The Dream of Clinical Supervision, Critical Perspectives on the State of Supervision, and Our Long-Lived Accountability Nightmare

Noreen Garman
University of Pittsburgh, ngarman@pitt.edu

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Noreen Garman[1]

Abstract

This memoir essay was originally intended to revisit a time when instructional supervision became the ubiquitous practice in a 'golden age of supervision,' and to valorize colleagues who contributed their scholarly canons to the field. An introductory narrative describes the goals and hopes of a field that emerged through Morris Cogan's popular clinical supervision, and other scholars who adopted and altered his principles with dreams of a road to effective school reform. It tells of the benefits as well as the dysfunctions of practices that occurred over the decades, including the all-encompassing metric world of public schooling. The nightmare includes a technocratic system that provides a view of teaching and supervision dominated by politicians, entrepreneurs, and special interest foundations, and serves a view of schooling based on valuing of cultural uniformity, a punitive notion of accountability, and an uncritical perspective of patriotic nationalism, corporate thinking and class, race, and gender privilege. Foucault's Panopticon is used as an analytic device for instructional supervision in order to portray a power relationship between the observer and the teacher. Not only does the nightmare reveal what has been happening over the past decades, but it also serves as a cautionary tale for the challenges we are now facing in the pandemic-era schooling of the 2020's.

Keywords

clinical supervision; educational accountability; critical supervision

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[1] University of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA

Corresponding Author:
Noreen B. Garman (School of Education, University of Pittsburgh, 5710 Wesley W. Posvar Hall, 230 South Bouquet Street, Pittsburgh, PA 15260, USA)
email: ngarman@pitt.edu

Introduction

Maya Angelou once said, "The world is moving so fast and our plates are overflowing with the things we feel we have to do…but all we really need to do is take a day and sit down and think." My work as a supervision scholar has called me to "sit down and think," first about the cherished colleagues over the years that have contributed to my conceptualization of supervision, but also to reminisce a bit about my past when there seemed to be a "golden age" of supervision in the academy. It was a time when supervision was imagined as a central road to school reform. I have decided to use this opportunity to reflect on my journey through the field in hopes that I might find a pathway through the debris of the current reform efforts[2].

