Supervision for the Millennium: A Retrospective and Prospective

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Supervision's historic legacy has prevailed despite attempts to denigrate its contributions to instructional improvement. Supervision has indeed evolved from 19th century crude and unsophisticated bureaucratic practices to more refined democratic participatory approaches. These innovative approaches based on reflective practice and constructivist learning form the basis for supervision in the new millennium and needed school reform.

What Does "Supervision" Mean?

Supervision, badly practiced, has attracted voluminous criticism for being bureaucratic, obtrusive, and inconsequential. Its critics claim that supervision has "outlived its usefulness" (Gordon, 1997). Sergiovanni (1992) hopes that a day will come when "supervision will no longer be needed." Others eschew the term "supervision" and favor "instructional leadership," as Glickman (1992) explained several years ago: "Supervision is in such throes of change that not only is the historical understanding of the word becoming obsolete, but I've come to believe that if 'instructional leadership' were substituted each time the word 'supervision' appears in the text, and 'instructional leader' substituted for 'supervisor,' little meaning would be lost and much might be gained (p. 3)."

Stephen Gordon (1997) concurs: "My argument is that while the primary goal should be a radical shift from control supervision to collegial supervision, changing the name of what we now call supervision, . . . will increase the chance" that the practice of supervision will change. He too advocates the term "instructional leadership."

This tendency to eschew "supervision" is often reflected in its omission from discourse on school and instructional improvement. Has supervision, in Steve Gordon's words, "outlived its usefulness"? We need to look back into history when supervisors or those concerned with the function and process of supervision advocated democratic and collegial partnerships to improve instruction. Supervision has for too long been associated with some negative aspects of bureaucratic school management. Furthermore, those who advocate substitute terms for supervision might be disingenuous.

Harold Spears (1953), in his widely disseminated volume, *Improving the Supervision of Instruction*, said, "of all the responsibilities of school operation, instructional supervision stands out as the one most discussed, yet least understood. Spears acknowledged the negative connotation associated with supervision and those who criticized supervision. Yet, he affirmed the important, if not lofty, pursuit it strives to attain:

> In some educational circles of late it has been almost sacrilegious to use the term supervision in connection with the school official's responsibility to look in on the teacher's classroom operation. It was implied that supervision as a term had disqualified itself in its earlier role of directing and ordering, and should be ostracized in the school family where there is mutual respect for ideas and rights.
>
> If injudicious action of earlier school administration brought to the term supervision a shady connotation, there is no reason why proper supervisory action today cannot remove such stigmatization from the term. Here we use the term freely from the front cover of the book on through the last page. Nor is there any reason to apologize for it by always prefacing the term with the descriptive adjective democratic, as though

supervision were not democratic unless so labeled.

The profession has found it easier to discard terms and coin new ones than to bring back into line meanings that had gone astray because of misuse through misunderstanding. Supervision, however, represents a noble principle, based in the American concern for the educational rights and welfare of each child, and consequently should be retained and respected. (pp.11-12)

Supervision badly practiced should be decried. Yet, supervision as a professional field of study and practice has had much to offer and, properly conceived, can prove invaluable to school and instructional improvement well into the millennium.

Supervision: A Retrospective

Supervision has medieval Latin origins and was originally defined as "a process of perusing or scanning a text for errors or deviations from the original text" (Smyth, 1991, p. 30). Later recorded instances of the word "supervision" established the process as entailing "general management, direction, control, and oversight" (see, e.g., Grumet, 1979). An examination of early records during the Colonial period indicates that the term "inspector" is referred to frequently.

The inspectors were often ministers, selectmen, schoolmasters, and other distinguished citizens. Their methods of supervision stressed strict control and close inspection of school facilities. As Spears (1953) explained: "The early period of school supervision, from the colonization of America on down through at least the first half of the nineteenth century, was based on the idea of maintaining the existing standards of instruction, rather than on the idea of improving them" (p. 14).

