

Leadership Requirements for School Principals: Similarities and Differences Between Four Competency Standards

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Abstract

The school principal is responsible for transmitting mission, vision, and values in and out the school, with a stronger, clearer emphasis for the success and well-being of students. Competency standard is defined as a guide that names the behaviours expected for the directions to do an effective job in their schools. This article presents the results of a content analysis of four competency standards for school principals from four different locations; two Canadian provinces (Québec and Alberta), Australia, and the United States. Despite the particularities of each context, the four competency standards studied present 85% of similarities. Competencies absent from these standards include technology, cultural diversity, and balance between personal and professional life.

Keywords: competency standard, competency profile, professional standards, leadership profile, competencies of school principals, school leadership standards

Context and Research Issue: Competency Standards and Change

Since the emergence of the effective school paradigm in the 1980s, research has continued to report on school principal practices that make a difference on improving students' academic success (Barber & Mourshed, 2007; Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005; Hallinger, 2003; Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins, 2006; Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010; Pont, Nusche, & Moorman, 2008). In fact, the effective schools movement has generated interest regarding the competencies of school principals. In 1990, the National Policy Board in Educational Administration (NPBEA) published the results of its *National Commission for the Principalship* study establishing 21 school competencies or performance requirement. Composed of four domains (functional, interpersonal, contextual, and curricular), this study has long been considered the gold standard of reference governing the competencies of school principals (Barnabé & Toussaint, 2002). Since this study, many education systems have undergone major policy reforms to maintain quality education standards (Maroy, 2013; Pont et al., 2008; United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2006).

Efforts have thus centered on revisiting the roles and responsibilities pertaining to the function of school leader (Barber & Mourshed, 2007; Ingvarson, Anderson, Gronn, & Jackson, 2006; Pont et al., 2008) on several levels: pedagogical, administrative, political, and relational (Ingvarson et al., 2006; Mulford, 2003; Pont et al., 2008; UNESCO, 2006). These works have led stakeholders to rework and rethink the skills required to occupy the position of principal. In recent years, there has been a new trend of describing with the role of school principal in developing *competency standards* (UNESCO, 2006). They are viewed as a *reference* to encompass standards that normalize behaviours or anticipated outcomes (Boyer, Corriveau, & Pelletier, 2009; Brassard, 2009). Three functions are attributed to the school principal competency standard: (a) it may guide their training (Pont et al., 2008; UNESCO, 2006); (b) channel their professional growth (Mulford, 2003; Pont, 2013), or (c) serve to assess in-service performance, such as in Belgium and New Zealand (Pont, 2013; Pont et al., 2008).

Several reasons confirm the interest in questioning the skills expected of school principals through an

official document such as a competency standard, because today's schools are different from those of yesterday, all over the world. Society is changing and this evolution is inevitably reflected in the educational environment. Thus, the role, recruitment, and professional development of school principals must be taken into account (Mulford, 2003). In addition, we note that there is limited research on the replacement of current principals (Pont et al., 2008), hence the importance of caring for the next generation of principals to ensure that they are competent and trained for the many challenges ahead. However, to meet these challenges, it is important to have expectations updated and inventoried in a competency standard. Nevertheless, the latter "is not static but dynamic and evolving and, therefore, likely to change" (Legendre, 2007, p. 232). Therefore, considering that a competency standard must be evolving (Boyer et al., 2009), this one will be continually revised (Brassard, 2009) in order to guide the actors who use it towards the best educational development according to the societal context and new challenges that arise.

At the global level, it appears that several countries have begun a process of updating the expected competencies for their school principals in recent years. We are asking what are the common elements and the distinctions between standards of different locations? We are wondering if the skills identified in the literature as expected to favor the work of the school principal occupy an important place in the competency standards. In the present study, we analyzed four competency standards of four different locations (in the USA and Australia, and two provinces in Canada) to identify the similarities and differences between the competency requirements of school principals according to various contexts. Three of these competency standards (USA, Australia, and Alberta, Canada) were recently revised, while the fourth (Québec, Canada) dates back to 2008.

