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Toward Standards for Instructional Supervision: A Genealogy of Standards

Henry St. Maurice and Perry Cook

Meet the Authors

Henry St. Maurice

Henry St. Maurice is Director of Field Experiences and Professor at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. He has also taught in elementary, secondary and rehabilitation programs. His research interests include rhetorical, philosophical, and historical studies of instructional supervision.

Perry Cook

Perry A. Cook, Professor of Science and Adolescent Education, earned his Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin—Madison in 1992. After working two years as an assistant professor of science education at the University of North Dakota he came to the University of Wisconsin—Stevens Point, his undergraduate alma mater. His teaching career began in Redlands, California where he taught science and served as science department chairperson for four years at Arrowhead Christian Academy. Dr. Cook's research interests include the use of virtual supervision for science student teachers, interdisciplinary approaches to pre-service elementary methods preparation and the process of teacher socialization.

In this chapter, we ask where standards come from and whether their provenance offers a means of analyzing prospects for the development and promulgation of new standards in the field of instructional supervision. Our method of inquiry is genealogy, as described by Foucault (1980):

Let us give the term “genealogy” to the union of erudite knowledge and local memories, which allows us to establish a historical knowledge of struggles and to make use of this knowledge tactically today. (p. 83)

Briefly, a genealogical method combines analyses of scholarly texts with analyses of local and tacit knowledge to show contradictions and discontinuities, and points of struggle over how official discourses and practices are constituted, and by whom.

The aim of this method is to show how words and ideas have changed and how they can change. As Fendler (1999) said, “The purpose of genealogical critique is to render events and circumstances historically contingent, and therefore changeable” (p. 185). This is not to imply there are no shared meanings of terms or to lessen the value of social constructions. By this method we analyze standards as constructions, which institutionalize what people say and do. This sets limits and possibilities for what is, is not, and will be appropriate discourse and practice.

In the following sections, we trace a genealogy of standards by specifying etymological, historical, and conceptual aspects of instructional supervision in the words and conventions that have been built and inhabited by educators since mass public schooling began in Europe and North America. This expounded, contextual understanding of standards may serve as a basis for instructional supervision reform.

Etymology

Etymologies of the word *standard* indicate a transition from military to civilian and scientific denotations of the word, maintaining strong moral overtones (*The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English* 1990). *Whether in a battle, a counting house, a factory, or a laboratory, a standard is more than a neutral*

point of reference, it is a paragon of rectitude. Williams (1985) captured these moral connotations in his definition:

Instead of referring back to a source of authority, or taking a current measurable state, a standard is set, projected, from ideas about conditions which we have not yet realized but which we think should be realized. There is an active social history in the development of this phrase. (p. 299)

Another historically social understanding of the word standard is rooted in finance and, by analogy, medicine. The often-cited term *gold standard* represents a shared meaning that implies not only inherent value but also a projection of hierarchy (Michaels, 1986). Literally, a gold standard transubstantiates a lesser element (e.g., paper) into a greater one. In practice, paper representations were exchangeable for gold. In professional fields like law and medicine, an analogous gold standard is assigned to practices generally agreed as best, but nonetheless open to challenge and change, much as monetary standards have changed at regular intervals. The image of immutability and the presence of mutation seem to inhere in every standard.

Historical Background

Processes of making and changing standards were crucial in the development of Western science and the expansion of European nations and empires (Crosby, 1997; Lindberg, 1992). For our genealogy, we will summarize some of the social history of standards since the mid-19th century. That is when a gradual process of weights and measures standardization, as indicated in the above etymologies, rapidly underwent major changes in Europe and North America over a short period of time. Railways, ship lines, and telegraph networks coalesced into something new in human affairs: a network of social, political, and economic systems larger than any single empire. Within a single decade, from 1840 to 1850, a patchwork of local markets merged into a global web tending to form monopolies (Hobsbawm, 1975). As information, goods, and services sped around the globe at unprecedented speeds, uniform standards emerged for quantities such as measurement (Alder, 2002), finance (Michaels, 1986), production (Hughes, 1990), time (Landes, 2000), and quality.

Environmental historian William Cronon (1991) described the origins of quality grading in Chicago in the 1850s: as elevators commingled separate crops, farmers were given receipts showing quantity in pounds and quality on a three-part scale. These receipts became commodities to be traded. Soon, derivative instruments such as futures contracts were traded as well. In a world of mass marketing and standardization, anything that could be mea-

sured was graded and traded. If a wagonload of wheat could be assigned a grade, so could a can of milk or a portfolio of stocks and bonds.

