DOES MANITOBA EDUCATION, AND
YOUTH’S AGENDA PROMOTE
EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP CENTERED
ON SOCIAL JUSTICE?

by

Jerome Cranston

A paper presented at the

Education Graduate Students Symposium

Winter 2003

Faculty of Education

University of Manitoba
Introduction

Manitoba Education and Youth’s (ME&Y’s) *Manitoba K-S4 Education for Student Success* (also referred to as the Agenda) provides a set of priorities in provincial policy for education in Manitoba. Manitoba’s New Democratic Party presents the Agenda as the basis for communicating actions to be taken to improve the province’s education system from 2002 through 2006. ME&Y contends that while Manitoba’s school system is serving the province’s children and families well and much is being accomplished by the education system, there are considerable issues and challenges that can only be addressed through school change initiatives. The Agenda claims to set a direction for the province’s education system through policies, which engage people in a positive process about what should be done for the province’s students to succeed. The Agenda, with its six priorities and supporting twenty-seven actions, was released in August 2002 to schools in the province as the NDP government’s statement of the priorities for education in the province for the next four years.

Joseph Murphy (2002), the editor of the *one hundred and first Yearbook of The National Society for The Study of Education – Part 1*, contends that the ways of thinking about educational leadership that have been relied on for the latter part of the past century provide an inadequate platform for educational leadership as society moves further into this new century. He suggests the traditional ways of conceptualizing educational leadership for practice and policy no longer provide adequate paradigms for the profession and advocates a re-culturing of the profession centered on three powerful new anchors which are: school improvement, democratic community and social justice.
Murphy claims each of these anchors individually, and all three collectively, offer great promise for repositioning the profession of educational leadership.

Through this analysis two questions will be examined, which are: 1) do the *Agenda*’s six priorities center educational leadership on social justice to articulate theories and strategies for eliminating institutional inequalities and discrimination in school communities; and 2) does the *Agenda*: rethink leadership for poor and marginalized school communities; organize multicultural communities through democratic leadership; and, develop human capacity and life chances through education?

Space limitations mean that not all of the *Agenda*’s twenty-seven action items can be examined. Accordingly, this paper will focus on the six priorities only. The priorities are a comprehensive list of the government’s priorities for the elementary and secondary education system in Manitoba. These priorities are intended to have an effect on the entire system of education in the province, as well as the students in Manitoba’s education systems.

The conclusion reached is the *Agenda* falls short when analyzed against the three lines of inquiry which Larson and Murtadha argue can construct theories, systems and processes of educational leadership for social justice.

**The Agenda**

The NDP government began consultation on the *Agenda* during the 2000-2001 school year. Then Education Minister, Drew Caldwell, outlined six priorities in a letter sent to education partners in July 2000. The priorities outlined were: improve outcomes especially for less successful learners; strengthen links among schools, families and communities; strengthen school planning and reporting; improve professional learning
opportunities for educators; strengthen pathways among secondary schools, post-secondary education and work; and, link policy and practice to research and evidence.

The need to center educational leadership

Murphy (2002, p. xi) contends that due to, “powerful political, social, and economic, shifts in the environment in which schools are nested, as well as significant changes in the educational industry itself – in the ways we understand learning, organize and manage school organizations, and relate to clients” that new foundations for the profession of educational leadership need to be built. Murphy posits that the new anchors for reculturing the profession of educational leadership can be found in the scholarly works across the “intellectual spectrum” in the following three areas: school improvement, democratic community and social justice. Murphy goes on to claim, “each of these anchors individually, and all three collectively, offer great promise for repositioning the profession” (2002, p.6).

Educational organizations become a chief venue were students become more fully human as society’s values are transmitted to them. Values transfer becomes a central goal for education and those willing to be its leaders. Educational leadership in its fullest sense is more concerned with values than facts, and judgments of fact are inextricably tied to judgments of value (Hodgkinson, 1991; Hoy and Miskel,2001). Whenever educational leaders pursue actions that they believe will attain a desired outcome, they are making a judgment of value between potentially competing goods or lesser evils. An educational leader, any educational leader is faced with value choices and to lead is to choose among values. One’s leadership can be allowed to be, or not, by values “deriving from hedonism, ambition or careerism, or by the prejudices and affinities one has for
colleagues or peers.” Each school day and each class period “provides the occasion for value judgments, and each choice has a determining effect on the value options for the future” (Hodgkinson, 1991, p. 93).