I came into the scholarship of supervision from by what people at the time might have described as the back door, first through public school teaching and then teacher education. I was never an administrator. I began supervising student teachers at the same time that I was hired to teach in the English Department at the University of Pittsburgh where I did my masters work. I was considered a good high school teacher and I knew what worked in the English literature classroom, and I was sure I knew what good teaching was, because I experienced it and I passed on my wisdom to those I supervised. It worked well for almost two years until one day when I worked with a teacher to include some of my sure-fire methods and then "observed" as the lesson disintegrated before my eyes in the novice classroom. I decided I needed something besides my own successful experiences to help teachers. I talked to the faculty coordinator about entering the School of Education since there was a new department, Curriculum and Supervision, that showed promise. She shook her head and assured me that "you will gain absolutely nothing from education courses in supervision – you already know all you needed to." So, in 1969 I ignored her advice and went into the Curriculum and Supervision doctoral program. After graduation in 1973 I took a faculty position teaching supervision, curriculum and secondary education. At that point I was a single parent and needed to moonlight in the English Department, and for the next three years I taught six courses each term at a Research I university.
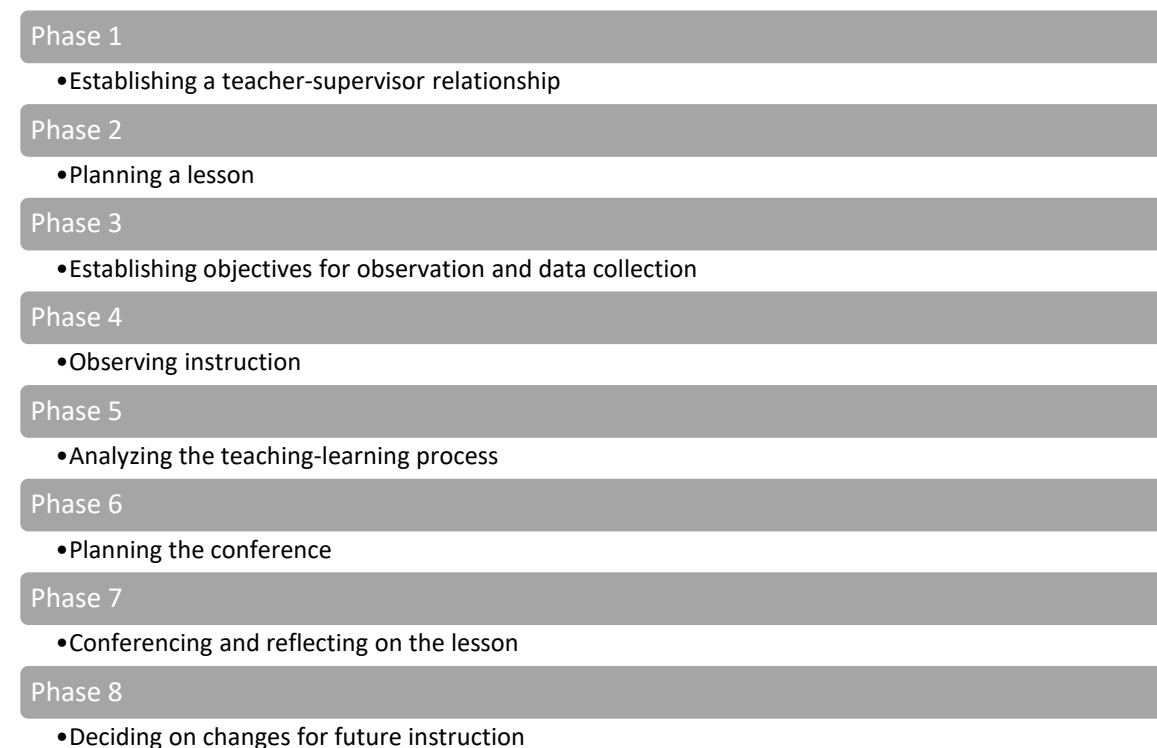
The Dream of Clinical Supervision

By 1976, after moving around a little bit, I was an assistant professor in the Curriculum and Supervision Department at the University of Pittsburgh. Morris Cogan was my colleague and friend. The late Bob Goldhammer had been a faculty member early in my study and his influence remained, even as we heard the stories about the Cogan/Goldhammer tussle to claim the seminal work in clinical supervision. For me clinical supervision, as a practice and a tacit philosophy, represented a life altering experience. It gave hope for supervision to become a major element in scholastic reconstruction. It was not quite the clinical supervision that Cogan had envisioned at Harvard in the 1950s (1973). I found that the classic eight phase process known as "the cycle of supervision" was useful to begin to think about the procedures associated with the events of face-to-face supervision. Cogan's methodological details emphasized the intensity and care with which the practice should evolve over time. In the next decades we had considerable experiences collected from supervision practitioners in order to generate a language for intellectual study. I

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began to imagine clinical supervision as a philosophy (I also saw it as a metaphor) as well as a practice. The concepts collegiality, collaboration, skilled service, and ethical conduct became the imperatives that, when explicated, would stake out the domain of the clinical approach to supervision (Garman, 1982, 1985, 1990.)

Figure 1: The Eight Phases of the Cycle of Supervision (adapted from Cogan, 1973)

Phase 1
- Establishing a teacher-supervisor relationship

Phase 2
- Planning a lesson

Phase 3
- Establishing objectives for observation and data collection

Phase 4
- Observing instruction

Phase 5
- Analyzing the teaching-learning process

Phase 6
- Planning the conference

Phase 7
- Conferencing and reflecting on the lesson

Phase 8
- Deciding on changes for future instruction

There were significant aspects embedded in the phases that portrayed the essential "essence" of clinical supervision yet certainly not assumed in typical supervisory thinking. They represented an early attempt, if not flimsy, to build teacher agency into supervision. Mainly, there were defining actions that made the practice unique. Some of these included what I detail below.