American schooling, in general, during the better part of the nineteenth century was rural, unbureaucratic, and in the hands of local authorities. The prototypical nineteenth-century school was a small one-room schoolhouse. Teachers were "young, poorly paid, and rarely educated beyond the elementary subjects." Teachers were "hired and supervised largely by local lay trustees, they were not members of a self-regulating profession. . . ." (Tyack & Hansot, 1982, p. 17). These local lay trustees (called ward boards) who supervised schools were neither professionally trained nor very much interested in the improvement of instruction (Button, 1961).

The tradition of lay supervision continued after the Revolution through the middle of the nineteenth century. Despite the emergence of a new "American system of educational thought and practice . . . the quality of supervision would not improve appreciably . . ." (Tanner & Tanner, 1987, p. 10). With the advent of a district system of supervision and then state-controlled supervision, the character of supervision did, in fact, change dramatically.

In general, unprecedented growth precipitated by the industrial revolution characterized the second half of the nineteenth century. The expansion of American education that started in the days of Horace Mann, whom Tanner & Tanner (1987) characterized as the "first professional supervisor," continued and assumed a new dimension in the latter decades of the nineteenth century. The schoolmen, specifically superintendents, began shaping schools in large cities into organized networks. Organization was the rallying cry nationally and locally. There was a firm belief that highly organized and efficient schools would meet the demands of a newly developed industrialized age. That hierarchically organized public schools, as social institutions, would meet the crises and challenges that lay ahead was beyond doubt.

The reform movement in education in the late nineteenth century was reflective of the larger, more encompassing changes that were occurring in society. Although rapid economic growth characterized the nineteenth century, reformers realized that there were serious problems in the nation's schools. In the battle that ensued to reorganize the nation's schools, sources of authority and responsibility in education were permanently transformed (Tyack, 1974). By the end of the nineteenth century, reformers concerned with undermining inefficiency and corruption transformed schools into streamlined, central administrative bureaucracies with superintendents as supervisors in charge. Supervision, during this struggle, became an important tool by which the superintendent would legitimize his existence in the school system (Glanz, 1991). Supervision, therefore, was a function performed by superintendents to oversee schools.

Supervision as inspection was the dominant method for administering schools. Payne (1875), author of the first published textbook on supervision, stated emphatically that teachers must be "held responsible" for work performed in the classroom and that the supervisor, as expert inspector, would "oversee" and ensure "harmony and efficiency." A prominent superintendent, James M. Greenwood (1888), stated emphatically that "very much of my time is devoted to visiting schools and inspecting the work." Greenwood (1891), three years later, 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" (p. 227). A review of the literature of the period indicates that Greenwood's supervisory methods, which relied on inspection based on intuition rather than technical or scientific knowledge, were widely practiced.

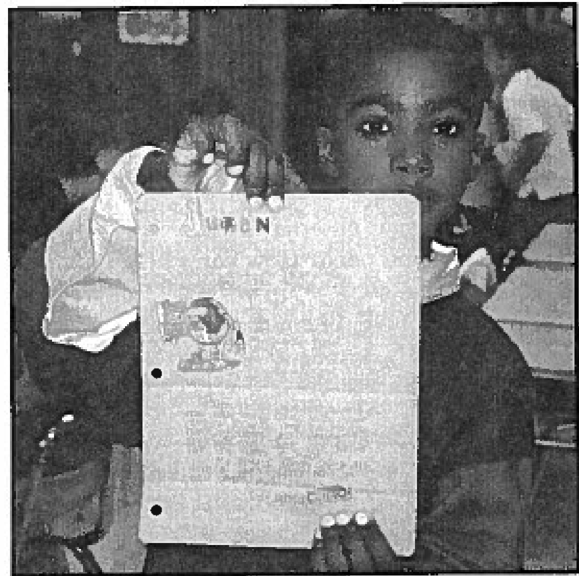
Supervisors using inspectional practices did not favorably view the competency of most teachers. For instance, Balliet (1894), a superintendent from Massachusetts, insisted that there were only two types of teachers: the efficient and the inefficient. The only way to reform the schools, thought Balliet, 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" (pp. 437-438). 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). Nineteenth century supervisors, for the most part, saw teachers, as inept. As Bolin & Panaritis (1992) explained: "Teachers (mostly female and disenfranchised) were seen as a bedraggled troop—incompetent and backward in outlook" (p. 33). The practice of supervision by inspection was indeed compatible with the emerging bureaucratic school system. Many teachers perceived supervision as inspectional, rather than a helping function.

