Standards for school leadership: gateway to a stronger profession?

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‘No-one ever taught you how to coach in those days, you had to find out for yourself.’

(Kevin Sheedy reflecting on his 27 years as the coach of Essendon Football Club, May 2007)
Weaknesses in the traditional PD system

1. The lack of a clear rationale for what leaders should get better at over the long term;

2. The lack of extrinsic incentives powerful enough to engage most leaders in on-going development; and

3. The low levels of personal ownership leaders feel for the professional preparation system.
Standards for School Leadership: Review of Literature

www.teachingaustralia.edu.au
Teaching Australia

Role:

1. To support and advance the quality of teaching and leadership
2. Strengthen and advance the standing of the profession
3. Develop as the national body for the profession

(Teaching Australia, Strategic Plan 2006-2009, p. 4)
Main phases of the project

- Review national and international developments in leadership and approaches to certification
- Development of an issues paper for consultation
- Analysis of responses from over 80 organisations and individuals
- National forum
A standards guided professional learning system
What are the possibilities of the teaching profession, not only developing, but operating a national system for the professional preparation and development of its school leaders?
Five examples of standards for school leadership

- **Western Australia**
  Performance Standards for School Leaders (in use by 1999)

- **England**

- **Netherlands**
  Professional Standard for Educational Leaders in Primary Education (2005)

- **Scotland**
  Standard for Headship (2005)

- **USA**
Questions guiding review

For example:

- Who developed the standards for school leadership and for what purposes?

- How were the standards developed, and on what foundation?

- How is professional learning organised to assist prospective or established leaders to attain the standards?

- Who provides certification for prospective or established school leaders who attain the standards?

- What forms of evidence are used to assess whether the standards have been attained?
Conceptualising school leadership

It was possible to read many sets of standards for school leadership and be none the wiser about the meaning of “leadership” that underpinned them.

Job descriptions of school leaders?

or

Descriptions of what effective school leaders know and do?
Two purposes for standards; two systems of evaluation

- Performance management by employer
- Professional preparation and certification
Professional Certification

- An *endorsement* that a professional body gives to a member who has attained a specified set of performance standards

It is:
- *available to all* members of the profession
- based on track record and *evidence of performance*; it is not an academic qualification
- *portable* - belongs to the person (not a job or position or classification specific to a school or employer)
- *voluntary*
Arguments for profession-wide school leadership standards

Stronger role for the profession in:
• setting goals for school leader preparation
• defining scope of leaders’ work
• relating research on leadership to practice
• operating the professional learning system
• providing certification to members who attain standards
School leadership standards

Two meanings:

- What we value about school leadership (standards as flag, rallying point, etc)

- What leaders should know and be able to do to promote quality learning opportunities (standards as measures)
Essential components of school leadership standards

Definitions of good leadership

Methods for presenting evidence of leadership

Methods for judging the evidence against the standards

What should leaders know and be able to do

Tasks or exercises that provide evidence of a leaders’ practice and thinking

What counts as meeting the standard?
An unfortunate distinction

Standards for assessment of teaching performance versus standards for professional development

• E.g. certification standards versus developmental standards
This is a false dichotomy:

Standards are useful for professional development *to the extent that* they can be used to assess performance –

- whether that assessment and feedback is provided by others, or,

- self-assessment and reflection about one’s performance
Standards structures:
What do effective school leaders know and do?

England, NCSL:
- Shaping the future
- Leading learning and teaching
- Managing the organisation
- Developing self and working with others
- Securing accountability
- Strengthening community

Leithwood et al. (2004)
- Setting directions
- Developing people
- Re-designing the organisation
A set standards needs a guiding conception of school leadership

For example:

The litmus test of all leadership is whether it mobilises people’s commitment to putting their energy into actions designed to improve things. It is individual commitment, but above all it is collective mobilisation. (Fullan, 2001)
Components of Fullan’s definition of leadership

- Having a clear moral purpose
- Relationship building
- Understanding and managing change
- Knowledge creation and sharing
- Ensuring coherence and alignment of structures
Good standards should

- be grounded in a clear guiding conception of leadership
- be valid; that is, represent what school leaders need to know and do to promote quality learning for students
- identify the unique features of what school leaders’ know and do
- be developmental – i.e. identify what school leaders should get better at over time.
- be assessable; that is, point to potentially observable leadership actions
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What counts as meeting the standard?
How can leadership standards be used to promote effective preparation and development?