During the two planning phases, it was imperative that the teacher and supervisor meet to co-create a plan for the lesson. If done well it was assumed that the planning would result in an educative event for both. During a second planning phase, the deliberations would result in decisions about how the observation would ensue and what the observation would yield. It was important to give over a good deal of control to the teacher in planning, as well as in the conference phase. As Cogan (1973) would say, "It is the teacher who is ultimately responsible for the actual instruction, not the supervisor" (p. 220). During the observation phase the supervisor was expected to, in Cogan's term, provide "stable data." I tended to refer to this as creating a text that both the teacher and supervisor could recognize as a good representation of the lesson. The supervisor's lesson text was prepared in a descriptive mode, devoid of normative comments. I cautioned novice supervisors to beware of "premature judgments," which are so common in typical classroom observations.

For the analysis phase the supervisor was to prepare the observation text for the teacher as the source for the teacher's analysis of the lesson as well as the supervisor. During these years we often used audio and/or video tapes as the text. Both were expected to do a careful analysis and interpretation separately before the conference meeting.

The conference represented the "space" where productive description and evaluation of the lesson were discussed. Cogan (1973) emphasized the importance of planning for the conference. "The success of the conference," he said, "is in part determined by the care with which the teacher has been prepared to take his appropriate role in it….The preparation of the teacher for his role in the conference helps to transform him from an object of supervision into a colleague in it" (p.198).

The debriefing phase of the process might include the teacher and/or others interested in supervision. It was both an ending and beginning, since it ended with a clear understanding of the next steps, including another visit. Cogan used "cycles" to imply that there was an ongoing aspect to clinical supervision… that the dyadic engagement would continue throughout the school year. It was vital to assume that clinical supervision focused on how a teacher enacted a lesson over time and how students were engaged in the lesson. It was considered impossible for the clinical supervisor to be productive through a single observation. The actions associated with the phases and several rounds of the cycles were the imperatives of Cogan's version of clinical supervision.

A Critical Perspective on the State of Supervision

As I mentioned, aspects of clinical supervision became a radical alternative view of the world for me. It was clear that this kind of educative practice required participants who could share a common will. Through this work, I was continually reminded of Jerome Bruner's (1966) notion that "Education must, then, be not only a transmission of culture, but also a provider of alternative views of the world and a strengthener of the will to explore them" (p.117). Thus, I realized that if I was to claim clinical supervision as a practice, I needed to struggle to embody the willingness to:

- Identify as an inquirer rather than a performer;
- Embody the multiple perspectives of narrative as well as normative modes of observing the events around us and to recognize how important it is to separate the descriptive aspects of the narrative mindset as distinct from the prescriptive aspects of the normative/evaluative one;
- Enact the role of student of teaching and learning responsible for the continual naming of instructional scenarios of teaching and learning as an important aspect of determining the educational worth of the encounter;
- Struggle in the space of uncertainly that is the classroom and beyond;
- Remain open to hearing others and to question the assumptions I might make about 'the other'; and, above all else;
- Keep issues of fairness and social justice as my commitment.

These are a few of the realizations that came forth as part of the Dream of Clinical Supervision in the latter 1970s and 80s. Situated in the heady times of the civil rights and feminist movements, it opened the mind windows for the fresh air of self-awareness, reflection, and restructuring of personal spirit as well as cultural mores. The dream of clinical supervision held out the promise as a universal remedy for an ailing educational system. Those of us who taught and wrote about clinical supervision took seriously the Aristotelian claim that "an unexamined life is not worth living." It became the centerpiece of our supervisory practice. I worried, however, whether there might be more than a modicum of solipsism mixed with narcissism that fueled our commitment.

As fantasy-like my description of clinical supervision may seem today, there were a considerable number of enthusiasts and skeptics who continued to accept and debate the future of it as a method as well as the semantic dissonance caused by the term "clinical." At the time we had two dispositions toward the process that I called the itinerant and the clinical. Itinerant supervisors took clinical supervision as a script that they could semantically articulate, giving the illusion inherent in the grand dream. They often reported, "We are doing clinical supervision in our school" (following the script) or more direct, "I am using the cycle on a group of teachers." Itinerants were generally competent leaders who found the clarity of the script refreshing and specific. Sometimes they wished for more time to work through the text. They regretted the demands of their jobs, reminding themselves of the practical and "real world" of supervision.