Numerous technological advances greatly influenced American education after 1900. As a result of the work of Frederick Winslow Taylor (1911) who published a book entitled *The Principles of Scientific Management*, "efficiency" became the watchword of the day. Taylor's book stressed scientific management and efficiency in the workplace. The worker, according to Taylor, was merely a cog in the business machinery and the main purpose of management was to promote efficiency of the worker. Within a relatively short period of time, Taylorism and efficiency became household words and ultimately had a profound impact on administrative and supervisory practices in schools.

Franklin Bobbitt (1913), a professor at the University of Chicago, tried to apply the ideas that Taylor espoused to the "problems of educational management and supervision." Bobbitt's work, particularly his discussion of supervision, is significant because his ideas shaped the character and nature of supervision for many years. On the surface these ideas appeared to advance professional supervision but in reality they were the antithesis of professionalism. What he called "scientific and professional supervisory methods" were in fact scientistic and bureaucratic methods of supervision aimed not at professionalizing but at finding a legitimate and secure niche for control-oriented supervision within the school bureaucracy.

The criticisms against Bobbitt's methods, nonetheless, accurately stressed a number of disturbing ideas. First and foremost was the ill-conceived notion that "education in a school" is analogous to "production in a factory." Bobbitt claimed, that "education is a shaping process as much as the manufacture of steel rails." Supervisors in the early twentieth century were becoming aware of the fallacy of this logic as well as realizing the negative effects of bureaucracy in education. Bobbitt's "scientific management and supervision" found justification within a school organization that was bureaucratically organized.

Still, it remains clear that the significance of Bobbitt's work was in his advocacy of scientific and professional supervisory methods. Supervisors thought that their work in schools would be more clearly defined and accepted by adopting Bobbitt's principles of "scientific management." Supervisors believed, as did Bobbitt, that "the way to eliminate the personal element from administration and supervision is to introduce impersonal methods of scientific administration and supervision." This was often translated into the development of rating schemes. In a



short time, supervision became synonymous with teacher rating.

Consequently, just as "supervision as inspection" reflected the "emergence of bureaucracy" in education, so too "supervision as social efficiency" was largely influenced by scientific management in education. Supervision as social efficiency was compatible with and a natural consequence of bureaucracy in education.

Bureaucratic supervision, relying on inspectional methods and seeking efficiency above all else, dominated discourse in the field. This sort of supervision attracted much criticism from teachers and others (Rousemmiere, 1992). Representative of the nature of this opposition were the comments of Sallie Hill (1918), a teacher speaking before the Department of Classroom Teachers, decrying supervisory methods of rating. Hill charged:

> There is no democracy in our schools. . . . Here let me say that I do not want to give the

> impression that we are sensitive. No person who has remained a teacher for ten years can be sensitive. She is either dead or has gone into some other business. . . . there are too many supervisors with big salaries and undue rating powers (p. 506).