The first standards for quantities established simple benchmarks but science and industry soon required more complex systems. Most notably, the synchronization of clocks raised many questions. For example, how could noon as measured by the sun directly overhead be replaced by standardized numbers? And, should standards be set requiring timepieces to run together in zones or over the whole globe? If so, how could a signal that takes time to travel ever accomplish perfect synchronization? Before Einstein's special theory of relativity established the speed of light as a constant, scientists searched for a physical invariant. One of the foremost, Pierre Poincaré of France, proposed that geometric laws offered the best model of standardization but with an inherent contradiction: nature is rarely straight or round. As Galison (2003) summarized,

In differential equations or in the physical systems they represented, there were always many ways of choosing variables—to describe, for instance, the flow lines of water down a stream. What was significant were the underlying relations that remained unchanged even after such changes in description: the vortices in a flow of water, the knots, saddle points, or spiral endpoints of geometrical lines. Similarly, the length of a line remains fixed when we rotate coordinates. These two aspects of Poincaré's work—the variable and the fixed—emerged together and can only be understood together. He says, in different ways over many years: Manipulate the flexible aspects of knowledge as tools; choose the form that makes the problem at hand simple. Then seize those relations that stand fast despite the choices made. Those fixed relations stand for knowledge that endures. Together the variant and invariant make scientific progress possible. (p. 79)

Standards make certain kinds of science possible, in short, by projecting invariance onto variance.

In the United States, philosophers of science also struggled with antinomies between precision and indeterminacy. Pragmatists such as Chauncey Wright, Charles Peirce, and William James stated that natural phenomena like the weather could be accurately measured but not perfectly predicted. Peirce, Marquand, Franklin, Mitchell, and Gilman (1883) asked whether laws of nature were themselves subject to laws. As Menand (2001) summarized, "Does the principle that everything can be explained have an explanation? Or...does the law of causality (which is another name for the principle that everything can be explained) have a cause?" (p. 275). Philosophers of quantitative science used their inquiries to install their discourses

and practices at the top of hierarchies in academia, industry, and the military. Further down the ladders, in qualitative experience, these questions were addressed in everyday routines. Weather forecasts that people saw in their newspapers might be wrong as they walked out their doors, and clocks they saw in their train stations might vary from the ones they carried on their persons, but these standards had as much precision as needed; no more and no less.

The biological sciences give us an example of the development of genetic standards derived from research and from which practices emanate. The Office of Health and Environmental Research in the U.S. Department of Energy developed a plan to map the entire human genome (National Institutes of Health, 1990), now known as the Human Genome Project (HGP). This large-scale process led to standardized medical research and development that not only promised breakthroughs in health care but also had potential for bioethical, legal, and social malfeasance, as Paabo (2001) discussed:

From a medical standpoint, improved predictive capabilities provided by the identification of disease-associated alleles harbor great potential benefits but also problems. The benefits will come from using individualized risk assessment to modify the environmental and behavioral components of common diseases...[but] increased medical predictive power obviously represents a societal challenge in terms of medical insurance, especially in countries that, unlike most Western European countries, are not blessed with health insurance systems that share risks in an equitable fashion among the whole population. (p. 1220)

Standardization does not diminish the consequences of science and technology and may instead intensify them.

The processes by which scientists and policy makers determine whether a standard was sufficient came to be known as conventions, which, as Galison (2003) says, are

likened to terms in language [e.g., French or German] that can be freely chosen and also to the freedom the mathematician or physicist has to choose a coordinate system [e.g., Euclidean or non-Euclidean] as well as a choice between the arbitrary system of meters and kilograms and the arbitrary system of feet and pounds. (p. 82)

As linguistic devices, standards and conventions harbor ambiguities, despite the rhetoric of precision and accuracy in which they are couched. In short, standards are formed by consensus among an elite, who decide which sets of quantities and qualities are most suited to their uses while tacitly agreeing that no one set of standards can be definitive (e.g., American National Stan-

dards Institute [ANSI], 2004; International Standards Organization [ISO], 2004; National Institute of Standards and Technology [NIST], 2004).

In the alchemy of modernity, standards, despite their artifice and ambiguity, become dominant facts of life for masses who toil by the hour and whose labors are measured, graded, bought, and sold. No one has said it better than Marx and Engels (1848/1998): “All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real condition of life and his relations with his kind” (p. 5). The solid fact of the sun in the sky gave way to the ephemera of standard time. The solid fact of a bag of grain was first commodified as a contract, then abstracted into a number on a tote board. By the beginning of the 20th century, standards and conventions, despite their limitations as ambiguous projections, became dominant in human life.

