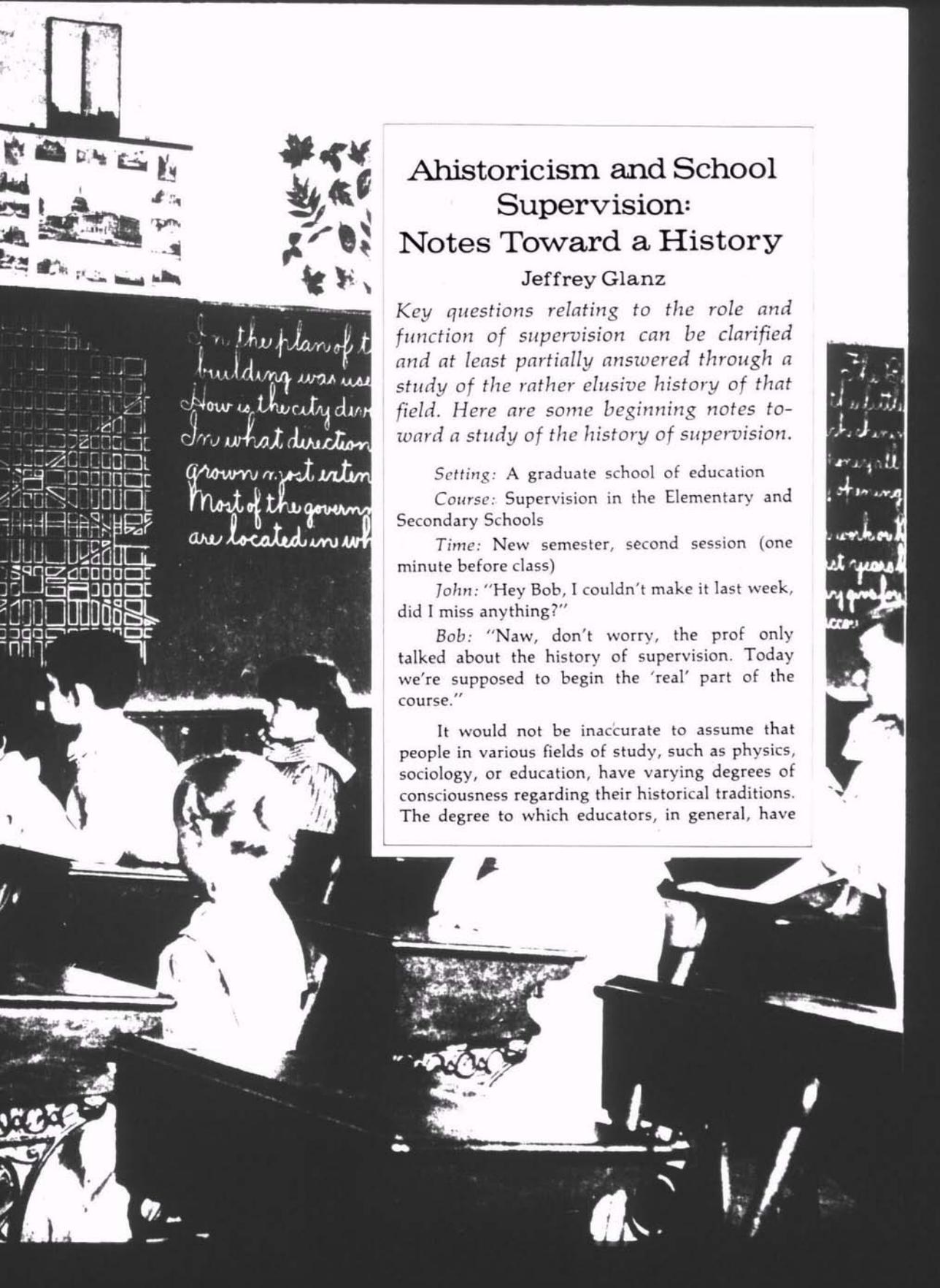


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Ahistoricism and School Supervision: Notes Toward a History

Jeffrey Glanz

Key questions relating to the role and function of supervision can be clarified and at least partially answered through a study of the rather elusive history of that field. Here are some beginning notes toward a study of the history of supervision.

Setting: A graduate school of education

Course: Supervision in the Elementary and Secondary Schools

Time: New semester, second session (one minute before class)

John: "Hey Bob, I couldn't make it last week, did I miss anything?"

Bob: "Naw, don't worry, the prof only talked about the history of supervision. Today we're supposed to begin the 'real' part of the course."