Conceptual Framework

This study was guided by three key concepts associated with research in the area of competencies and the competency standards of school leaders. First, we have competency (Le Boterf, 2008, 2011) followed by standards pertaining to the roles of principals (Pont, 2013) and finally, the principles governing competency standards.

Competency

In a given professional situation, competency (knowing how to act) must be considered as an action requiring the mobilisation of a knowledge ensemble (theoretical knowledge), as well as of knowing how (abilities) and knowing how to be (attitudes, qualities, emotions). It is associated too with the will (intentional practice) and the power (available resources) to act (Le Boterf, 2008, 2011) (see Figure 1). Competencies are the bridge between individual characteristics and the qualities necessary to successfully complete specific profession-related tasks (Levy-Leboyer, 1996).

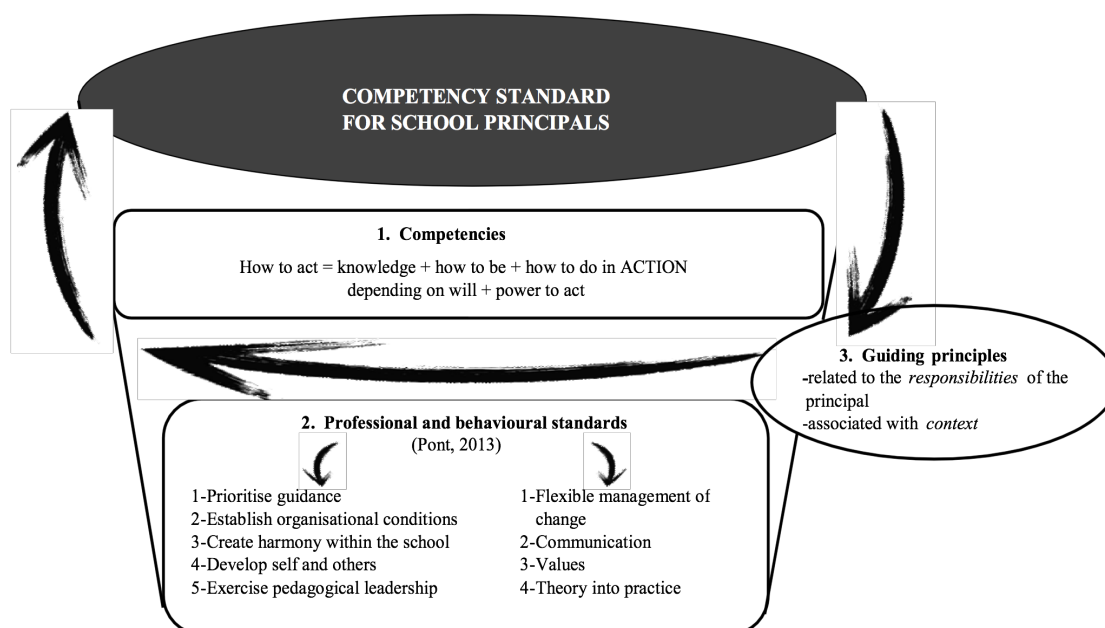


Figure 1. Schematic of the conceptual framework.

Standards Pertaining to School Principals

The useful competencies in a standard that guides this research were inspired by a report named *Learning Standards, Teaching Standards and Standards for School Principals: A Comparative Study*, by Pont (2013). It said:

A review of several meta-analysis and specific studies highlight – explicitly or implicitly – the existence of two types of competencies or key aspects of the principals’ management: those linked to tasks which are proper to the principal’s function, and others linked to attitudes and values that contribute to the exercise of this role. (Muñoz & Marfán, 2011). Regarding the contents of the standards proposed by the different educational systems, it is possible to identify several common elements, which in turn, are usually consistent with what is proposed in the literature. (p. 53)

According to Pont (2013), the necessary skills for school principals are divided into two main groups. They are identified as professional standards and behavioural standards, divided into five and four domains respectively (Figure 1) and subdivided into detailed components. Pont’s report is the most recent as regards the current competences requested for school principals. This framework (Pont, 2013) has already been used to analyze standards. Since then, several standards have been updated.