The movement to alter supervisory theory and practice to more democratic and improvement foci, while at the same time minimizing the evaluative function, occurred in the 1920s as a direct result of growing opposition to autocratic supervisory methods. Consequently, supervisors tried to change their image as "snoopervisors" by adopting alternate methods of supervision. The following poem, quoted in part below, indicates the desired change of focus to more democratic methods in supervision:

> With keenly peering eyes and snooping nose,
> From room to room the Snoopervisor goes.
> He notes each slip, each fault with lofty frown,
> And on his rating card he writes it down;
> His duty done, when he has brought to light,
> The things the teachers do that are not right. . . .
>
> The supervisor enters quietly,
> "What do you need? How can I help today?
> John, let me show you. Mary, try this way."
> He aims to help, encourage and suggest,
> That teachers, pupils all may do their best.
> (Anonymous, 1929)

Influenced in large measure by John Dewey's (1929) theories of democratic and scientific thinking, as well as by Hosic's (1920) ideas of democratic supervision, supervisors attempted to apply scientific methods and cooperative problem-solving approaches to educational problems (Pajak, 1993). Hosic cautioned the supervisor to eschew his/her "autocratic past." "The fact that he is invested for the time being with a good deal of delegated authority does not justify him in playing the autocrat. . . . To do so is neither humane, wise, nor expedient" (pp. 331, 332). Continuing to build a philosophic rationale for the supervisor's involvement in "democratic pursuits," Hosic explained that it is no longer viable to apply techniques of the past. Hosic believed, as did Dewey, that it was possible to reshape a school system originated on the idea of bureaucratic maintenance to comply with the principles of democracy.

Democratic supervision, in particular, implied that educators, including teachers, curriculum specialists, and supervisors would cooperate in order to improve instruction. Efforts by prominent superintendent, Jesse Newlon, reinforced democracy in supervision. In an article entitled "Reorganizing City School Supervision," Newlon (1923) asked: "How can the ends of supervision best be achieved?" He maintained that the school organization must be set up to "invite the participation of the teacher in the development of courses. . . ." The ends of supervision can be realized when teacher and supervisor work in a coordinated fashion. Newlon developed the idea of setting up "supervisory councils" to offer "genuine assistance" to teachers. In this way, he continued, "the teacher will be regarded as a fellow-worker rather than a mere cog in a big machine." Participatory school management and supervision had its origins with the work of Newlon.

Throughout the thirties, forties, and fifties, the idea that supervision involves improving instruction based on classroom observation gained momentum. Supervision as a means of improving instruction through observation was reinforced by the use of "stenographic reports" which was the brainchild of Romiett Stevens, a professor at Teachers College, Columbia University. Stevens thought that the best way to improve instruction was to record verbatim accounts of actual lessons, "without criticism or comment." Stevens's stenographic account was "the first major systematic study of classroom behavior" (Hoetker & Ahlbrand, 1969).

Supervisors, during this era, advocated a scientific approach toward their work in schools. Scientific supervision was considered distinct from social efficiency and entirely compatible with democratic practices (Dewey, 1929). Burton and Brueckner (1955) claimed that "A few individuals still speak, write, and supervise as if science and democracy were antagonistic, or at least not easily combined. The truth is that each is necessary in an integrated theory and practice" (p. 82).

Democratic and scientific supervision continued well into the 1950s. Democratic methods in supervision, however, were clearly expanded and clarified in the 1960s in the form of supervision as leadership. The legacy of supervision as inspection which found justification in the production-oriented, social efficiency era was no longer viable. Neither was bureaucratic supervision viable. A new vision for the function of supervision was framed.

Uncertainties plagued the field of supervision by the 1970s. Markowitz (1976) stated that "the supervisor in the educational system is plagued by ambiguities. His or her position in the authority structure is ill-defined and quite often vulnerable, . . . there is a lack of clarity in the definition of his or her role and a lack of agreement on the functions associated with supervision" (p. 367). Alfonso, Firth, and Neville (1975) described this role of ambiguity in terms of a "power limbo." That is, supervisors are "neither line nor staff, neither administration nor faculty, but somewhere in between. . . ." (p. 342). Wilhelms (1969) concurred that supervision had witnessed tremendous change. "Roles are changing; staff organization is swirling; titles and

functions are shifting," continued Wilhelms, "But whether his title is 'principal,' 'supervisor,' 'curriculum coordinator,' or what not, the person in a position of supervisory leadership is caught in the middle" (p. x).