It would not be inaccurate to assume that people in various fields of study, such as physics, sociology, or education, have varying degrees of consciousness regarding their historical traditions. The degree to which educators, in general, have

attempted to examine their inherited modes of behavior and action has certainly been miniscule. Different attitudes have been conveyed concerning the lack of historical awareness into educational problems and issues. On the one hand, some historians have tended to lament the ahistorical nature of educational thought and practice. On the other hand, some educationists have expressed ambivalent views concerning the useful and pragmatic consequences of historical inquiry. In recent years, however, the number of historical studies in education has markedly increased. Interest in American educational historiography has focused attention, although to a limited extent, to sub-specialties within the field of education. The field of curriculum is a prime example (Bellack, 1969; Kliebard, 1976). To a greater degree than ever before, history, as a mode of inquiry, is being recognized as a valuable resource for the contemporary educator.

Considering this recent interest in history, it remains difficult to understand how an important and pervasive school function such as supervision has escaped historical investigation. Indeed, those presently concerned with school supervision, as a professional enterprise and field of study, are in a state of "historical unconsciousness." Even the recent ASCD yearbook, a volume devoted to historical inquiry, has given insufficient attention to supervision apart from curriculum development from a historical perspective (ASCD, 1976). In 1943, when the Department of Supervisors and Directors of Instruction merged with the Society for Curriculum Study to form ASCD, it was readily understood that the new organization would serve the needs of both the curriculum worker and school supervisor. Attesting to the neglect of the supervisor as practitioner and of supervision as a field of study, a recent article in *Educational Leadership* called "for putting the 'S' back into ASCD" (Krajewski, 1976, p. 376).

The fictitious scene described at the outset of this article is indicative of the role history has played in courses in supervision. Indeed, the student is given a brief encounter with the history of the field merely as a lead into the "core" of the course. It is our contention that supervision as a professional field of study and practice does have a history that deserves examination for its

own sake. This writer is not convinced that historical exploration will alter existing conditions in our schools, but there remains a strong belief that we can begin, perhaps, to understand and become aware of the problems that have plagued supervision in schools. In fact, our image of the past has importance for awareness of present conditions as well as future possibilities. Our purpose in these few pages, then, is to revive historical sensitivity in the field of supervision.

Directing Our Focus On Supervision

Throughout most of the nineteenth century, city school systems were controlled by loosely-structured, decentralized wardboards. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, educational reformers sought to transform schools into a tightly organized and efficiently operated centralized system. Recent educational historiography has focused attention to this period in the late nineteenth century during which the movement toward centralization in large urban cities gained considerable momentum. Tyack, for example, described the centralization movement as one that placed power with the superintendent to expertly administer urban schools (1974). In general, reformers during this period sought to remove the schools from what they considered to be harmful, bureaucratic influences. The pervasive lay control was considered anathema to these reformers. Centralizers, such as Nicholas M. Butler and Andrew S. Draper, sought to "remove the school from politics" by placing the superintendent in power to control, legislate, and assume responsibility. Indeed, these reformers eventually succeeded in shifting the direction and responsibility of schooling to the superintendent.

Although the centralization of urban schools in the late nineteenth century has been explored in detail by many historians, an important factor seems to have been overlooked, or at the very least minimized; that is, the importance that school supervision assumed during this period. A recently completed study found that supervision, as the primary function of the superintendent, played an important role in the movement toward centralization in large urban cities. Supervision, it was found, became an indispensable means by which superintendents would



James M. Greenwood's supervisory methods, which relied on experience and intuition, were widely adhered to in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Photo: Bachrach's of Boston.

maintain control over schools as well as inculcate certain bureaucratic values and ideas into the schools. In essence, supervision was found to be a convenient control mechanism of the superintendent. This study attempted to present one possible interpretation of the history of supervision (Glanz, 1977). Still, we need additional historical investigations to further analyze the role supervision has assumed. By directing our attention to supervision, historically, we can begin perhaps to realize where we have come from, where we are, and where we can go. Let us begin to explore some of the views of our historic forebears in the late nineteenth century concerning centralization, and more importantly, school supervision.

A Glimpse of Supervision in the Late Nineteenth Century

Centralization as a plan for urban school organization, according to A. S. Draper, who was a prominent superintendent from Cleveland, Ohio, was advantageous because "it confers authority, . . . it involves close supervision of instruction, . . . it harmonizes and solidifies the force. . . ." (1894, pp. 307-8). Draper also realized that the superintendent would be afforded a greater degree of authority. "I am not in favor of limiting the authority of city superintendents. If I could," insisted Draper, "I would confer upon them much broader authority than they

now have" (1890, p. 467). Draper was no exception. ". . . I am a firm believer in one-man power," claimed Israel H. Peres of Memphis, Tennessee. Peres maintained that the "superintendent should be superior to the teacher in mental power, culture, and experience" (1901, p. 827). Similarly, Emerson E. White, another leading superintendent, stated in 1895 that "a school superintendent should be a Caesar, a Solomon, and an angel, all in one person!" (1895, p. 224).