Principles Governing Competency Standards

Developing a competency standard requires that two key markers be considered: (a) those related to the *responsibilities* of the principals, and (b) those associated with *context* (Figure 1). The markers pertaining to the principal’s responsibilities determine the characteristics, tasks, and duties performed, which stem from general skills that transcend culture, in addition to the cultural specificities of the educational setting which must also be reflected in a competency standard (Pont et al., 2008). The markers associated with the context of the standard refer to the dynamic aspects of the standard, which call for continuous update and revision (Brassard, 2009) to transform, progress, and evolve accordingly (Boyer, Corriveau, & Pelletier, 2009; Legendre, 2007) and to effectively channel its users through the various emerging societal issues and demands.

Figure 1 outlines principles that guide a competency standard. To achieve this, the standard feeds on competencies (point 1, Figure 1), resulting from three factors (know-how, will-to-act, power-to-act), which can be defined as an ability, a useful skill for successful functioning or to perform a task (Le Boterf, 2010; Legendre, 2005). Overall, two types of competencies (point 2, Figure 1) are associated with the roles and responsibilities of school principal. First, there are the competencies associated with tasks that are specific to the function of school principals, and on the other hand, those related to attitudes and values that contribute to the exercise of the role of leader (Pont, 2013). Finally, standards present in a competency profile are not static (point 3, Figure 1); they must be regularly reviewed and adjusted to keep pace with the changing knowledge, expectations, and context that shape the work of school principal (NPBEA, 2015). The competency standard is therefore an evolving document (Boyer et al., 2009; Legendre, 2007).

Since the competency standard is the basis of the expected functions of school principals, it is important that the knowledge, skills, and attitudes recognized by this framework meet the quality imperatives in a context of change. In addition, the development of a competency standard associated with school principals requires a concomitance between general and contextual skills (Murakami, Torsen, & Pollock, 2014; Pont et al., 2008). This can be explained by the fact that the competency standard must be representative of where it is operated while keeping the main educational priorities that remain universal (point 3, Figure 1). The balance between universal skills, which are generally useful, and specific skills, which must necessarily take into account culture and context, must be respected in a competency standard (Lévy-Leboyer, 1996; Pont et al., 2008).

In short, to develop a competency standard and ensure its updating later, several concepts are inter-related to each other, as explained in Figure 1. The competency standard represents the basic tool for managing an educational institution and helps to give an idea of the main characteristics, tasks, and responsibilities to perform a job effectively (Pont et al., 2008).

Methodology

This research is of the exploratory type, carried out using documentary data. In this study, four competency standards for school principals in four different contexts were analyzed to identify the convergences and divergences associated with the requirements for the position of school principal. To reach our goal, we made a content analysis. Content analysis is a way of processing information and it is the most widely used method for studying qualitative observations (Krippendorff, 2004). This methodology is defined as the analysis of a message by counting and classifying the elements found in a coding list where categories have been determined in advance. The coding list summarizes the information contained in a message by categorizing it, which will facilitate comparisons. In short, it involves transcribing the qualitative data using an analysis grid and coding the information collected in order to process it.

Corpus

The analyzed corpus was composed of the competency standards of four different school systems from Alberta and Québec (Canada), Australia, and the United States (NPBEA):

1. School Leader Standard (Department of Education Alberta, 2016).
2. Australian Professional Standard for Principal and the Leadership Profiles (Australian Institute for teaching and school leadership [AITSL], 2015).
3. La formation à la gestion d'un établissement scolaire: les orientations et les compétences professionnelles [The training in the management of a school: the orientations and the professional skills] (Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport [MELS], 2008).
4. Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (NPBEA, 2015).

Coding List

The coding, of mixed type, was developed taking into account the skills required for a school principal. These skills were identified from the conceptual framework that was constructed with the literature listed by Pont (2013) on the competencies of school principals. Pont's work has been used previously to compare competency standards too. Pont distinguished professional standards which are the competencies relating to the duties of the function which are five in number and the behavioural standards related to attitudes and values contributing to the exercise of this role which are subdivided into four parts. Subse-

quently, Pont classified these nine categories into 42 descriptors. These 42 descriptors are the basis of the coding list that we retained. Some items from Pont's list have been grouped together (see Table 1 and 2) to obtain 20 recording units to perform this content analysis (see Table 3).