Standards for Supervision

There is an active social history of standardization in the field of instructional supervision. Mass public schooling grew in industrially developed nation-states during the 19th century with the explicit purpose of fostering more and better industrial workers and national citizens (Green, 1990). From the beginning, mass public schooling in the United States was instrumental in industrial development. To run schools that Mann (1849) said were the “the balance-wheel of the social machinery” (p. 59), managers were said to occupy a “classless profession” (Mattingly, 1975; Tyack & Hansot, 1982). The first standards for instructional supervisors were simple: either a school had a building with desks, books, and a teacher or it did not (Blumberg, 1985). As supervision became professionalized (Glanz, 1998), it embodied the “cult of efficiency” in industrialized nation-states (Callahan, 1964; Hughes, 1990; Tichi, 1987). There are hosts of examples of the primacy of social efficiency in the United States during two centuries of schooling (Cremin, 1988; Glass, Mason, Eaton, Parker, & Carver, 2004; Kaestle & Foner, 1983; Kliebard, 1986). A concise statement of standards based on efficiency is found in the *Fourth Yearbook of the Department of Supervisors and Directors of Instruction* of the (U.S.) National Education Association (Woody et al., 1931):

Supervision may be evaluated in light of any one or any combination of these three considerations:

1. *Effect*. The degree to which its effect on persons (including pupils, parents, teachers, and the community as a whole) and on educational methods and materials approximates the results desired

2. *Activities*. The degree to which its activities conform to accepted standards for supervisory activities
3. *Supervisor's characteristics*. The degree to which the characteristics of the person doing the supervision conforms to the standards for such traits (p. 15).

The standards invoked in this passage embody "autocratic methods and procedures" (Glanz, 1998, p. 49) derived from religious and military hierarchies, alongside business and government bureaucracies. For generations, this has been familiar to all teachers. One example of these standards in school folklore is the "snoopervisor," described in the following poem by an anonymous author. It was first published in 1929 (quoted in Glanz, 1990):

*With keenly peering eyes and snooping nose,
From room to room the Snoopervisor goes.
He notes each slip, each fault with lofty frown,
And on his rating card he writes it down.
His duty done, when he has brought to light
The things that teachers do that are not right.
With cheering words and most infectious grin,
The peppy Whoopervisor breezes in.
"Let every boy and girl keep right with me!
"One, two three, four!
"That's fine! Miss Smith I see
These pupils all write well." This his plan
"Keep everybody happy if you can."
The Supervisor enters quietly.
"What do you need? How can I help today?
"John, let me show you. Mary, try this way."
He aims to help, encourage and suggest,
That teachers, pupils, all may do their best.*

Between the male and female figures in the poem are a host of tensions over "standard practices." Specifically, the supervisor's parameters of efficiency are said to occupy neutral space apart from race, class, gender, or politics. To teachers, however, the discourses of social efficiency clash with practices like minatory male supervisors peering through keyholes, seeking "weaknesses" in subjugated female teachers. The supervisor of the poem, left unstated but implied, is far from the norm. The first two caricatures not only

predominate in folklore, but in practice, as empirical studies have repeatedly shown (Glanz, 1998; Blass, Mason, Eaton, Parker & Carver, 2004; Tyack & Hansot, 1982).

As Menand (2001) pointed out, social efficiency movements thrive during times of political crisis: civil wars, wars of imperial conquest, the two World Wars, the Cold War, and economic depression. For instance, during the Great Depression of the 1930s, scientists and policy makers were challenged to develop and implement technologies to ameliorate social crises. In their turn, scholars of instructional supervision proposed more scientific analyses of teaching, even as teachers sought greater democratization through their professional organizations, which began to adopt aims and methods from labor unions (Glanz, 1998). One leading proponent of more rigorously quantifiable standards for supervisors, A. S. Barr (1931), declared that “supervisors must possess training in both the science of instructing pupils and the science of instructing teachers” (p. x). Such quests for certainty remain unresolved. At the same time, teachers and teacher educators proposed various other standards based on differing philosophical and political systems, including liberal humanism (Charters & Waples, 1929) and socialism (Counts, 1932). These struggles continued and expanded for decades. Edelfeldt and Rath (1999) listed 10 major standardization proposals put forth by teacher educators and supervisors in the United States since Barr’s declaration and concluded that most recommendations for reforming teacher education and supervision are often “totally ahistorical, with no authors wondering why the profession had ignored previous recommendations or adopted them without changing dramatically the practice of teachers or the status of teaching” (p. 27). Decades after Mann and his successors sought utopian solutions for schools, teachers and their supervisors have not come closer to a consensus over the aims and means of instructional improvement. No one has secured a “king’s standard” that, as Williams (1987) said, is a projection like the end of a rainbow.

