Special Issue

Standards and Competency Frameworks for School Administrators: Global, Comparative and Critical Perspectives

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Standards and Competency Frameworks for School Administrators: Global, Comparative and Critical Perspectives

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Abstract: In this introduction to the special issue, we highlight the increased transnational interest in standardizing the knowledge, competencies, and practices that relate to educational leadership. While acknowledging the thematic convergences in leadership standards and competency frameworks from heterogenous localities, we propose that it is critical to interrogate the policy mobilities and the recontextualization of the discourses that have contributed to the formulation and implementation of standards. To achieve this aim, this special issue stages a global dialogue about this global leadership turn by including a selection of articles that discuss the emergence and adoption of education leadership standards in diverse linguistic, social and cultural contexts.

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Estándares y competencias en gestión educativa: Perspectivas globales, comparativas y críticas

Resumen: En esta introducción al número especial, llamamos la atención sobre el renovado interés a nivel transnacional en la estandarización de los conocimientos, competencias y prácticas en gestión y liderazgo educativos. Reconociendo las convergencias temáticas en los marcos de estándar y competencia formulados en múltiples contextos nacionales e internacionales, señalamos la importancia de interrogar críticamente las movilidades y recontextualizaciones en estos discursos. En particular, sugerimos que el estudio de la implementación de reformas educativas sobre liderazgo y gestión escolar, merecen atención especial por parte de investigadores y legisladores. Las contribuciones incluidas en este número especial revelan el estado actual del "giro hacia el liderazgo" en tanto fenómeno global, con análisis situados en diversos contextos lingüísticos, sociales y culturales.

Palabras-clave: Estándares; competencias; liderazgo educativo; gestión educativa, movilidades en política educativa

Padrões e competências em gestão educacional: Perspectivas globais, comparativas e crítica Resumo: Nesta introdução à edição especial, chamamos a atenção para o interesse renovado no nível transnacional na padronização de conhecimentos, habilidades e práticas em gestão e liderança educacional. Reconhecendo as convergências temáticas nas estruturas de padrões e competências formuladas em múltiplos contextos nacionais e internacionais, destacamos a importância de questionar criticamente as mobilidades e recontextualizações desses discursos. Em particular, sugerimos que o estudo da implementação de reformas educacionais sobre liderança e gestão escolar mereça atenção especial de pesquisadores e legisladores. As contribuições incluídas nesta edição especial revelam o estado atual da "virada para a liderança" como um fenômeno global, com análises localizadas em diversos contextos linguísticos, sociais e culturais.

Palavras-chave: Padrões; competições; liderança educacional; gestão educacional; mobilidade na política educacional

Assessing the Leadership Turn in Education Reform

Recent education reform initiatives that emphasize the achievement of system outcomes have provoked a reconfiguration of the structure and administration of schools in several jurisdictions worldwide. Instigated by international assessment programmes like PISA and TIMMS, numerous education systems have begun to focus on the organizational conditions that facilitate the achievement of measurable learning outcomes, and more specifically, on the practices of actors in charge of delivering and implementing the policy messages on school improvement at the school level. Within these outcomes-based reform initiatives, leadership has been conceptualized as the ideal policy mechanism to organize the different school actors towards attaining the system's goals. School administrators, under these regimes, have been positioned as the key policy actors in charge of student learning, defined as the key indicator of school effectiveness (Pont et al., 2008; Riveros, Verret, & Wei, 2016).

Over the last three decades, there has been a heightened global interest in identifying and operationalizing the knowledge, competencies, and practices that relate to leadership in education. This "leadership turn" (Riveros, Newton & Burgess, 2017; Strain, 2009; Thorpe, 2019) is evidenced

in policy initiatives that seek to standardize the leadership practices of school administrators. Leadership standards and competency frameworks have been formulated and adopted in numerous national and provincial/state contexts, and have been used for leadership preparation, professional learning, and evaluation. Some examples include the *Australian Professional Standard for Principals and the Leadership Profiles* (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2014), the *Kiwi Leadership for Principals: Principals as Educational Leaders* (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2008), and the *Professional Standards for Educational Leaders* (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015) in the United States. Examples of provincial/state frameworks include *The Alberta Professional Practice Standards* (Alberta Education, 2018); the *Leadership Standards for Principals and Vice-Principals in British Columbia* (British Columbia Principals' and Vice-Principals' Association, 2016), and *The Ontario Leadership Framework* (Ontario Institute for Education Leadership, 2013). As noted by some commentators (English, 2006; Magno, 2013), these frameworks maintain striking similarities across localities.