Table 1

Coding List of Recording Units Based on the Required Professional Standards Leadership Competencies of School Principals (Pont, 2013)

PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS (Pont, 2013)	Coding list of recording units based on the re- quired leadership competencies of school prin- cipals (Pont, 2013)
1) Prioritize guidance	
Organize the school's mission/educational project to focus on improvement	Mission and vision (academic excellence)
Align the individual interests with those of the mission	Improvement, innovation
Structure the educational project around the characteristics of the environment and the community	Decisions and responsibilities
Relay the mission by achieving concrete objectives	Mission and vision (academic excellence)
Promote excellence	Mission and vision (academic excellence)
2) Establish organizational conditions	
Take the time to support teaching	Supervision (teacher support)
Organize resources and institutions according to the mission	Material and financial resources
Manage my workload to balance my personal and professional life	Balance between personal/professional life (self and others)
Connect the school to the environment	Community, parents, partnership
Collaborate with the families in the education process and the school culture	Balance between personal/professional life (self and others)
Favour a culture that focuses on achievement	Laws and policies
Favour a culture that focuses on collaboration	Material and financial resources
Use technologies and management systems to lead the school organization	Technology (ICT)
Ensure that the school meets the legal standards	Laws and policies
Respect the commitments to stakeholders	Decisions and responsibilities
Implement measures for effective communication	Communication

3) Develop self and others

Motivate the teachers intellectually and encourage professional development	Professional development (self and others)
Guide human resource management according to well-defined quality criteria	Collaboration, shared leadership, empowerment
Be attentive to each teacher	Professional development (self and others)
Recognise and celebrate individual and collective contributions and achievements	Human resource management (interpersonal relationships)
Examine my own practice and professional growth	Professional development (self and others)
Develop the leadership skills of others	Collaboration, shared leadership, empowerment

4) Exercise pedagogical management

Analyze information to make decisions aimed at improvement	Use of relevant data (results and research)
Possess pedagogical knowledge	Knowledge of pedagogy and programs
Manage program planning	Learning practices and strategies
Supervise the teachers	Supervision (teacher support)
Oversee learning and the proper use of data	Use of relevant data (results and research)
Take appropriate actions to improve the curriculum	Decisions and responsibilities
Promote the use of effective education practices and technologies	Technology (ICT)

5) Create harmony within the school

Manage conflict resolution	Communication
Facilitate a climate of safety and well-being to enhance learning	Needs of the students
Ensure that the standards are met	Organizational climate
Address the special needs of the students and the community	Needs of the students

Table 2

Coding List of Recording Units Based on the Required Behavioural Standards Leadership Competencies of School Principals (Pont, 2013)

BEHAVIOURAL STANDARDS (Pont, 2013)	Coding list of recording units based on the required leadership competencies of school principals (Pont, 2013)
1) Flexible management of change	
Adapt my leadership to the needs of the school and to environmental changes	Adaptation to change and feedback
Choose effective solutions based on an understanding of change processes	Adaptation to change and feedback
Address complex situations	Adaptation to change and feedback
2) Communication	
Communicate clearly and actively listen to others	Communication
3) Values	
Demonstrate organizational values	Mission and vision (academic excellence)
Promote the values of democracy, fairness, respect, and diversity	Cultural diversity (inclusion)
Protect the privacy of the students and their families	Decisions and responsibilities
Encourage interpersonal relationships in the spirit of respect and acceptance	Cultural diversity (inclusion)
4) Theory linked to practice	
Incorporate research results in my leadership practices	Use of relevant data (results and research)

In short, 20 recording units based on Pont's (2013) work were chosen to do this content analysis. We resume them in the following table (Table 3).