The belief that the supervision of instruction would be "the most essential part of the work of a school superintendent" was widely held (Dutton and Snedden, 1922, p. 300; Pickard, 1890). "We must have supervision," stated J. P. Wickersham in 1872, "Hence, we must have superintendents" (1872, p. 257). Thus, in examining the period before 1900, we find that the function of supervision was primarily controlled and performed by the superintendent of schools.

It is evident that to describe the function of supervision in the late nineteenth century one must explore the activities of the school superintendent. Upon such examination, it is unmistakably evident that much of the superintendent's time was spent in "teaching his teachers how to teach." A. W. Edson, county supervisor in Massachusetts, stated in 1893 that "a superintendent should be first of all a teacher of teachers. . ." (1893, p. 394). Edson, like many of his contemporaries, believed that most teachers were weak and needed assistance. Thus, the superintendent as supervisor was needed.

In a revealing address delivered before the National Educational Association in 1888, James M. Greenwood, a prominent superintendent, described what perhaps may have been the typical affairs of a superintendent performing the function of supervision:

Going into a school, I try to put aside everything like authority, or superiority, and to approach the teacher in a proper spirit of helpfulness. . . .

What To Do?

1. I go in quietly.
2. I watch the teacher and pupils awhile. . . .
3. Sometimes I conduct a recitation, . . . and thus bring out points in which she may be deficient. . . .
4. If suggestions should be made to the teacher, I do so privately, or request her to call after school. . . . I think the question may be put in this form: Given the teacher, the school, the defects; how to improve them?



William Torrey Harris greatly influenced the direction that supervision took in the late nineteenth century. Photo: The Library of Congress Photographic Division.

Signs To Look For

1. Common sense. 2. Good health. 3. General scholarship. . . . 5. Order. 6. Ability to manage hard cases. 7. Power to teach. . . . 14. Pleasant voice. . . . 17. Disposition to scold and to grumble. . . . 19. Neatness and cleanliness of room, desks, etc.

Sometimes I jot down items that need attention and hand them to the teacher. . . .

Very much of my time is devoted to visiting schools and inspecting the work (1888, pp. 519, 520, 521).

Greenwood, three years later in 1891, again illustrated his idea of how supervision should be performed. The skilled superintendent, said Greenwood, should simply walk into the classroom and "judge from a compound sensation of the disease at work among the inmates" (1891, p. 227). There is much evidence to infer that Greenwood's supervisory methods, which relied on experience and intuition rather than technical or scientific knowledge, were widely adhered to.

It seems clear that the superintendent as supervisor did not favorably view the competency of most teachers. In 1894, T. M. Balliet of Mas-

sachusetts insisted that there were only two types of teachers: the efficient and the inefficient (1894, p. 377). The only way to reform the schools, thought Balliet, was to "secure a competent superintendent; second, to let him 'reform' all the teachers who are incompetent and can be 'reformed'; thirdly, to bury the dead" (1891, pp. 437-38). Characteristic of the remedies applied to "improve teaching" was this suggestion: "Weak teachers should place themselves in such a position in the room that every pupil's face may be seen without turning the head" (Fitzpatrick, 1893, p. 76). It would not be unfair to conclude, then, that supervision in the late nineteenth century seemed to thrive, in a sense, on teacher incompetence.

Autocracy in Supervision: Some Exemplars

Within the context of centralization, it is not surprising that autocratic tendencies dominated school supervision in the late nineteenth century. Certainly the impulse toward bureaucratic governance and autocratic supervision must be explained in terms of the socioeconomic-political conditions of the time. However, the particular values, ideas, and beliefs of the people who advocated autocratic supervision are also of considerable importance. It was men like W. H. Payne, W. T. Harris, and W. E. Chancellor, as progenitors, who articulated the ideas of order, control, and autocratic supervision.