These attempts to homogenize leadership practice, however, have received numerous critiques. In particular, leadership standards have been criticized for their decontextualization and for neglecting issues related to equity and social justice (English, 2006; Davis, Gooden, & Micheaux, 2015; Niesche, 2013). Moreover, the development of leadership standards has been conceptualized as a disciplinary mechanism, and a manifestation of governmentality in education (Usher & Edward, 1994). These critiques noted that by standardizing school leadership practice across contexts, the leadership turn normalizes and legitimizes knowledges, values, and discourses related to outcomesbased reform. A particular concern, noted by some of the articles included in this special issue, is the lack of attention to issues of indigeneity, race, gender, sexual identity, ability and social class, among others, which has serious implications for the preparation, practice and evaluation of school leaders (English, 2006; Niesche, 2013). Reacting to some of these critiques, some jurisdictions have begun to revise their leadership standards to address the rapidly changing expectations for and responsibilities of principals and vice-principals. Some examples include the NPBA Professional Standards for Educational Leaders in the United States (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015) and the Alberta Professional Practice Standards (Alberta Education, 2018). As educational systems begin to revise their standards, more research is needed to investigate the impact of these frameworks in global, national and local contexts. This special issue aims to contribute to this research effort with a selection of notable studies that interrogate and compare standards and competency frameworks in different jurisdictions.

Policy Mobilities

Researchers have identified important thematic convergences when comparing the formulation of leadership standards in different countries. Some of the common themes include: 1) setting goals, establishing shared visions, and planning for school development; 2) improving student academic performance; 3) providing instructional leadership, and promoting teacher professional development; 4) increasing school effectiveness through resource allocation, budgeting, and personnel management; 5) engaging in communications and collaborations with teachers, parents as well as community members; and 6) ensuring school safety (Ingvarson et al., 2006; Pont et al., 2008; Riveros et al., 2016; Walker, Bryant, & Lee, 2013; Wei, 2017).

According to researchers in comparative and international education (Phillips & Ochs, 2004; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010; Steiner-Khamsi, 2004), the recent proliferation of leadership standards evidences a global convergence in the discourses and practices of education reform. This global convergence in education policy has been driven by discourses derived from New Public

Management (O'Reilly & Reed, 2010), which have placed emphasis on decentralization, global competition, and market-based accountability. The adoption of these discourses normally results from complicated power relations, marked by the interests, conflicts, and negotiations among stakeholders across local, national, regional, and global levels (Steiner-Khamsi, 2004).

Consequently, in understanding the global mobilities of policy ideas, it is critical to ask: Why have particular discourses been mobilized globally? And, how have those discourses been recontextualized locally? As noted by Carney (2008), "contemporary globalization is characterized by 'flows' that are not only rapid but 'disjunctive', embodying new possibilities but also inconsistencies and contradictions" (p. 64). In order to address, these questions, we adopt a comparative approach that aims to analyze cases from various national education systems. This strategy has been used by Magno (2013) in her analysis of the neoliberal influences in the policyscape of school leadership. Drawing upon five cases (Azerbaijan, Mongolia, Pakistan, Switzerland, the United States), Magno's study underpins the global forces that have influenced the education leadership reform agenda, namely decentralization, accountability and international assessments.

This Special Issue

The articles selected for this special issue offer timely and robust perspectives on the current status of the global leadership turn in education reform. They exemplify diverse national contexts, offering an opportunity to compare and contrast different manifestations of the standardization movement in educational leadership. Indeed, a unique contribution of this special issue is the inclusion of studies situated in diverse linguistic, social and cultural contexts, such as Chile, Mexico, Quebec, Spain and the United States, an effort that aims to connect multiple academic literatures on educational policy and administration in conversations about the global phenomenon of leadership standards. We believe that a global dialogue about the standardization movement would offer important insights about the origin and uptake of policy ideas in education reform. As noted by Eacott (2015), "leadership' may be more of a particular socio-geographic construct than a universal" (p. 33), a sentiment that resonates with Magno's (2013) observation that the leadership standards movement, originated in anglophone countries of the global north, rapidly spread out to other national and cultural contexts around the globe. While this could be interpreted as a form of epistemological (Eacott, 2015), cultural, or ideological imperialism, more empirical research is needed to determine the extent by which constructs like "leadership" are adopted, or reimagined, in local policy contexts. The contributions included in this special issue offer substantial insights to evaluate the impact of these leadership reform discourses in various jurisdictions around the globe.

