I could quote him)
He shared how he has seen Pakeha people setting career goals and achieving them, but for Maori that's not the point. As a Maori, he said, I have to take my whanau and my hapu with me. It's not about my own achievement. We have to get there together.

This time last year I put a post on the Bible and Treaty Facebook page about 'decolonising supervision'. And heaps of people responded, so we had a couple of zoom meetings and wow the conversation was so rich and interesting. That set me off to research, to find out where supervision is at in Aotearoa.
And this is what I found:

A growing understanding of the importance of reflective practice supervision across diverse contexts.
Especially in work with vulnerable youth and children, as highlighted by the Royal Commission into Abuse in Care.
Most organisations who employ people to work with people have written supervision policies and include supervision in employment contracts.
BUT … it is not provided for people in education, probation … Only some parts of the health system get external supervision.
Yes, it could be beneficial, but there's no funding. And less funding now.
Training for professional supervision has grown exponentially. 9 of our Tertiary institutions now offer post graduate courses. 11 independent organisations and businesses offer workshops and smaller qualifications. That's 20 training providers in Aotearoa.
I heard that the Polytech folks chat with each other, but I could find very little points of connection or conversation between these 20 training providers. People are working away in their own corner.
And what ongoing support is there for all those graduates? Some are already members of a professional body, but many are not.
There are calls for registration of supervisors, for the establishment of a supervision Association.
We do have a Supervision Collective, which is awesome.
But as I researched this, one thing became strikingly obvious: the vast majority of supervisors, and supervision trainers, look like me – middle-aged white women. I mean, I love being a middle-age, middle-class white woman, but it is really not OK for this to be the norm for supervisors, because our community sectors our youth and ministry sectors, are totally culturally, gender and generationally diverse.

I would love there to be some ongoing conversation around this. I would love there to be spaces where anyone with a heart for this thing we frame as Professional Supervision can feel valued and encouraged and stretched.
I am keen to host another hui like this one in the Wellington area. And there's some folks in the Hawkes Bay who are also keen for a get-together.
Beyond that, I have no particular agenda.
In calling this Hui today I felt strongly to create the space and hear from whoever comes and to trust the process.