Lacking focus, a sound conceptual base, and purpose, supervision explored alternative notions to guide theory and practice in the field. Efforts to "reform" supervision were reflective of a broader attempt to seek alternatives to traditional educational practice. Clinical supervision grew out of this dissatisfaction with traditional educational practice and supervisory methods. Goldhammer (1969), one of the early proponents of clinical supervision, stated that the model for clinical supervision was "motivated, primarily, by contemporary views of weaknesses that commonly exist in educational practice" (p. 1).

The premise of clinical supervision was that a prescribed, formal process of collaboration between teacher and supervisor could improve teaching. The literature of clinical supervision has been replete with concepts of collegiality, collaboration, assistance, and improvement of instruction. Bolin and Panaritis (1992) explained that clinical supervision "appealed to many educators" because of its "emphasis on 'collegiality'." Clinical supervision favored collaborative practice over inspectional, faultfinding supervision.

During the early 1980s, public education continued to receive voluminous criticism for being bureaucratic and unresponsive to the needs of teachers, parents, and children (see e.g., Johnson, 1990). One of the prominent proposals for disenfranchising bureaucracy was the dissolution of autocratic administrative practices where overbearing supervisors rule by fiat. Favored was greater and more meaningful decision-making at the grass-roots level (Dunlap & Goldman, 1991). This idea translated into giving teachers more formal responsibility for setting school policies, thus enhancing democratic governance in schools (Kirby, 1991). Johnson (1990) observed that "although schools have long been under the control of administrators, local districts are increasingly granting teachers more formal responsibility for setting school policies" (p. 337).

Criticism leveled at the educational bureaucracy has had consequences for school supervision (Firth & Eiken, 1982). Throughout this period educators continued to consider alternative methods of supervision. In the early eighties, developmental supervision, in which varied levels of teaching abilities were acknowledged, gained attention (Glickman, 1981). By the end of the decade transformational leadership, which advocated that supervisors serve as change-agents, became popular (e.g., Liethwood & Jantzi, 1990). Other writers advanced alternative approaches known as "culturally-responsive" supervision (e.g., Bowers & Flinders, 1991). Teacher empowerment (e.g., Darling-Hammond & Goodwin, 1993) gained attention as a viable means for teachers to become active participants in decision-making processes in schools. Peer supervision (e.g., Willerman, McNeely, & Koffman, 1991) appeared in the literature as an alternative to traditional supervision by "professionally trained supervisors," as did cognitive coaching (Costa & Garmston, 1994). Other collegiality and democratic supervisory methods continued to receive notice (e.g., Smyth, 1991).

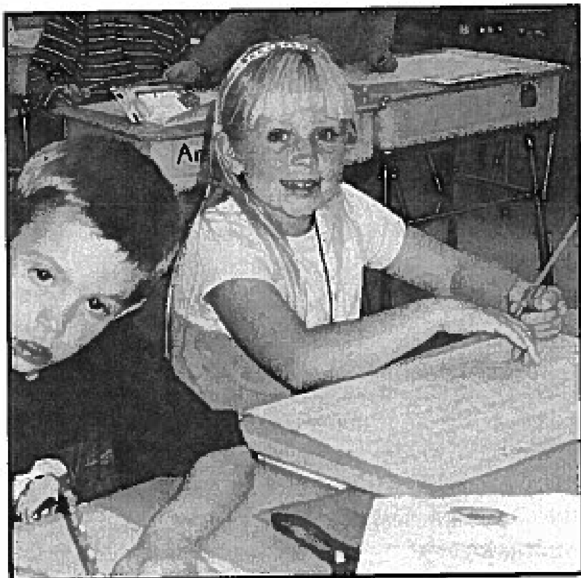
The publication of *Supervision in Transition* (1992) by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) marked a refinement in the changing conception of supervision as a democratic enterprise. Glickman, editor of the yearbook, clearly set the tone by stating emphatically that the very term "supervision" connoted a distasteful, even "disgusting" metaphor for school improvement. Instead of even using the words "supervision" or "supervisor," educators, or what Glickman called "risk-taking practitioners," were more comfortable with terms such as "instructional leadership" and "instructional leader." The transition that Glickman and the authors, of this comprehensive account of supervision, envisioned was one that valued collegiality. Supervision, in the words of Sergiovanni (1992), was viewed as "professional and moral." Other models and conceptions of supervision emerged in an attempt to extend democratic methods in order to disassociate itself from bureaucratic and inspectional supervision. Clinical, developmental, transformational, among other models of supervision, then, had a common bond in that they emerged to counter the ill effects of supervision's bureaucratic legacy.