Nevertheless, movements for standardization have not only persisted, but intensified. Following the publication of *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (Bell & United States National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) and a series of well-publicized national reports and summit meetings, a highly charged movement for “world-class standards” swept through schools in the United States (Riley and United States Department of Education, 1995). For example, the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA) promulgated national standards for instructional leadership (NPBEA, 2002), and one pertains to supervision: Instructional leaders are exhorted to “utilize a variety of supervisory models to improve teaching and learning (e.g., clinical, developmental, cognitive and

peer coaching, as well as applying observation and conferencing skills)" (p. 14).

Most recently, beginning in 1992, a set of six national standards has been developed for school leadership in the United States (Council of Chief State School Officers, 1996), versions of which have been adopted in various states (e.g., Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2004):

- ◆ The administrator leads by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared by the school community.
- ◆ The administrator manages by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to pupil learning and staff professional growth.
- ◆ The administrator ensures management of the organization, operations, finances, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.
- ◆ The administrator models collaboration with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.
- ◆ The administrator acts with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.
- ◆ The administrator understands, responds to, and interacts with the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context that affects schooling.

In a similar vein, standards for instructional supervision recently have been proposed (Allen, Fillion, Butters, Gordon, & Bentley, 2004), some based on the U.S. National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (Bernstein, 2004).

These recent standards and their ancestors, beginning with the pioneer educator's visions of stable social order, followed by the progressive reformer's quests for efficiency and scientific validity, and leading up to contemporary visions of democratization and empowerment, all share discourses and practices, which disperse power relations with multiple points of authority and therefore a myriad of points of contestation. When thousands of instructional leaders in schools and agencies implement different models of improvement for millions of teachers, a net of power relations is strung, without a center, but no less pervasive. Such relations enact what Foucault (1988) called "technologies of power, which determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination, an objectivizing of the subject" (p. 18). In short, the discourse of standards and the practices of instructional supervision remain in conflict. For example, under U.S. federal

rules implemented since 2001, instructional supervisors must now make educational decisions that are determined by the outcomes of standardized testing, not the processes of deliberation and communication indicated in the standards in the above list. As Glanz (2004) summarized, "Supervision within a standards-based environment resorts to mechanistic, bureaucratic means, aimed not at instructional improvement, but to implementing narrowly prescribed measures of performance" (p. 3). The technologies of standardization are once more bifurcated into palliative discourses from supervisors and proletarianized processes.

Conclusions

Our genealogical review and analysis of standards for instructional supervision offers five specific points:

1. Standards are discursive constructions for projecting invariance onto variance, usually in quantitative terms.
2. Standardization is a process of projecting invariance through the formation of conventions that are first adopted by elites and then enforced on masses.
3. All movements for standardization are contingent on circumstances and contexts; their rhetoric of continuity sustains a network of power relations.
4. Invariance inheres in standardization, despite whatever anyone says or does otherwise.
5. Movements for standards for instructional supervision have occurred in parallel with increased standardization of life and work for more than 15 decades of rapid industrialization.

In general, for more than a century, standardization of instructional supervision has dispensed rhetoric of continuity at best, and widened disconnections among discourses and practices at worst. Reviews of supervisor discourses and practices during those decades (Glanz, 2004; Glass et al., 2004), show gulfs and "cold wars" among educators, whether in the name of social efficiency, social transformation, or social mobilization (Blumberg, 1980). In particular, standardization has not fostered developmental approaches to instructional supervision, as described by Glickman, Gordon, and Ross-Gordon (2004): "Goodness, purpose and hope for all our students [in a] purposeful school dedicated to teaching and learning" (p.476).

In conclusion, our brief genealogy of explicit and implicit discourses and practices indicates that schools are institutions in which quantities such as time, mass, and distance may be standardized, but qualities such as learning, engagement, and improvement are not yet and probably will not be stan-

standardized. Such processes depend on concentrated control over the discourses and practices by an elite, through its conventions. But democratic schools depend on dispersed control over diverse discourses and practices. This antinomy would seem to make impossible standards for supervision. The teachers, leaders, students, and communities that inhabit schools require more complicated tools for instructional leadership toward educational equality and excellence.

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