Meyer (as cited in Rowan and Miskel, 1999, p. 376) claims “the statuses conferred by educational organizations give students future access to positions in the political and economic order of society.” Similarly Osborne (2001) argues, in an analysis of citizenship education in Manitoba, that educational organizations may also effectively deny students access to certain positions in the social order of society. Educators are decision makers and collaborators who must reclaim their roles in the shaping of practice by both taking a stand and becoming activists for what should be the correct center for education (Cochran Smith, 1991). Rebore (2001) poignantly claims that the most significant current issue, which educational leaders must deal with, is to answer the question: how will effective leadership be exercised within the tremendously diverse milieu of public education? The answer Rebore suggests can be found in developing ideas and notions of social justice that can serve as a basis from which educators can exercise their leadership; a basis on social justice for educational theories and practice, which does not see students as a utility. It is this value of social justice that can provide a new foundation for the profession of educational leadership as society moves into the 21st century.

The values of social justice theorists and practitioners are offered as the new center for educational leadership as we move into the third millennium. Beginning with social justice theorists who argue “that all men and women who provide leadership for public educational institutions within a democratic society must reach for greater
opportunity and justice for all children”, Larson and Murtadha make a plea for educational leaders to make social justice a daily reality by leading to “enhance equity, opportunity and justice through education” (2002, p. 135 - 136).

**Educational leadership centered on social justice**

Pounder, Reitzug and Young (2002) argue that it is critical that educational leaders be prepared to promote and support social justice in their institutions. They claim, “part of leading for social justice, then, is understanding that one is not just a leader but an activist for children, an activist who is committed to supporting educational equity and excellence for children” (p. 272). Social justice is neither a 21st nor 20th century concept. According to Novak (2000) the term social justice was first used in 1840 by a Sicilian priest, Luigi Taparelli d’Azeglio, and given prominence in 1848 by Antonio Rosmini-Sebati in *La Constitutione Civile Secoundo la Giustizia Sociale*. Koerbel (1997, p. 139), in defining social justice, contends, “every human being should and must receive as a matter of fundamental right the opportunity to fully develop his or her aptitudes and talents according to specific potential and endowment” through government intervention when necessary.

Typically it is the denotation of regulatory control on which many of social justice’s strongest critics focus. F. A. Hayek, defender of the free market and classical liberal principles, took exception to the fact that most definitions of social justice were in reality not definitions but vague terms that became instruments of ideological intimidation used for the purpose of gaining power and legal coercion (Novak, 2000). Perhaps as is the case with other complex concepts it is more significant to broadly conceptualize social justice rather than define it. Some support of this move to create a
broad conceptualization may be found even amongst one of social justice’s harshest critics. Even though Hayek took exception to the lack of a precise definition of social justice, Novak contends that he was a practitioner of “social justice rightly understood.” “Social justice rightly understood” was a specific habit that is social in the two following senses: the skills it requires are those of inspiring, working with, and organizing others to accomplish a work of justice; and, it aims at the good of the city, not at the good of one agent only (Novak, 2000).

Hayek’s conception emerges organically and spontaneously from the rule-abiding behavior of free individuals. It is this notion of free individuals, which requires closer scrutiny and examination. Whereas Hayek fundamentally believed individual freedom was generated from free markets and minimalist government intervention (Hamowy, 1999) others have argued that the poor, oppressed, and marginalized cannot be free until unjust social institutions and structures are either reformed or dismantled.

Fr. Pedro Arrupe, SJ, the former Superior General of the Society of Jesus calls for people to become agents committed to social justice in society by “not merely resisting unjust structures and arrangements but actively undertaking to reform them” (Arrupe, 1974). Arrupe argues for a pedagogy for social justice based on three concrete benchmarks in the struggle for freedom and equality for all humankind. He challenges educators to work towards educating for benchmarks of: a basic attitude of respect for all people which forbids to use of people as instruments for profit; a firm resolve never to profit from, or allow ourselves to be suborned by, positions of power deriving from privilege, for to so, even passively, is equivalent to active oppression. To be drugged by the comfort of privilege is to become contributors to injustice as silent beneficiaries of the
fruits of injustice; and finally, an attitude not simply to speak of refusal but of counterattack against injustice; a decision to work with others toward the dismantling of unjust social structures so that the weak, the oppressed, the marginalized may be set free.