The clinical disposition, by contrast, imagined that the "real world" was the clinic, wherever that might be. It was a time and place where special involvements were eventually meaningful. There were actually a number of supervisory clinicians in the field who shared the serious tenets of the clinical supervision dream.

Earlier in the 'golden era,' when the dream still seemed like a possibility, we faced a dilemma. Traditional supervision, as practiced in schools in the name of clinical supervision, included personnel evaluation of teachers and was often carried out for purposes of bureaucratic accountability. Evaluation was tied to an old and discredited notion of inspection. So we made an unfortunate bargain. Since many of us saw the main contaminant in the field of supervision as personnel evaluation of teachers, we eliminated it from our discourse and inquiry, insisting that 'supervision is for the improvement of instruction.' Some of us even ignored the fact that, in order to think and talk about improvement, we needed to delve more deeply into what we meant by 'improvement.' We seldom explored the theoretical challenges of making judgments about someone else's practice, disregarding the contested aspects of the normative in supervision. We left the philosophic discourses to the curriculum and evaluation scholars. We also left ourselves open to the scourge of branding, improvement of instruction could be sold with more palatable brands, such as staff development, instructional leadership, mentoring, etc.

As the new millennium approached, it seemed to me that many of us were still hanging on to the 'improvement of instruction' banner and narratives, ignoring the theory that could inform personnel evaluation (see Holland & Garman, 2001). Meanwhile a group of evaluation scholars were exploring philosophical underpinnings in their field through hermeneutic lenses. Thomas Schwandt, Jennifer Greene, and Deborah Kerdeman, just to mention a few, were addressing issues of power, control, agency, and the significance of how we construct 'the other.' In other words, issues that address our orientation to practice, or what Schwandt labeled as praxis.

Schwandt (2001) posited that "praxis is about our 'concernful dealings' with one another….It is about our effort to do the right thing and do it well in our everyday interactions with one another" (p.77). He explicated the importance of responsiveness, reminding us of the normative dimension of practice. "Responsiveness" he said, "is first and foremost the virtue of being oriented or attentive to praxis (practice). It is to recognize that one is dealing with situations that are lived, embodied, experienced and performed (p.78). Schwandt wrote about the importance of wise judgment and of discernment as the need to apprehend the interrelationships of human affairs that require a power to discriminate, "as discrimination is understood in art, literary, film or music criticism." Schwandt's explication of normative practice warned that:

> [T]he kind of judgment (practical deliberation) demanded by responsiveness is above all not a simple matter of weigh and sum; it is not calculative as, for example, Scriven suggests it should be in evaluation. Simple weighing assumes that there is some unitary concept of value at stake in a situation calling for judgment. (p.80)

As Schwandt and other evaluation scholars suggest, judgment is at the center of inquiry. Yet these ideas espoused by the evaluation scholars are not necessarily new in educational philosophy. The significance, however, is that they are being carried on as a major discourse in the field of evaluation and not in the field of instructional supervision.

In supervision this perspective would mean rejecting the instrumentalist view of practical rationality. Instead we would be challenged to frame evaluative judgment in terms of accounts of the perspectival, the conditional, and the comprehensive. We would assume that there is no unitary concept of 'value,' that rule-based synthesis as a matter of judgment is replaced by judgment as a narrative account of the recognition of quality. This narrative takes up the personal, social, economic, political, and cultural conditions that affect the perceptions and the worth or merit of those we are asked to judge within the interactive space of supervisory practice.

It's important for me to remember that there are scholars in supervision that were concerned with the practice of supervision in service of evaluation (perhaps in a golden age). As early as 1984 Sergiovanni and other critics noted that the typical reductionism of a rational/technical approach was symptomatic of the 'web of primitive scientism' in which educational supervision seemed trapped. It resonated with the perspectives of many of my COPIS colleagues who struggled in the 1980s and 90s to get us out of the trap. Helen Hazi, Pat Holland, Jerry Starratt, Ed Pajak, Fran Bolin, Carl Glickman, Tom Sergiovanni, and John Smyth all wrote theoretically and philosophically from, what I considered an enlightened view of possibilities. Their work excited my thinking.