Table 3

Coding List Used for the Content Analysis

Recording Units
1. Improvement, innovation
2. Decisions and responsibilities
3. Mission and vision (academic excellence)
4. Community, parents, partnership
5. Balance between personal/professional life (self and others)
6. Laws and policies
7. Material and financial resources
8. Technology (ICT)
9. Collaboration, shared leadership, empowerment

10. Professional development (self and others)
 11. Human resource management (interpersonal relationships)
 12. Knowledge of pedagogy and programs
 13. Learning practices and strategies
 14. Supervision (teacher support)
 15. Needs of the students
 16. Organizational climate
 17. Adaptation to change and feedback
 18. Communication
 19. Cultural diversity (inclusion)
 20. Use of relevant data (results and research)
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Analysis

To analyze these four documents, we examined the content, line by line and we categorized the qualitative data in the appropriate place in the coding list based from Pont's (2013) work (Tables 1, 2, and 3). After separating all the information collected in the four different competency standards, we were able to analyze the results (Krippendorff, 2004) to determine the presence or the absence of each required competencies of school principals (Pont, 2013). All the skills of the four standards analyzed could be placed in the list of descriptors of Pont. The corpus was covered in its entirety and each unit of information was associated with a single category of recording unit in the coding list. Two other coders did the same work with the corpus and the coding list, thus allowing an intersubjective agreement of the distribution of the units of registration of the elements of the corpus.

Results

Using the coding list, we marked each competency present in the four competency standards under study (Table 4). Two of the four standards analyzed present all competencies, namely, those of Australia and the USA (NPBEA), while Alberta shows 19 and Québec 18 out of the 20 competencies. In short, 17 competencies figure in all four reference standards, while three are absent among the four competency standards.

Three Absent Competencies

Cultural diversity is absent from the Québec standard and present in those of Alberta, Australia, and the USA (NPBEA). *Balance between personal/professional life* is absent from the Alberta standard and present in the Australia, Québec, and USA (NPBEA) standards. Finally, *Technology* is absent from the Québec standard but present in the other standards (Alberta, Australia, and the USA (NPBEA)). In the following sections, we delve further into these three absent competencies (Table 4).

Cultural diversity. The competency Cultural diversity is present in three competency profiles (Alberta, Australia, and the USA (NPBEA) and absent in the Québec standard (Table 4). The Alberta standard promotes a safe environment that nurtures inclusive learning for all: "fostering an inclusive learning environment in which diversity is embraced, a sense of belonging is emphasized, and all students and staff feel welcome, safe, cared for, and respected" (Department of Education Alberta, 2016, p. 5). In the American standard (NPBEA, 2015), diversity is defined as encompassing several situations: "confront and alter institutional biases of student marginalization, deficit-based schooling, and low expectations associated with race, class, culture and language, gender and sexual orientation, and disability or special status" (NPBEA, 2015, p. 11).

Table 4

Presence or Absence of the Competencies in Each Standard (Alberta, Australia, Québec, USA)

Professional and behavioural standards	Alberta (2016)	Australia (2015)	Québec (2008)	USA (NPBEA) (2015)
1. Improvement, innovation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2. Decisions and responsibilities	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
3. Mission and vision (academic excellence)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
4. Community, parents, partnerships	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
5. Balanced personal/professional life (self and others)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
6. Laws and policies	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
7. Material and financial resources	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
8. Technology (ICT)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
9. Collaboration, shared leadership, empowerment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
10. Professional development (self and others)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
11. Human resource management (interpersonal relationships)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
12. Knowledge of pedagogy/programmes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
13. Learning practices and strategies	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
14. Supervision (teacher support)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
15. Needs of the students	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
16. Organizational climate	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
17. Adaptation to change and feedback	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
18. Communication	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
19. Cultural diversity (inclusion)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
20. Use of data (results and research)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

For its part, the Australian competency standard recognizes the multicultural aspects of the Australia's people: "Principals embrace inclusion and help build a culture of high expectations that takes account of the richness and diversity of the wider school community and the education systems and sectors" (AITSL, 2015, p.19). Australia added diversity in their competency profile in these terms too: "They draw on best practice nationally and internationally to embed a culture of inclusion and high expectations for all and take steps to tackle the effects of disadvantage on learning" (AITSL, 2015, p. 19).