Lessons Learned

What can we learn from this excursion into history? For some theorists and practitioners, a lesson learned is that authoritarian supervision aimed at faultfinding and suspecting the competence of teachers is and should not be compatible with modern practice of supervision. Some view, including this author, the evolution of the practice of supervision as a progression from crude, unsophisticated bureaucratic inspectional approaches to more refined democratic participatory techniques and methodologies. For some theorists and practitioners the legacy of inspectional supervision lives on in the form of evaluation. Democratic supervision is viewed as helping teachers improve instruction, while bureaucratic supervision is associated with accountability and judging teachers' "efficiency." This conflict between the "helping" and "evaluative" functions of supervision has been longstanding. Tanner and Tanner (1987) assert that this dilemma presents an almost insurmountable problem for supervisors: "The basic conflict between these functions

is probably the most serious and, up until now, unresolved problem in the field of supervision" (p. 106).

Historically, the evaluative function of supervision is rooted in bureaucratic, inspectional-type supervision. Maintaining an efficient and effective school organization as well as a sound instructional program mandate that teachers be evaluated for competency. In other words, the evaluative aspect of the supervisory function emanates from organizational requirements to measure and assess teaching effectiveness. The origins of the helping or improvement function of supervision can be dated back to democratic practices in the early twentieth century. In other words, helping teachers improve instruction and promote pupil achievement grew out of democratic theory of supervision.



Supervisors or people concerned with supervision, however, have faced a basic role conflict; namely, the unresolved dilemma between the necessity to evaluate (a bureaucratic function) and the desire to genuinely assist teachers in the instructional process (a democratic and professional goal). If I had to pinpoint a problem that will continue to plague supervision in the new millennium then this would be it (Glanz, 1997). The field of supervision has, however, attempted to resolve this basic conflict between evaluation and improvement (e.g., Hazi, 1994; Poole, 1994; Tsui, 1995). It is clearly evident throughout the history of supervision that efforts have been made to extricate supervision from its bureaucratic heritage.

Supervision: A Prospective

For most of the twentieth century, schools retained features of the factory organizational model, a legacy of 19th century industrial society. Schools relied on hierarchical supervisory control and representative democracy. We are now, however, undergoing major societal transformations into a post-industrial era (Ambrose & Cohen, 1997) characterized "by exponential information growth, fast-paced innovation, organizational change, and participatory democracy" (p. 20). As a result of these technological, political, economic, and social changes, schools (teachers and supervisors) are "being called on today to rethink and restructure how schools operate and how teachers relate to students . . . We sorely need new ways of thinking about educational supervision and leadership . . ." (Pajak, 1993, p. 159). Over the past several years alternative models or approaches to school and instructional improvement and teacher evaluation have gained prominence. Among these innovative ideas are site-based management, union-sponsored peer coaching, professional partnerships, reflective practice, and teacher self-evaluation. Based on the brief discussion of the history of supervision in this article, these innovations can be seen as ways of extending participatory democracy in supervision.