The papers in this issue have been organized in two groups, depending on the methodological focus of the study. We recognize, however, that this classification is ad-hoc and arbitrary as substantial overlaps and connections exist among the manuscripts. The first group includes studies that focused on comparisons between standards, such as Larochelle-Audet et al. (Quebec, Australia, British Columbia, California, England, New Zealand, Texas, and the United States), and Diaz Delgado and García Martinez (Mexico and Spain), The second group includes studies that focused on specific cases, such as Bolivar (Spain); Childs (United States); Lambert and Bouchama (Quebec) and Rivero et al. (Chile). Clearly, our organization of the issue is merely a heuristic to animate a much-needed conversation regarding leadership standards discourses and policies at a global scale. We invite the readers of this issue to identify the rich relations between these contributions.

The first paper by Larochelle-Audet, Magnan, Potvin, & Doré compares the Québec competency standards with other frameworks from Australia, British Columbia, California, England,

New Zealand, Texas, and the United States. Their study explores the ways in which the competency standards address issues of equity, inclusion, and social justice. In their analysis, Larochelle-Audet et al. categorized the examined leadership standards into three groups. In the first group, which includes the standards from Australia, California, and the United States, school leaders are explicitly encouraged to pursue the goals of equity, inclusion, and social justice in education. Further, rather than focusing on a deficit perspective, these standards highlight the leadership competencies and practices that will help overcome structural injustices in schools. The second group includes the standards from British Columbia and New Zealand. In this group, there is some reference to some social categories, but there is limited elaboration on the visions of school leaders to address the structural determinants of inequity. The last group includes leadership standards from England, Québec, and Texas. In this group the practices outlined do not seem to address issues of equity, inclusion, and social justice directly. These standards seem to focus more on achieving system outcomes through high efficiency and performance. The authors conclude that most leadership standards examined in their study have been, in one way or another, influenced by New Public Management discourses. Lastly, the paper proposes recommendations for the redevelopment of leadership standards in Québec, recognizing the importance of equity in the provision of education.

In the second paper, Díaz Delgado and García Martínez reported on their comparative analysis of standards in Mexico and Spain, with a particular focus on the role of the standards in 1) the selection and promotion of school leaders, 2) the development of bureaucratic structures, and 3) leadership preparation. The comparison reveals important similarities and differences between these frameworks. For instance, in Mexico, the standards have been formulated and implemented at the national level, whereas in Spain, the standards have been formulated and implemented at the provincial, regional or institutional level. Another important difference is the conceptualization of the principal's (director/a): in Spain, some hybridity (teacher/administrator) is maintained throughout the leader's professional career. Principals are often selected from within the teaching body and can retain some teaching duties; after their period as principals is over, they can return to their teaching duties. In Mexico, the principals' work is exclusively administrative; they only participate in teaching as instructional leaders. One important similarity between these systems is the pervasiveness of institutional hierarchies that centralize decision-making on the principal, in detriment of more distributed and democratic forms of school governance. Another common aspect in both contexts is the existence of leadership preparation strategies designed to support beginning school leaders during the first stages of their career. The authors recommend further comparative analyses to illuminate some of the factors that influence the formulation of standards as well as the development of joint research initiatives to develop collaboration and knowledge exchange.

The third paper in this issue is Bolivar's study of leadership standards in Spain. His analysis aims to situate the Spanish framework, Marco Español para Buena Dirección (MEBD), in relation to global trends on leadership reform. In particular, Bolivar identifies conceptual relations with frameworks from Chile, Peru, Ontario (Canada) and the US. One common theme in these frameworks, according to Bolivar's study, is the repositioning of the school administrator as instructional leader. As noted above, this refocusing towards instructional leadership reflects current trends on education reform that position learning outcomes as the measure of educational effectiveness. Another theme highlighted by the author is the preference for distributed forms of leadership in the standards. In Bolivar's view, the introduction of shared forms of leadership and governance in educational organizations would offer new possibilities for leadership development and professionalization in school administration.

In the fourth paper, Farley, Childs, and Johnson examined the extent to which the recently revised leadership standards in the US (PSEL, NELP) respond to the challenges that school leaders face in their work, particularly concerning equity and justice. The authors start with an overview of the development of the leadership standards in the US, noting the historical alignment between the different iterations of the standards for leadership practice in schools (e.g. ISLLC, PSEL) and the standards for leadership preparation (e.g. ELCC, NELP). One highlight of the latest versions, namely the PSEL (2015) and NELP (2018), is that more attention is given to the school leaders' practice and day-to-day experiences. Moreover, the revised leadership standards have also attempted to include an equity-oriented language by emphasizing a vision towards all students' success.