Balance between personal and professional life. The competency Balance between personal/professional life is absent from Alberta's standard (Table 4) but present in the three other competency profiles. In the Québec standard, it is expressed as follows: "en recherchant et en maintenant l'équilibre entre sa vie personnelle et sa vie professionnelle [by looking for and by maintaining the balance between its personal life and its professional life]" (MELS, 2008, p. 41). The Australian standard elaborates further by emphasizing the importance of health, both of self and of others: "they model the importance of health and well-being, watch for signs of stress in self and others and take action to address it" (AITSL, 2015, p. 16). In the USA standard, methods are proposed to support this balance, such as reflection and relevant literature: "tend to their own learning and effectiveness through reflection, study, and improvement, maintaining a healthy work-life balance" (NPBEA, 2015, p. 14).

Technology. The presence of this competency was noted in three of the four standards analyzed. The Québec standard makes no mention of this competency. The purpose of technology is to serve teaching and learning: "promote the effective use of technology in the service of teaching and learning" (NPBEA, 2015, p. 12). Its usage is thus encouraged: "Facilitating technology use to support learning for all students" (Department of Education Alberta, 2016, p. 5). In addition to implementation and support, technology must be fully optimized at every level: "They lead and implement the appropriate use of new technologies in all aspects of the school's development" (AITSL, 2015, p. 17).

Seventeen Competencies Present

Our analysis reveals that 17 competencies are common to the four standards on the 20 expected (Table 4). It means that 85% of the competency are important to develop by the school principal, despite the context. However, a competency standard is also particular to the context. We saw that although many of the themes were similar in the four standards, the formulations were different from one place to another.

Particularities of Each Standard

Several particularities are evidenced from the analysis of the four competency standards. Particularities are elements that stand out only in a standard but not on the others. For example, the Alberta competency standard mentions empathy: "demonstrating empathy and a concern for others" (Department of Education Alberta, 2016, p. 4).

Two competencies are specific to Alberta and Australia, in reference to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit populations:

establishing relationships based on mutual trust with First Nations, Métis and Inuit parents/guardians, Elders/knowledge keepers, local leaders and community members by: inviting Elders/knowledge keepers and cultural advisors into the school community; and respecting and modeling First Nations, Métis and Inuit cultural protocols. (Department of Education, Alberta, 2016, p. 4)

For its part, the Australian standard is based on an inclusive curriculum and a school culture that respects Aboriginal cultures and the cultures and languages of many other ethnocultural communities: "they lead an inclusive curriculum and school culture that promotes understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages and other culturally and linguistically diverse communities" (AITSL, 2015, p. 19).

The Québec standard (MELS, 2008) highlights the importance of participating in research-action initiatives and collaborative research activities:

en favorisant la présence de l'université dans son établissement non seulement en accueillant des stagiaires, mais aussi en encourageant la tenue de recherches-action ou de recherches collaboratives avec le personnel enseignant, le personnel des services éducatifs complémentaires et de soutien et les stagiaires [by favoring the presence of the university in its establishment

not only by welcoming trainees, but also by encouraging the holding of research-action or collaborative research with the teachers, the staff of the complementary educational services and the trainees] (MELS, 2008, p. 35).

Other types of university-directed research may also be undertaken, provided there is emphasis on improving student achievement: “en participant à des démarches de recherche pouvant alimenter et faire progresser la réussite des élèves [by participating in research which can feed and make the success of the students progress]” (MELS, 2008, p. 39).

Discussion

In the present study, four sets of competency standards for school principals in different contexts were compared to identify those competencies deemed necessary to hold the position of school leader in different contexts. The content analysis retained 17 competencies present in each of the four sets of standards, based on the coding list from the professional and behavioural leadership requirements for school principals (Pont, 2013).

Three Absent Competencies

Three competencies absent from one of the standards are: Cultural diversity, Balance between personal/professional life, and Technology (Table 4). Cultural diversity and Technology are not in the oldest standard (Québec) realized in 2008. Balance between personal/professional life is absent from the Alberta standard.

Cultural diversity. In Québec, this competency is absent from the principals’ competency standard, but immigration has contributed for over 40 years to increasing this province’s active population (Toussaint, 2010). In 2011-2012, for example, 23.7% of students in the three levels of its compulsory education system were immigrants (MELS, 2014). Furthermore, several studies on Québec teachers and their principals have revealed that these educators lack the proper training to work in contexts of ethnocultural diversity (Bouchamma, 2015; Bouchamma & Tardif, 2011; Steinbach, 2012; Toussaint, 2010). Duchesne (2011) argues that the school principal has a role in inclusive education. In light of these facts, the competencies of school leaders associated with intercultural considerations should be prioritized to support inclusion and the achievement for all students. Intercultural education contributes to a better understanding of different cultures and facilitates communication with people from different cultures (Steinbach, 2012).