However, the 1990s brought a number of challenges that moved my interests away from the practice of supervision. I accepted a Fulbright to the Philippines during a sabbatical leave and when I returned I took on a major responsibility for administering two programs in Bosnia/Herzegovina during and after the war. Meanwhile back at the academy, the Pitt School of Education had settled into a reorganization that diminished the scholarship in supervision. The theoretical and philosophical discourses in the field of curriculum studies seemed to me to be thriving, and I put my academic energies into teaching curriculum and social foundations of

education, as well as a doctoral core course. With Maria Piantanida, I published two books related to qualitative/interpretive dissertation work. Still it was difficult to give up a field that transformed my thinking about teaching and learning and played an important part in my emergent scholarship. Then, I experienced a rather sad regret when I read Bill Pinar's comment in Understanding Curriculum (Pinar et al., 1995):

> Garman's employment of hermeneutics as the basis for supervisory inquiry and practice, implying as it does the primacy of a moral vision of supervision, may be her greatest contribution to the field. It may rival in significance the seminal contributions of Thomas Sergiovanni and John Smyth, the two scholars often regarded as the most important in the area of supervision (p. 730).

In mentioning this I realize that I run the risk of self-aggrandizement being compared to Sergiovanni and Smyth. Actually, I mention this to highlight the basis for a deep regret – a sense that perhaps I abandoned the field at a time when I could have contributed, not only to supervision, but most certainly to my own emergent thinking. So it may be that, as I reflect on this, I find myself looking for forgiveness…Yet forgiveness is what we do after we give up on making the past better.

If, indeed, it seems as if I have abandoned the field of supervision, what can I possibly say to my supervision colleagues? I acknowledge the hubris reflected in my attempts. I'm also grateful to Daisy Arredondo Rucinski, Helen Hazi, and Pat Holland who have continued to stay in conversation with me about supervision. They've challenged me to write, even as they realize I probably don't have much to contribute. It's forced me, however, to face my dilemma. I find the evaluation scholarship provocative, full of potential ideas for supervisory practice. Newer scholarship in feminist philosophy, cultural studies, and curriculum studies hold immense promise. One part of me is interested in contributing to productive and moral forms of democratic praxis. I'm less convinced, however, that this is worthwhile, or even possible.

## The Decades-Long Nightmare of Political Accountability

By the beginning of the 1990s state politicians were starting to pay more attention to new school reform efforts, including curriculum standards. Many governors had claimed the mantle of "Education Governor." Among them included James Hunt of North Carolina, Bill Clinton of Arkansas, Lamar Alexander of Tennessee, and George W. Bush of Texas. For the most part, their reforms consisted of new requirements for testing and accountability. Overnight, supervision seemed to have become a vehicle for accountability – a place that we sadly still find ourselves today. By this time the growing dysfunctional aspects of clinical supervision morphed into 'instructional supervision,' with much the same script of face-to-face procedures of clinical supervision. Instructional supervision was able to claim its domain as the improvement of instruction, even as the political forces were pressing more and more toward high stakes accountability measures. Some of us were caught off guard as our political naiveté kept us from the awareness of a creeping culture of surveillance and appeasement in the name of improvement of instruction through supervision. The high stakes testing environment has generated fear and surveillance as the talk of data-driven instruction and evaluation of teachers using electronic data dominates the scene.

I worry that this form of supervision is related to Foucault's description of the Panopticon, an architectural device that allowed the prison warden in his *Discipline and Punish* (1975) to visualize the prisoners at all times. Foucault, in his history of how power is constructed through modern surveillance and discipline, describes Jeremy Bentham's notion of an ideal prison structure. A watchtower is situated at the center of the prison, surrounded by cells in which the prisoners are housed, isolated from each other and constantly on display for the observer. Once the tower is complete,