Rawls (1999) in a similar manner sees the need to center justice on the principle of free individuals. In developing his concept of “justice as fairness” he argues for the need to find an alternative to utilitarian doctrine as the basis for the institutions of constitutional democracies. Rawls does not accept that utilitarianism can provide a satisfactory account of the basic rights and liberties of citizens as free and equal persons, a requirement of absolute importance for an account of democratic institutions. Chief among his discontent with the utilitarian view of justice is the utilitarian need for society to allocate its means of satisfaction whatever they are, rights and duties, opportunities, and various forms of wealth, so as to achieve the maximum average utility.

Rawls theory of “justice as fairness” and Arrupe’s conceptualization of social justice, like Hayek’s, center on the notion of the freedom of individuals to act. Unlike Hayek, Rawls and Arrupe promote policies and practices which act to free the oppressed from injustices of birth and circumstance. The next step in this inquiry is to further examine practices and policies of education which promote social justice and which enable individuals to live as free and equal members of society.

Capper (1998) posits that the goal of education from a critical theory perspective is social justice and equality. Scholars such as: Habermas, Marcuse, Adorno and Harkheimer, Capper argues, believe society is teeming with injustice and oppression and she contends that critical theory provides a framework for those educators who wish to initiate social change to emancipate the oppressed and disenfranchised by taking a critical
view of education and focusing on power relationships through rational, intellectual
dialogue about problems of practice. The genesis of critical theorists’ orientation to
leadership is the need to develop educational organizations whose fundamental purpose is
to nurture not only equality among organizational stakeholders but also to pursue the
freedom and autonomy of individual members (Leithwood and Duke, 1999).

Paulo Freire (1970) articulated the need for leaders committed to social justice to
reject the hierarchical and controlling practices built on inappropriate relationships
between the oppressors and the oppressed. Freire and Capper (1998) both position
educational leadership for social justice on a dialogical relationship, which argues for free
exploration, honest exchange and non-manipulative discussion. Freedom and equality are
pivotal and critical aspects of the call to center educational leadership on social justice. It
is liberation or freedom that opens people up and leads them to the discovery

Taylor (1991) laments the malaise of modern society with its shift away from
common humanity towards individualism and cautions that, “the dark side of
individualism is centering on the self, which flattens and narrows our lives, makes them
poorer in meaning, and less concerned with others or society” (p.4). Individualism and
other-centeredness are elements of a paradox of competing drives which plagues all
members of a society. We are driven to belong and to fit in, while we are also driven to
let our deepest selves rise up and to walk alone (Vanier, 1998). Vanier argues, “as
humans we crave belonging, we need the connectedness to others that brings security, but
this connectedness can prevent the natural movement and evolution we need in our lives”
(p. 18). Society’s paradox of drives calls for behaviors, practices, and policies of
educational leaders to move away from a societal view that honors only the powerful, the
clever, and the gifted. This societal view necessarily belittles the weak, the marginalized and the oppressed and stops people from becoming fully human.

Educational leadership centered on social justice requires educators to examine and critically analyze practices and policies that are paramount to creating greater freedom, opportunity, and justice for all citizens – citizens who through education are better able to participate in and sustain a free, multicultural, pluralistic, and democratic society (Larson and Murtadha, 2002). Larson and Murtadha argue that insights gleaned from research focused on: feminist images of leadership, African American scholars and leadership for justice and, spirituality, love and leadership are “providing alternate theories of educational leadership based on the practices and insights of men and women who are working in our impoverished school communities” (p. 144).

Drawing on literature from disciplines outside education Larson and Murtadha see an opportunity to re-construct educational leadership centred on social justice. They posit that this re-construction brings to the forefront three paths which can stimulate critical questions and advance inquiry. The three themes for centering educational leadership on social justice that Larson and Murtadha conceptualize are: rethinking leadership for poor and marginalized school communities; organizing multicultural communities through democratic leadership; and, developing human capacity and life chances through education. These three strands and the literature that supports them shed light on the practices and policies of educational leadership that impede the most impoverished, marginalized and oppressed people from being free.

