

Comprehensive or Implementable? A Review of Y. Bouchamma, M. Giguère and D. April's, Pedagogical Supervision Standards: A Conceptual Framework

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Résumé de l'article

I argue in this book review that the authors have created a readily implementable framework for school principals' in their instructional supervision tasks, by virtue of not attempting to become comprehensive.

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Book Review

Comprehensive or Implementable?
A Review of Y. Bouchamma, M. Giguère and D. April's
Pedagogical Supervision Standards: A Conceptual Framework.
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Ellwood Cubberley, one of the first North American scholars of educational administration, in 1916 lamented that school boards were too often animated by local considerations, personal appearance, and sympathy for the teacher rather than competence in appraising teacher instruction: “professional merit and adaptability to the work of instruction, for which there are no standards for judging, count for far too little” (Newman, 1992). A century later, we have multiple standards across North American education—for student performance (York Region District School Board, 2017), for teacher effectiveness (Colorado, 2020), for principal practice (NAESP, 2015), for school superintendents (Ohio, 2008), for mathematics and social studies and science teaching (NCTM, 2020), for special education (CEC, 2015), for distance education (BC Ministry of Education, 2010), for leadership (Government of Alberta, 2019), for ethical practice (Ontario College of Teachers, 2020), and all kinds of assessment matters. Perhaps the time is ripe for an international handbook on the topic! Standards are part of an “epidemic of policy,” and certainly there is no shortage of educational advice about how to enact them. What makes Bouchamma, Giguère, and April’s competency framework intriguing is that it has been prepared from and for Francophone school administrators. As an English translation following the original 2017 French edition, this book will hopefully enable English-language school supervisors in Quebec, and ideally across North America, to adopt their work.

An immediate question is: Do Francophone school leaders see their supervisory tasks differently than their Anglophone counterparts? The authors are well positioned to provide an answer. Bouchamma was formerly with the University of Moncton, but now is at Laval University in Quebec City. *Giguère* was a school principal from a Quebec school district, now serving as a lecturer at Laval. April was a Greenfield award-winning doctoral student under Bouchamma’s supervision at Laval and was formerly a director of French-as-Second Language studies in Nova Scotia at St. Anne’s University. These three authors’ work thus arises from deep experience in both Quebec and Acadian French education. However, their most immediate experience was studying school supervision in two school districts in Quebec with a grant from the Quebec Ministry of Education. The Quebec government may have been interested in developing a framework that could eventually become province-wide policy. While this did not come to pass, their field research has informed the standards in this volume.

There is a broader set of impulses over the past two decades that can explain standards development across North American education. The first is a research-and-assessment explosion of knowledge on potentially efficacious teaching and learning, accompanied by digitization in the academy and within school systems (Collins & Halverson, 2018; Hargreaves, 2003). Delineating a common core or center point in this expanding body of knowledge affords educators a focal point for anchoring their practice.

As such, standards frameworks are synthetic, delimited to distillations of research for improvement. The second public policy shift across all sectors, not just K-12 education, has been the move toward consequences and outcomes, not techniques and processes (Drake, 2012). Results-based management and improved student achievement, however conceived, have followed New Public Management precepts (Aucoin, 1990, 1995) in governance. The third trend is accountability, especially within limits of public finance and the goal of balanced budgets. Many realms of education have not had explicit criterion standards until the past couple of decades (Shores & Loeb, 2016). In my experience, standards and performance statistics enable policymakers to make difficult budgetary tradeoffs between health and educational spending. Bouchamma and associates acknowledge the influence of all three trends in the introduction of their timely book.

We can ostensibly see standards as a foil to postmodern or post-structural thinking (Stufflebeam, 1998), as a kind of Rorschach blot into the essentialist's mindset (Bouchamma et al., 2014). If the postmodernist rejects notions of shared knowledge, the poststructuralist rejects overly simplistic thinking. In contrast, Bouchamma and associates' framework is a taxonomy of 57 competencies with two to four paragraphs for each linking the competency back to North American scholarship about efficacious supervision. A single three-page table sets out the range of knowledge that a supervisor ought to hold. The authors foresee their book as a ready-made "reference manual" for school districts developing local policy for improving pedagogical supervision. The framework sets out a precise set of objectives as a "systematic overview of a system" for leaders to supervise instruction. Without a doubt, this framework goes much further than other writing on instructional supervision, laying out the key competencies required. Viewed historically, we are taken substantially beyond Heck, Hallinger, Glanz and Zepeda, and others (Glanz & Hazi, 2019). Moreover, the competencies draw on North America-wide, French-language and English-language research. That one-third of the scholarly references cited are French-language researchers is in itself a unique and valuable contribution to the burgeoning field of instructional supervision.