> All that is needed then, is to place a supervisor in a central tower and to shut up in each cell a madman, a patient, a condemned man, a worker, or a schoolboy (or teacher…mine added). (the cells) are like so many cages, so many small theaters, in which each actor is alone, perfectly confined to a cell from which he is seen from the front by the supervisor, but the side wall prevent him from coming into contact with his companions. He is seen, but he does not see: he is the object of information, never the subject of communication... (p. 200)

Figure 2: The Panopticon of Education
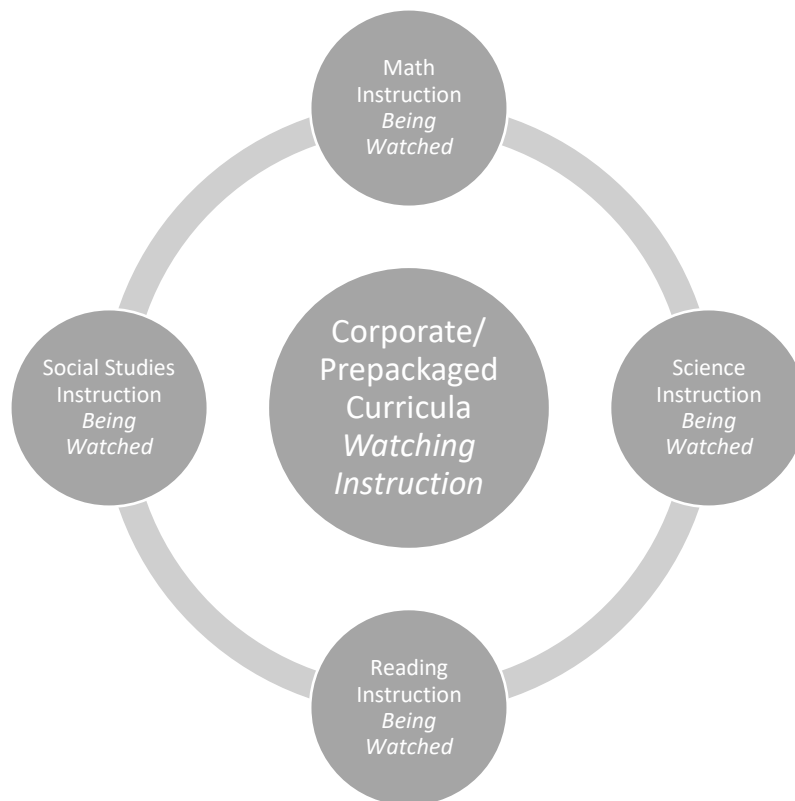
Thus the Panopticon efficiently generates a power relationship between the watcher and the watched. The observation becomes a tacit assumption and the physical presence of the supervisor becomes irrelevant.

In the 2000s Helen Hazi and I began to explore what was happening in Pennsylvania and West Virginia schools as a result of the recent accountability mandates and initiatives. We called our study, "Teach by Numbers" (Hazi et al., 2007). I knew that situations in many schools were radically changed, but I was not prepared for the all-encompassing metric world in schools. It became clear to me that the political bureau technocracy was now rampant in an impoverished educational landscape where a single cybernetic narrative (Morgan, 2006) controls the action of practitioners. And although early in the twentieth century, schools had been given over to various forms of social engineering that grew to shape the educational culture; now, in the new millennium, sophisticated technologies and political spectacles were dominating the world of schools. We were then, and continue to be now, dangerously close to living within technological determinism, and the emphasis has spawned a cybercratic authority whose narrative is cleansed of social conflict and moral struggle. We know that teachers do more than impart skills and content; they enact the role of social and moral agent in a civic institution that is responsible as an agency of social justice and cultural democracy. The obstacle, however, is a technocratic system dominated by politicians, entrepreneurs, and special interest foundations that presents a view of teaching and schooling based on the valuing of cultural uniformity; a punitive notion of accountability; and an uncritical perspective of patriotic nationalism, corporate thinking, and class, race and gender privilege.

Most worrisome, however, are the attitudes and actions that were reported as we talked with teachers and administrators. Our work led us to posit that the educational nightmare was breeding a culture of compliance; surveillance, and seduction (see Hazi and Garman, 2007). It was as if this public accountability narrative had created a reality through a host of media theatrics that placed real human forms of teaching at risk of extinction. Educators were being programmed to accept the data-driven world with its packaged curricula and test results as a normalized reality.