Training in intercultural relations for school principals is becoming more and more obvious in order to develop the necessary skills for a better integration of students with an immigrant background into Quebec schools. The best way to prioritize the development of intercultural competencies of the school principal is to include it in their competency standard. The competency standard conveys what is desirable or even intended to evolve in the profession (Legendre, 2007). So, updating the competency standard (MELS, 2008) is becoming more than necessary in order to integrate intercultural competence into the professional skills to be developed, as other countries have done with this document.

Thus, since it is a dynamic document, the repository must be subject to continual revisions (Brassard, 2009) in order to transform it, make it progress and evolve. It must be remembered that the objective of a competency standard is to give precise benchmarks in a given time (Gerbé, Raynauld, & Téta Nokam, 2012). The challenge of cultural diversity in Quebec is becoming increasingly urgent to consider. It is the opportune time to revise the official document associated with the development of the skills of school principals in order to integrate the theme of diversity in all its forms in the competency standard. Initial formation is obligatory to be a school principal in Quebec since 2000. We believe that if the development of intercultural competence is added to the Quebec competency standard, universities will add it to their initial training, which could be beneficial for the academic success of students from immigration.

The proportion of Canada’s foreign-born population is just behind Australia. It represented 26.8% of total population in 2010 (Statistiques Canada, 2016). Also, like other Canadian provinces, including Alberta, it is time for Quebec to include diversity in its competency standard especially because Montreal is one of the three Canadian cities currently hosting the most people of immigrant background (Statistiques Canada, 2016).

Balance between personal and professional life. This competency refers to maintaining a balanced and healthy life, where school principals take the necessary steps to reduce the level of stress associated

with their demanding work schedule (Fortin, 2006). The Australian, Québec, and American standards include this competency, while the Albertan standard does not.

The task of the school principal is more and more complex and demanding physically, emotionally, and intellectually and often has repercussions on the private life as Corriveau (2004) explains. In a context where school principals must take on added responsibilities in the course of their career (Mulford, 2003; Pont et al., 2008; UNESCO, 2006) and that the encroachment of their job on their private life is a reality (Bouchamma, 2013; Pelletier, 2008), maintaining a balance between professional and personal life is crucial. The responsibilities of school leaders appear to be considered as too demanding, stressful, solitary, and lacking support, which tends to discourage potential candidates (Mulford, 2003). This demonstrates the importance of ensuring that managers in training or positions acquire the skills needed to maintain a balance between their personal environment and their work environments. The burden of the task contributes to the shortage of school principals, hence the importance of making it more aware of maintaining a balance between personal and professional life (Corriveau, 2004). This awareness is useful to include in the competency standard, so that future school principals will be prepared accordingly.

Technology. The competency Technology is absent from the Québec reference standard (MELS, 2008), which may appear to be a paradox considering the technological advances occurring in society that inevitably impact the realm of education (Murakami et al., 2014). Many authors (Attenoukon, Karsenti, & Gervais, 2013; Coen, 2011; Karsenti & Collin, 2013; Karsenti, Raby, & Villeneuve, 2008) have argued that the integration of ICTs in the classroom not only alters learning activities but also increases the level of motivation of the students, which ultimately improves their academic outcomes, considered as the prime objective of all four competency standards analyzed here. The absence of this competency may be attributed to the date of publication of this standard, which dates back almost 10 years, hence the need for revision, an obligatory practice to competency profiles in education (Boyer et al., 2009; Legendre, 2007) to address new issues.

Particularities in Each Standard

Our analysis of the four competency standards revealed certain specificities. Also, each of the standards introduced one or more elements that we do not find in the other analyzed documents. This shows that specificities of the culture of each of the environments must also be reflected in a standard (Pont et al., 2008).