In order to assess the extent to which these changes incorporate concerns about equity in schools, the authors conducted a content analysis of the different versions of the standards documents. They found that while equity and justice are mentioned in all leadership standards, these notions are addressed more frequently in the revised versions. However, more references to inclusion were found in the NELP standards compared to the PSEL standards, and fewer references to justice were found in the NELP standards compared with the PSEL standards. Farley et al. argue that the revised leadership standards in the United States have evidenced an evolving understanding of equity and justice in education by placing more emphasis on cultural responsiveness, educational opportunities, and the role of the educational leader in creating equitable schools. Nevertheless, the conceptualizations of equity and justice still focus on the distribution of goods and access, which fails to address the complexity of equity as a wicked problem in education, that is, a problem that is complex, difficult to conceptualize, and difficult to address. The authors noted that the standards have yet to recognize the institutionalized challenges experienced by students from diverse backgrounds, as well as the role of school leaders in influencing policies. Farley et al. recommend the design of leadership preparation and development programs that, in addition to critically engaging the current leadership standards, would promote the abilities to "rethink, reimagine, and transcend" school contexts.

In the fifth article in this issue, Lambert and Bouchamma investigate the competencies required for the day-to-day practice of school leaders in Québec. Recent educational reforms in Québec introduced a results-based management model centered on school effectiveness. In light of this new context, school leaders in Québec are expected to pay increasing attention to student academic achievement. Following these reforms, leadership competency standards were introduced in 2008 aiming to reflect the school leaders' changing roles and responsibilities.

Drawing upon these competency standards, the authors interviewed 13 school leaders to explore the challenges in their work and the strategies they adopted to overcome those difficulties. Some of the themes that emerge from their findings include creating dynamic educational projects, priority management, and adaptation to changes. The competencies mentioned by participants in relation to those challenges include balancing between personal and professional life, managing staff, networking, managing the unexpected, and stress management. In addition, the findings highlight four cross-curricular competencies, including collaboration, leadership, communication, and listening. Moreover, even though not listed in the leadership standards, emotional intelligence and previous teaching experience are seen as cross-curricular competencies for school leaders to meet their challenges.

Lambert and Bouchamma conclude that the leadership standards in Québec have addressed the competencies needed by school leaders to face the challenges in their everyday practices. They recommend the inclusion of competencies related to emotional intelligence, previous teaching experience, managing stress and the unexpected. The authors conclude that Québec's leadership

standards are effective guidelines for practicing school leaders, notwithstanding that the expectations for principals and vice-principals have been constantly increasing and changing.

The sixth paper in this issue is Rivero, Hurtado and Yañez's study of school administrators' perceptions of leadership preparation in Chile. Using the Chilean educational leadership framework, Marco para la Buena Direccion y Liderazgo Escolar (MBDLE), as their referent, these researchers surveyed 575 school principals (directores/as) to investigate the administrators' knowledge, perceptions, and expectations in relation to the MBDLE. Their findings reveal that the leadership framework has been influential in the development of leadership practices in schools. The analysis shows that while administrators recognize the value of the standards as guidelines for practice, the levels of preparation to implement the framework vary significantly; that is, while the participants see themselves as highly prepared for some dimensions of the framework, other dimensions, particularly those associated to the implementation of new curricular initiatives, require additional support. Some of the recommendations include the development of more specific and diversified leaning opportunities for administrators that respond to the organizational and cultural context of the school, as well as a recognition that the career stage of the administrators plays a role in their professional learning.

Relatedly, the authors suggest these multiple professional development opportunities must reflect the different competencies of the MBDLE; keeping in mind that not all administrators possess the same level of preparation and experience. Rivero et al. conclude by arguing that the successful implementation of the leadership framework would be greatly improved by investigating the professional learning needs of other members of the leadership team in the school. This would offer a more informed perspective of the distribution of leadership capacity in educational organizations.

Conclusions

This special issue seeks to contribute to the emerging scholarship on global leadership reform by presenting and comparing cases from multiple national spaces. Research on school leadership has been largely dominated by instrumentalism and has evidenced a lack of critical evaluation of the discourses that shape leadership practice and policy around the globe (Eacott, 2015; Magno, 2013). As leadership reform becomes a global phenomenon, comparative analyses of standardization in educational administration and leadership prove urgent and necessary (English, 2006). In order to accomplish this task, research on leadership standards from non-English speaking contexts must be brought to the fore. Indeed, some of the articles included in this special issue offer diverse global perspectives on the adoption of leadership standards.

Aiming to animate the comparative analysis of leadership standards, the editors of this special issue have created an online repository of policy documents and scholarship on leadership standards and competency frameworks around the world. The *Global Observatory of Leadership Standards* (https://www.edu.uwo.ca/gols/) offers a compendium of policies and research organized by country and themes. Our attempt is to offer a toolbox for policy makers, researchers, and practitioners interested in the evaluation, comparison, development and mobilities of these global policy trends. We believe that this evolving global conversation has the potential to reveal new aspects of the contemporary dynamics of school reform and will provide new venues for scholarship, policy analysis and development.

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