Public education governance in neoliberal era:
An examination of the changing role of professionals, bureaucrats and elected politicians in Manitoba

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Introduction/Background

The Canadian transition from a welfare state towards a neoliberal one started by the mid of the 1970s and by the 1990s, elements of a neoliberal governance model became well developed in several provinces. A suggested primary reason behind the rise of neoliberalism was a global economic crisis that led to questioning the Keynesian economic model (Evans & Shields, 2010, p. 308). The term neoliberalism refers to new types of political and economic governance that is based on extended market relationships. It is usually used more than its synonyms that may include managerialism, contractualism, economic rationalism and neoconservatism (Larner, 2000, p. 5).

The broad purpose of the neoliberal governance paradigm was increasing the central control, enforcing regulatory structures, and minimizing the power of elected local bodies (Basu, 2004, pp. 624-625). Manitoba, however, has resisted at least some of the centralization movement of public education that other Canadian provinces have seen. For instance, collective bargaining is still under local school board authority and Manitoba schools boards have retained the ability to levy local property taxes in support of public educational services (Henley & Young, 2008, p. 2).

Purpose & Problem

In her study of educational governance in Washington, DC, Mawhinney (2005) posed the following general question: (i) have ideologies of neoliberal management reform and governance restructuring been actually implemented as policies; and (ii) if so, have these ideas resulted in
substantial shifts in education policies that are substantially different from existing liberal education policies (Mawhinney, 2005, p. 32). The focus of this paper, however, will be on the case of Manitoba. It proposes to address the following question: has neoliberalism changed the role of professionals, bureaucrats and public representatives/elected politicians, in the governance of public education in Manitoba?

The answer of this primary question may require to answer the following secondary questions: (i) what is neoliberalism and its relationship to governance of public education systems; (ii) what are the recent shifts in education governance at different organizational levels in Manitoba; and, (iii) what are the changes in role of educational professionals, bureaucrats and elected politicians, in Manitoba?

**Procedures**

This is a theoretical examination of the relationship between neoliberalism and education governance of Manitoba. To achieve its purpose, the paper will adopt the following procedures: (i) it will present a conceptualization of neoliberalism as an economic and political ideology and its relationship to the governance of public education, (ii) it will describe recent shifts in education governance at different organizational levels in Manitoba, and, (iii) it will provide an initial analysis of some changes in the roles of educational professionals, bureaucrats and elected politicians in Manitoba.

Developing an understanding of the relationship between neoliberalism and governance of education in Manitoba would help us understand how educational policies and decisions are made in the province.
Sources & Bibliography