Professional competencies and cross-disciplinary skills. The Québec standard is in agreement regarding the distinction between professional competencies and cross-disciplinary skills (MELS, 2008), referred to as professional and behavioural standards by Pont (2013). The fact of not juxtaposing overarching skills with professional ones provides the Québec standard with a highly judicious configuration which shows the cross-disciplinary aspect transcending each professional competency (MELS, 2008, p. 32). This presentation is unique among the four standards analyzed in the present study because usually the skills and know-how are found in a standard without distinction. We believed that it is a good idea to present the behavioural competencies like the Québec standard did because these skills are present in many professional competencies.

Empathy. The Alberta standard is the only one to mention empathy in one its descriptors. It seems difficult to include this particular attitude in other behaviours observed in the standards. It is true that all the references have emphasized the importance that management must bear in the climate of its environment, but empathy is an attitude that represents even more than harmonious relations. That's why we say that only the Alberta standard makes it stand out. In addition, empathy seems to be a term more and more used actually in human resources. This ability to understand the emotions of others and use this understanding to develop better relationships with them (Schermerhorn, Osborn, Uhl-Bien, Hunt, & de Billy, 2014) is undoubtedly an asset that every school principal should add to their leadership skillset. Human relations are an integral part of any principal's job, as the latter must constantly improve communication to effectively perform their duties while fostering a harmonious environment. In this sense, empathy is a relevant, interesting, and highly specific competency directly related to communication.

Acknowledgement of the First Nations. The significant contribution of the First Nations in the history and culture of Alberta and Australia is acknowledged in both of these competency standards. The Aboriginal and Torres in the Australian standard and the First Nations in the Alberta standard have a place of choice. Some Canadian provinces are more advanced than others, as is demonstrated in Alberta's com-

petency standard but the First Nations continue to fight for the fair and rightful inclusion of Native history in the curricula across Canada (Boisvert, 2017).

Participation in university-level research. The Québec competency standard is the only one to suggest that schools benefit from research results and collaborate with universities to undertake research-action initiatives. The relevance of research-action in education is recognised in several works in this field (Mertler, 2017; Van der Maren, 2014) and in the Québec context, research-action projects and research-action-training programs are financially supported, as are collaborations between universities and practice environments.

In short, these isolated initiatives demonstrate that each competency standard has its own inherent particularities. Similar to Wildy, Loudon, and Robertson (2000), we found that each education system uses a similar approach in terms of the standards imposed on their school leaders while taking into account their own specific context. However, we must remember the dynamic nature of competency standards (Brassard, 2009) which call for continuous revision and adjustment (Boyer et al., 2009; Legendre, 2007). Accordingly, three of the four analyzed standards have recently been updated: Alberta (Department of Education, Alberta, 2016), Australia (AITSL, 2015), and the USA (NPBEA, 2015).

Conclusion

Our analysis of four official competency standards pertaining to the professional and behavioural leadership requirements for school principals in Alberta, Québec, Australia, and the United States reveals similarities and differences, depending on each context. Despite the particularities of each of these school systems, 85% of the common competencies are present in the four analyzed standards. In fact, regardless of context, a nucleus of universal professional and behavioural norms exists relative to the duties and responsibilities of school leaders. These competency standards also vary in their configuration from one context to another. For example, the Québec standard does not present the behavioural requirements in a parallel section but rather across-disciplinary skills that accompany each of the professional competencies.

Moreover, absences were noted in certain standards which should provide food for thought as to the importance of ensuring that competency standards be regularly revised to remain abreast of current educational issues and concerns. We believe that these absent skills from some standards should be integrated because they are topical. Given that two of the missing skills are found in a standard of more than 10 years (Québec, 2008), it suggests that the updating of such a document must remain a priority so that school principals develop useful skills for students' academic success. Considering that the standard is used for the formation of future directions, it seems to us even more necessary to revise such a document in order to adapt it to the changing needs in the educational environment. For example, for Quebec, it seems obvious that cultural diversity and technology are topical issues; however, the standard still has not taken these things into account, as other places have done.

Finally, we are reminded that competency standards are designed to guide the initial training, professional development, and assessment of school principals. If we want to have school principals to ensure students' academic success, the development of useful skills for this work remains a primary concern.

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