The authors have avoided mistakes frequently made by educators, such as confusing standards for standardization, and misconstruing supervision for centralized direction. The authors are explicit that pedagogical supervision should not be equated with a top-down unanimity that involves "authority, control, even intimidation" (xiii). In fact, Bouchamma and colleagues weigh the merits of professional learning circles against individual supervisory methods, precisely because the former better recognizes the workload of principals or other supervisors. That trade-off is also about cultivating collective versus individual responsibility for student outcomes. Perhaps most important, the Pedagogical Supervision Standards are designed for supervision, not for teacher evaluation, a distinction many teachers do not make. The authors recognize "the paradigm has shifted toward a more open, collegial approach" (xiii) wherein multiple models may be followed. Indeed, the success of pedagogical or instructional standards will hinge on teachers recognizing that paradigm shift (Bouchamma et al., 2017).

These standards are for educational administrators, not teachers. They might be compared to Alberta's *Leadership Quality Standard* (Government of Alberta, 2019). However, the Alberta standards are expressions of public policy and are a certification requirement for principals and superintendents, while there is no evidence that the standards advocated by Bouchamma have been accepted as policy by the government of Quebec. School boards in Quebec and elsewhere are free to use them or not as they choose. A further difference is the scope. Bouchamma's *Pedagogical Supervision Standards* focus on one element in the multiple roles of a principal, whereas the Alberta standards encompass multiple roles of the principal, including the supervision of instruction.

Bouchamma's framework is incisive and definitionally clear, so we may note the careful choice of title. Professor Bouchamma focuses on pedagogy whereas the analogous label in English Canada and the United States is instructional leadership. The distinction is important: the first suggests expertise in learning theory, whereas the second suggests expertise in translating curriculum in the classroom into effective teaching within a subject area. Whereas pedagogical theory enables the supervisor with experience in teaching to become effective, instructional leadership implies that the supervisor has expertise within a particular subject area or grade level configuration. In that sense, the *Pedagogical Supervision Standards* are more broadly applicable than the Alberta standards to a range of principals' background experience.

This framework and Alberta's *Leadership Quality Standard* (Government of Alberta, 2019) con-

front similar challenges in covering a wide array of topics. At my home campus, we require aspiring school administrators to take at least two courses, and at other Alberta universities, even entire programs of study to meet provincial certification demands. At Laval University, the 57 competencies are covered in one course (p. xi). So it is difficult to ensure that this breadth of knowledge and skill required is covered, let alone cultivated, with aspiring pedagogical leaders. We wonder if a typical graduate school instructor would be able to cover let alone practice all the skills outlined in a three-page chart. Nevertheless, Dr. Bouchamma clearly anticipates the framework will eventually be adopted as the Ministry of Education policy (pp. xiv-xv). But are these standards implementable as policy at either the provincial or local level? Given Dr. Bouchamma's aims, we can apply implementability criteria from a recent study of the *Teacher Growth, Supervision and Evaluation Policy* in Alberta to her work (Brandon et al., 2018, p. 163-178). Implementability as the interpretation of a text is distinguishable from implementation as a structured process for change, and from enactment as behavioral or performance adjustment. It assumes that local authorities must transparently communicate policies to local audiences so they can be operationalized in disparate settings and in different situations. If we see the *Pedagogical Supervision Standards* as eventual personnel policy, then we need to ask whether they can be implemented as given within a school district. Personnel policies must be crafted or drafted in their wording for the user: the policy's intrinsic characteristics can enhance or impede its implementation. Implementability involves the author's tradeoffs in resolving tensions between the concreteness/abstractness of the text, and about comprehensiveness/narrowness of scope.

Clarity and crispness of definition is one trait of highly implementable policy. Both the *Alberta Leadership Quality Standard* and the *Pedagogical Supervision Standards* define standards in similar ways – as a competency or mixture of knowledge, skill, and ability. Both are an input standard, not an educational process or outcome standard to which time-harried administrators apply checklists and tick marks. Comparing the two frameworks, we can see an 85 percent overlap in traits (Lambert & Bouchamma, 2019, p. 62), signifying that school leaders in both jurisdictions ought to be roughly similar in their skills and knowledge. Thus, the two documents are readily interchangeable, but we receive much more detail in Bouchamma et al.'s standards. That is, they are generally transposable in content, hence implementable across a wide array of Canadian circumstances.