William Harold Payne was a prominent superintendent as well as a prolific writer on supervision. He authored the first text published on supervision in 1875, entitled *Chapters On School Supervision* (1875). Payne believed that teachers were weak and ineffective. Teachers, thought Payne, need "external aid" (1887, p. 331). The superintendent as supervisor, of course, would provide this assistance. Payne never questioned the emerging hierarchy in schools. In fact, he, as much as anyone, contributed to conceiving schools as hierarchical arrangements. "Human society is also a hierarchy of forces. Organization implies subordination," said Payne. He asserted that "the many must follow the direction of the few. . . . The weak are to be protected by the strong. . . ." (1875, pp. 13, 14). Related to his views on the school hierarchy, Payne noted that "women can not do man's work in the schools."

Women, said Payne, must instruct children "up to the age of nine years . . . beyond this time there are some branches, as physics, chemistry, and mathematics, which are best taught by men" (1875, p. 49). Other nineteenth-century educators had similar views.

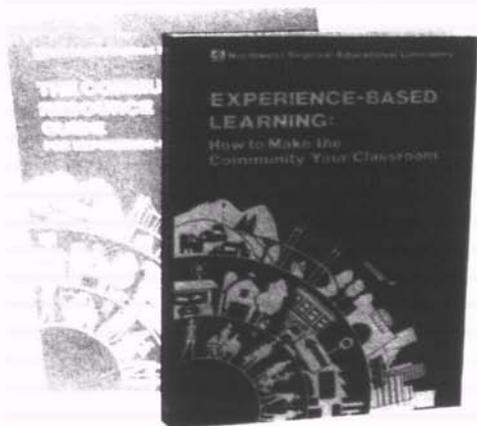
William Torrey Harris, perhaps the most prestigious educator of his time, greatly influenced the direction that supervision was to take in the late nineteenth century. Harris maintained that "the first prerequisite of the school is order" (1871, p. 31). Nonconformity and disorganization were evils that had to be expunged, thought Harris. Freedom was not considered by Harris to be a viable option for teachers. This is best evidenced in Harris' notion of "supervisory devices," which were to be used by the superintendent to improve "the method of instruction or the method of discipline." Harris contended that this device also proved quite effective "in strengthening the power of governing a school. . . ." This device, said Harris, "is the practice of placing teachers weak in discipline on the 'substitutes' list and letting them fill vacancies here and there as they occur through the temporary absence of the regular teacher." "I have known teachers that had become chronic failures in discipline entirely reformed by a few weeks of such experience," said Harris (1892, pp. 171, 172). The nineteenth-century superintendent as supervisor believed that employing such supervisory methods would beneficially affect instruction and teaching in the schools.

William Estabrook Chancellor, another leading superintendent, maintained that the hierarchy of officers in the American public school system afforded the superintendency greater prestige and authority. Thus, said Chancellor, the superintendent would be in a better position to perform the function of supervision. Chancellor tried to convince the public that there was little difference between teachers and supervisors. However, a close examination of his ideas belies this view of equality or democracy. Chancellor explained that supervising officers "are not necessarily higher in character, ability, energy or scholarship" than teachers, "though they usually receive more money." He admitted using the words "superior" and "subordinate," because there was "no other way to express the relations of superintendent,

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principal, and class teacher." But, he continued, they were related in only one way: "administrative and supervisory, not necessarily intellectual and moral." This was because administrative ability was more highly valued than teaching; Chancellor could not be more correct (1904, p. 106). It is also interesting to note Chancellor's views of women in supervisory positions. He states:

That men make better administrators I have already said. As a general proposition, women make the better supervisors. They are more interested in details. They do not make as good associate or assistant superintendents, however (1904, p. 210).

Conclusion or Just a Beginning?

At present, supervision as a field of study has little by way of history. It has been my purpose in these few pages to help us move toward constructing a history. I have only touched the surface by asking such questions as "Who was the supervisor?"; "What was the role and function of the supervisor?"; "How were supervisory practices conducted?"; and "Who were the people advocating these practices?" If present-day educators, and particularly supervisors, are to become "conscious" of their intellectual traditions and inherited modes of operation then they must begin to understand how their field came to be as it is. It is hoped that the interested reader will join in the provocative venture of exploring public school supervision, historically. \overline{F}

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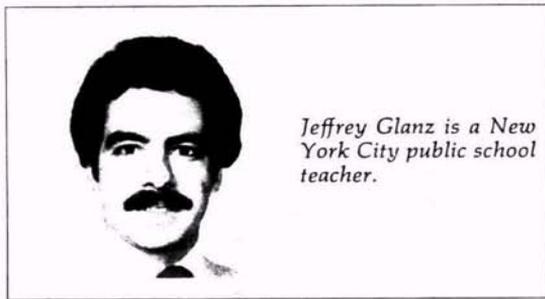
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