Supervisory practice has evolved since its origins in Colonial times and its effectiveness, as a means of improving instruction depends on the ability of educational leaders to remain responsive to the needs of teachers and students. An educational leader's resolve to remain adaptable also depends on an appreciation of the changing and evolving nature of supervision, especially in the new millennium. An educational leader who understands the history of supervision and how current demands are influenced by that history will better able to confront the technological, social, political, and moral issues of the day. Supervisors will need specialized knowledge and skills to meet organizational challenges in the twenty-first century. They will need to base their practice of supervision on a foundation of dispositions or beliefs. Supervisors will have to place a premium on initiative, flexibility, tolerance for ambiguity, collaboration, and an ethical mindset. In the future supervisors will be expected more and more to be collaborative and assist teachers in reflecting about classroom instruction in meaningful ways.

Supervision has certainly been in crisis. Researchers have noted that a wide range of perplexing and challenging problems have beset educational supervision as a professional practice and field of study (Glanz, 1995). While these problems are not new and supervision scholars and practitioners have attested to them, the situation has reached crisis proportions. Although I disagree, as noted earlier, with Glickman, Sergiovanni, and Gordon who have argued for the dissolution of supervision, I do believe that social, political, and technological changes necessitate concomitant changes in the way supervision is conceived and practiced (Pajak, 1993). I agree with Behar-Horenstein and Ornstein (1996) who have stated:

Changes at sociopolitical levels suggest that principals for the 21st century will need to be able to cope with change processes and challenges associated with educating diverse student populations and recognize the need for a broadened participation in the leadership process. Rather than operating in isolation with little input from their faculty, principals must recognize the need for the help and cooperation of each other as well as 'outside' stakeholders. (p. 17)

Supervisory leadership for the 21st century requires enhanced collaborative relationships, participatory decision-making, reflective listening and practice, and teacher self-direction—all emanating from the constructivist paradigm (Arrendondo, 1999; Osterman, 2000; Sullivan & Glanz, 2000). So how do we define supervision in the new millennium? Supervision refers to a school-based or school-college based activity, practice, or process that engages teachers in meaningful, non-judgmental, and ongoing instructional dialogue for the purpose of improving teaching and learning. Past supervisory practice based on such a definition should be applauded. Future supervisory practice should continue such efforts. When conceived as such, supervision is central to the renewal of classroom teaching and learning. Supervision, in its "beautiful" form (not "ugly" form, to use Glickman's, 1998, terms), can be the following:

Collaborative rather than hierarchical
Dialogic versus didactic
Descriptive rather than judgmental
Supportive rather than punitive.

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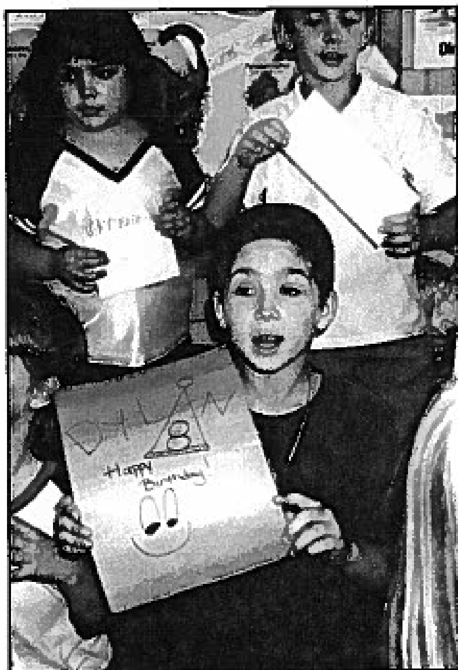

THE MILLENNIUM: ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND CHALLENGES

NEW JERSEY ASSOCIATION FOR SUPERVISION AND CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

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Note: All photographs that appear in this issue of *Focus on Education* are from Marissa Brown's second grade class in the Hamilton Township Public Schools, Hamilton, New Jersey.