Two pathways:

1. Develop a course, or courses (e.g. NCSL in England)

2. Develop a professional certification system for aspiring and established school leaders
Developmental assessment task: “Leading and managing change”

Example:

In this portfolio entry you will tell the story of how you initiated and conducted a project to improve teaching and learning in your school.
What do you need to do?

In this portfolio entry you will tell the story of how you initiated and conducted a project to improve teaching and learning in your school.

Readers will be looking for clear and convincing evidence that you have initiated and managed a school improvement project in a particular area of your school’s operations that led to improved professional practices and, thereby, improved learning opportunities and/or outcomes for students.
Links between school leadership standards and developmental assessment tasks

- Knowledge creation and sharing
- Ensuring coherence and alignment of structures
- Having a clear moral purpose
- Portfolio task: Leading and managing change
- Understanding and managing change
- Relationship building
Guidelines for your Portfolio Entry

SECTION 1. School context
SECTION 2. Identifying the need
SECTION 3: Planning for change
SECTION 4. Implementation of change strategies
SECTION 5. Reporting and reflecting on outcomes
Valid developmental and assessment tasks should:

- Engage leaders in authentic leadership initiatives
- Allow for the variety of forms sound leadership practice takes
- Provide ample opportunity for analysis and reflection
- Call for evidence of relevant research-based knowledge
Key features of good professional learning

Good learning = Long-term, personal quest

- ↑ attention to what leaders need to learn
- ↑ explicit links between knowing and doing
- ↑ use of practice as the site for learning
- ↑ use of professional school leadership standards and authentic assessments as a framework to guide professional learning
Essential components of school leadership standards

- Definitions of good leadership
- Methods for presenting evidence of leadership
- Methods for judging the evidence against the standards

What should leaders know and be able to do?

Tasks or exercises that provide evidence of a leaders’ practice and thinking

What counts as meeting the standard?
A standards guided professional learning system
Future directions for Teaching Australia?

As a Provider of courses and a course accreditation agency?

Or a Provider of a professional certification service to school systems?

Or?
Future directions?

- Which agency/ies will provide certification – for prospective and established school leaders who attain national professional standards?
- What forms of evidence will be used to assess whether those standards have been attained? Who will develop the methods of assessment?
- Who will assess whether school leaders have attained the standards and how will they be trained to use the standards fairly and reliably?
- Who will provide the professional learning infrastructure to support candidates for certification?
Building a school leadership profession

- If we want to develop and implement profession-wide standards for school leaders, the professional certification model is the most likely to involve the profession at every level and create the greatest sense of ownership.
A Standards Guided Professional Development System

Main components:

- *Standards* that articulate what teacher and school leaders should know and be able to do and provide direction for professional development over the long term

- *Career paths* that value teacher and school leadership and provide incentives to attain these standards

- An *infrastructure for professional learning* that enables teachers to gain the knowledge and skill embodied in the leadership standards

- A voluntary system of *professional certification* based on valid methods for assessing performance in leadership roles
Challenges for standards developers

- On what foundation should standards be based?
- What should school leaders be held accountable for?
- What should be common to a set of leadership standards, no matter what the context?
- How will roles and responsibilities specific to school systems be distinguished from profession-wide standards?
Willingness and effort by the learner

Student ability/prior achievement

Quality of teaching (Conditions for learning)

A family/social context supportive of teaching and learning

Opportunity to teach and learn (school context)