

Superintendent Leadership Quality Standard

Quality superintendent leadership occurs when the superintendent's ongoing analysis of the context, and the superintendent's decisions about what leadership knowledge and abilities to apply, result in quality school leadership, quality teaching and optimum learning for all students in the school authority. *Alberta Education Ministerial Order #002/2020*

- Building Effective Relationships
- Modeling Commitment to Professional Learning
- Visionary Leadership
- Leading Learning
- Ensuring First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education for All Students
- School Authority Operations and Resources
- Supporting Effective Governance



Leadership Quality Standard

Quality leadership occurs when the leader's ongoing analysis of the context, and decisions about what leadership knowledge and abilities to apply, result in quality teaching and optimum learning for all school students.

Alberta Education Ministerial Order #002/2020

- Fostering Effective Relationships
- Modeling Commitment to Professional Learning
- Embodying Visionary Leadership
- Leading a Learning Community
- Supporting the Application of Foundational Knowledge about First Nations, Métis and Inuit
- Providing Instructional Leadership
- Developing Leadership Capacity
- Managing School Operations and Resources
- Understanding and Responding to the Larger Societal Context

Alberta System Education Leadership

Leading us Forward Conversation Starters: Contextual Literacy

Whether you refer to them as Divisions, Districts or Regions, each school authority in Alberta is unique. The contexts are different, and the leadership required must fit the cultures, practices and traditions in each place. Marshall Goldsmith's book *What Got You Here Won't Get You There* (2007) talks about how leadership behaviours are shaped by, and, in turn, shape the context of organizations and the relationship with people. Goldsmith suggests that success at one level, or in one context, does not mean you will be successful in a new context.

Many of us will have experienced or seen how Goldsmith's title rings true. As we watch succession issues, we often see talented and capable school leaders who struggle to meet the same level of success at a new level. We see talented teachers who struggle as a principal. We also see talented leaders who are moved to the same level, even within one region, and who do not achieve the same level of success as they previously had enjoyed. This dissonance can lead to discouragement and low morale as people try to figure out what is different. As they all know, what is different is the context. Strong leaders need to be able to read context, to absorb new values, beliefs, norms of an organization, and to adapt their own leadership style to those new norms. How often have we heard "that's just the way we do it around here" without any real explanation of why?

Contextual literacy is about that ability to adapt and read the lay of the land. That adaptation takes time and patience. As you move into new positions, and new contexts, the language will change, the relationships between existing groups will be different, underlying assumptions and values may be different and you will have to learn to understand the structures and relationships that allow leadership to unfold. If you do not take the time to listen, ask questions and learn, you can fall victim to early leadership traps and pitfalls.

A framework for understanding contextual literacy can be informed by the world of coaching and Michael Bungay Stanier. His methodology is surrounded by patience and listening and can be summed up three ways, be lazy, be curious, and be often.

The "lazy" part is defined by his beliefs that when someone comes looking, your advice may not be nearly as good as you think it is. Bungay Stanier believes that, particularly for leaders, we are hard wired to give advice and to help out. We think we have solutions, when in fact, those solutions might not be helpful at that moment in that context. He talks of an "advice monster" that is rooted in our own desire to add value by offering solutions. His message is one of patience and finding time by not leaping to solutions and advice.

The “curious” part comes next and is about probing to learn more about the issue and the context. Through simple and patient questioning techniques you can ask people to simply “tell you more” about the issues and the challenges they face. How can we all, as leaders, come to learn more about the issues at hand, the relationships and supporting information behind an ask, and what other elements that you would need to consider before suggesting any direction? Curiosity is about patience and honouring the person(s) before you as you come to understand the issues at play.

Once you have considered the context, and if you do provide support, suggestions or advice after all things are brought to bear, then the final piece is to “be often.” Bungay Stanier urges leaders to repeat these simple behaviours often with people. Follow up, see if your input helped, connect with people regularly to learn more about the context in which they (and you) work. Celebrate and share small wins together as a mechanism to build trust and confidence.

Michael Fullan talks about Contextual Literacy as de-skilling people. When you move into a new role, in a new context, the skills that you brought to bear in your previous leadership work have to be re-considered. Leaders need to “take the time to deeply engage with context so that we can become lead learners within our organizations.” The time that Fullan refers to can be informed by the careful listening, questioning and feedback that both Bungay Stanier and Goldsmith reference. Fullan, Goldsmith and Bungay Stanier all would agree that any leadership unfolds in context and taking the time to understand context and how it informs your leadership is critical for success.

Questions to Consider:

1. What is it about the context in your district/division/region that you feel is essential for people to know as a system education leader? – How did you come to learn this in your role?
2. How do you support people who are new to role or level in understanding the context of their work?

Further Resources:

Schiller, C. & Schuman-Stoler, B (Hosts). (2017, November 30). *Simplify* (2017-2021). Michael Bungay Stanier: Be lazy, be curious, be often. [Audio Podcast]. Blinkist.

<https://podcasts.apple.com/ie/podcast/michael-bungay-stanier-be-lazy-be-curious-be-often/id1255922966?i=1000395449831>

College of Alberta School Superintendents. (n.d.) *CASS resource library*.

<https://cass.ab.ca/resources/>

Clear, J. (n.d.) *What got you here won't get you there by Marshall Goldsmith*.

<https://jamesclear.com/book-summaries/what-got-you-here-wont-get-you-there>

Tom Vander Ark (Host). (Sept. 2, 2020). Michael Fullan on leading in a culture of change. [Audio Podcast]. Getting Smart.

<https://www.gettingsmart.com/podcast/michael-fullan-on-leading-in-a-culture-of-change/#:~:text=Leaders%20have%20to%20be%20contextually,lead%20learners%20within%20our%20organizations.%E2%80%9D>

Goldsmith, M. (2007). *What got you here won't get you there: How successful people become even more successful!* (1st Ed.). Hyperion.