In standards, conditional verbs are important: the choice of “may”, “would”, “could” or “should” becomes crucial in decision-making and direction, thus shaping the degree of accountability attached to a standard. For the most part, Bouchamma et al. skirt this question by not inserting any qualifying word in their roster of competencies, thereby avoiding the controversial issue of standards and stakes. Their document becomes feasible for implementation, by virtue of letting the school district clarify the expectation.

The authors structure their standards around four broad categories: *Knowledge*, *Know How to Do*, *Know How to Be*, and *Know How to Become*. These broad categories yield two columns of competencies: *Pedagogical* and *Human Relations*. Such a packaging owes much to Freidson (2001). But it also signals that this standards document is internally coherent, enhancing its implementability. The last two areas of *Know How to Be* and *Know How to Become* are a unique contribution to instructional supervision. They signal the need for a growth mindset on the part of the supervisor, not just the teacher. Consistency in values, flexibility and openness, learning more about human relations approaches are just as important as fixed ideas about skills and abilities.

Yet we must recognize that Bouchamma et al.'s framework does not articulate other informal but key knowledge central to any leadership role: *Knowing When* and *Knowing Where*. These domains encompass the largely tacit knowledge involved in gesticulation, gestural use, spatial sense, locational choice, and communicative competence entailed in professional-to-professional relationships. This knowledge is not typically captured in either pedagogical or instructional supervision—knowing when to ask a question and when to make a statement; where to hold meetings to subtly foster conceptual change among followers through one's positioning around a table; when gestures can communicate messages that reinforce or undermine the verbal messages exchanged; when body language and facial expression can more effectively convey intentions than verbal utterances; how to structure a meeting agenda and position oneself in a meeting space. A large part of inter-professional communication is not in written or spoken form, but instead involves the deliberate choice of situation and body language about which supervisors as leaders

must become knowledgeable. This standards framework does not deal with implicit and inchoate bodies of knowledge, thereby becoming un-implementable because it is too comprehensive in trying to cover all contexts.

There is another obvious area of knowledge that such professional standards statements do not typically embrace—statistical literacy. A meaningful discussion of results demands some sophistication in statistical competence. If the eventual goal is an improvement in outcomes, how many school principals understand the differences between a norm-referenced standard and a criterion-referenced standard, or deal with proportion in ratio for calculating class size in ways different than looking at proportion in fractions? Bouchamma and associates accurately note the importance of S(pecific) M(easurable) A(ttainable) R(elevant) T(ime bound) goals, but can school leaders and teacher followers mutually discuss results which invariably arrive in numeric form? Statistics are central to decision-making for school outcomes and school re-opening after a public health crisis. That linguistic and numeric requirement is perhaps a transcending issue for undergraduate and graduate education across an entire Faculty of Education, not one that can be addressed within a pedagogical supervision document.

The utility of any standards document will ultimately hinge on its adoption by school districts. Quebec legislators for the immediate future will be preoccupied with implementing the 2019 *Laicity Act* to address residual or emergent religious issues among its teaching force as a policy priority. And Bill 40 in February 2020 abolishing Quebec school boards will raise questions about the pedagogical services that will be available in new service centers and who the employer of school leaders/supervisors actually will be when supervising pedagogy. Improved pedagogical supervision as practised will not be high on the National Assembly priority list, nor on most provincial/state legislative agendas this year, given overriding public health issues. So we can forecast that Quebec supervisors and teachers will continue to operate under the current Ministry policy set in 2008, even if the employment status of educators will necessarily change. Eventually, the quality of any service or product hinges not what you put into it, but rather on what the end beneficiary gets out of it. Bouchamma et al.'s framework articulates key constituents of high-quality pedagogical supervision by explicitly identifying and detailing formal competencies. Nevertheless, we have yet to see whether these standards will be adopted by Canadian school boards and whether Francophone, Anglophone, and Indigenous students in Quebec or elsewhere will ultimately benefit from shared standards in curriculum, instruction, pedagogy, supervision, or leadership. Whether any educator has fulfilled Cubberley's goal still remains to be seen.

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