The high stakes testing environment has also generated opportunities for entrepreneurial vendors from the for-profit sector to penetrate emerging public education markets with new and improved product lines. In addition, there is another change within public education that grew from the seeds of privatization of curriculum development and the penetration of the marketplace by for-profit firms. There is also a colonization of public education now taking the form of substantial investments by philanthropic organizations: foundations established as tax shelters by those who have amassed great wealth in the private sector. Ravitch (2016) details the deep concerns we should have regarding the role that three powerful foundations are playing in public education: The Gates Foundation, The Broad Foundation, and The Walton Foundation. As she points out, these corporations describe themselves as venture philanthropies that want to invest large amounts of money in education. Venture philanthropy borrows concepts from venture capital finance and business management. The danger, as Ravitch details, is to threaten the 'Life of the Great American School System' as a public institution. Gates and Broad continue to play out their visions of education across the country where a new form of supervision that looks very much like a dysfunctional clinical model and focuses on evaluation over formative feedback and support.

The educational nightmare of accountability is the world of bogus claims of research-based practices, data-driven instruction, prepackaged and scripted curricula, classification of students

and teachers, standardized rubrics and tests, AYP progress goals, and large scale data reporting, all in the service of political and economic imperatives made manifest through a dominant political spectacle of 'accountability and choice.' In this nightmare it appears that <u>we have abandoned our democratic aspiration to create an educational system that meets the individual needs of every child</u>, while at the same time allowing the roles of the supervisor to be eroded. We are no longer viewed as support systems for students and teachers as they learn the skills essential to become active participants in a democracy. Instead we are now seen as deliverers of educational products and services within a competitive marketplace. Most of all, we, as supervisors, run the risk of becoming the Panopticon of Foucault's institution, monitoring the data for teacher evaluation based largely on what is determined by corporate prepackaged curricula. Teachers have been stripped of their responsibilities to engage in the creation and interpretation of knowledge and instead are expected to function as pre-programmed delivery systems for the latest version of the market's new and improved managed curricula.

Conclusion

Children, who once were viewed as our most precious resource and the future of our society, continue to be classified merely as outputs of the factory model of education, despite nearly two decades of failed accountability efforts. The only winners are those who are positioned to take full advantage of the profit-making opportunities within public education. My concern remains that here has been very little organized resistance to neoliberal, market-driven incursions into public education. We see this continue to be promoted as we move into the 2020s. My hope here is to explore the responsibilities that we have as members of the academy concerned about sustaining the life of public education, and more specifically, all the great work that has been developed in the field of supervision.

Thus we are forced to confront the nightmare, a country that is rapidly moving away from democratic principles and more towards an autocracy. For me, the question remains: How do I work with other educators to inquire about effective, democratic, and morally responsive supervision, curriculum and pedagogy where the real work must be rendered in a world of horrifying illusion? I am constantly challenged to become a radical revolutionary to promote a praxis of resistance and culturally relevant pedagogy that addresses the structural inequities that have existed for so long in our nation.

My hope is to challenge us to consider how we come to terms with the choices we are called upon to make, because it is humanity who pays the ultimate price for our educational ventures into the praxis of a treacherous nightmare reality. We need to proceed with caution because that price may very well be the future of our children. I call on all educators to fall back to their dreams of what it means to help move our country forward – and to do so with reckless abandon as we disrupt the nightmare of accountability.

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Author Biography

Noreen Garman is emerita professor in the School of Education at the University of Pittsburgh. As former professor in the Administrative and Policy Studies Department and co-director of the Institute for International Studies in Education, she taught courses in curriculum studies, instructional supervision, and qualitative/interpretive research, publishing numerous articles and two books in these fields. As a Fulbright senior scholar, she facilitated study groups in the Philippines, as well as Australia and Egypt. In Bosnia she administered two educational programs during and after the war. She was given the 2012 international Elizabeth Turlock Mentorship Trust Award, and during her career has been presented with five other national and local awards for excellence in mentoring and scholarship.