Larson and Murtadha, drawing heavily on the work of researchers such as; Freire, argue for the rejection of top-down hierarchical theories, practices and policies of
leadership which only serve to oppress the disenfranchised and poor in society. Instead they contend educators must “rethink leadership practices and policies for poor and marginalized school communities.” Freire (1970) argued against the de-humanizing banking approaches to education which saw a pre-defined knowledge bank deposited into poor and marginalized children regardless of their condition in life. In opposition to this approach, Freire (1994) adamantly supported the acquisition of language and literacy for the democratization of education and the foundation of personal and collective identity. Freire stated, “dialogue is meaningful precisely because the dialogical subjects, the agents in the dialogue, not only retain their identity, but actively defend it, and thus grow together” (p. 117).

The second theme, “organizing multicultural communities through democratic leadership,” further contributes to centering educational leadership on social justice. Strong school community relationships in diverse, pluralistic communities require substantive attention and direction to build deliberative communities of difference for the purpose of understanding culture, reducing prejudice, and learning to talk across potentially devise lines such as race, ethnicity, caste and gender (Larson and Murtadha, 2002). Larson and Murtadha argue schools, and those who lead them, must be more community centered, less bureaucratic, more democratic and be less corporation-like. School leaders working within a context of inequity must become activists for social justice and be capable of and willing to confront injustices in their theories, practices and policies. Educational leaders centered on social justice need to organize school communities around, “shared concerns for greater compassion, equity and justice” (p. 151).
The final theme Larson and Murtadha present, “developing human capacity and life chances through education,” builds on the framework on the first two themes and forcefully and firmly centers educational leadership on the concept of social justice. This theme draws heavily on the work of two individuals: Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum. Developing human capacity and life chances through education moves educational leadership away from the practice and policies of narrowing the curriculum to pass high stakes tests (McNeil, as cited in Larson and Murtadha, 2002) and rejects the utilitarian pursuit of higher test scores and higher standards. Larson and Murtadha maintain that the strategy of narrowing the curriculum, setting higher standards and pushing for higher test scores reduces rather than expands possibilities for children’s growth, development and learning. Instead developing human capacity and life chances through education supports educational leadership that places freedom to achieve and capabilities to achieve as the focal points of the analysis of what center the profession of educational leadership should have.

Sen, (1992) argues that greater equality will require a shift away from utilitarian values of education which concentrate on achievement while ignoring social, economic and political disparities in the freedom or spaces to achieve. Sen presents a framework for theories, policies and practices of equality based on human diversity. This diversity is not to be ignored or to be introduced later on. He argues that all theories of equality must take into consideration the importance of the question “equality of what?” at the practical level. This question “equality of what?” derives from the actual diversity of human beings so that demanding equality in terms of one variable tends to clash – in fact and not just in theory – with wanting equality in terms of another.
Larson and Murtadha (2002) drawing upon Sen’s thesis challenge policy makers and implementers “to see that defining spaces of inequality is critical to developing freedoms to achieve” (p. 153). They provide the following guiding questions, drawn from Sen’s theory of “spaces to achieve”, for educational leaders to use to assess practice and policy for greater social justice: how do various types of hardships that children and their families bring to school affect their freedoms to achieve; how are these hardships viewed by the school, state and broader society; and, what social and educational policy emerges from the prevailing view of these hardships? To ignore or deny the hardships of the poor, marginalized or oppressed in practices and policies for the sake of claiming objectivity is in reality to be practically and politically dense (Sen, 1992).

Nussbaum’s (2000) concept of social justice can be used in conjunction with Sen’s to more solidly center educational leadership on social justice by asserting school leaders need to examine what a particular child or group of children is actually capable to do and to become when implementing policy. Nussbaum contends that insufficient attention is paid to cultural variety and particular features of individual lives and this leads to unjust and detrimental policies and practices Nussbaum’s conceptualization of social justice plays a practical role in sorting out often perplexing and contradictory thoughts about greater equality and justice and requires practitioners to consider how policies and practices support the capability of each student (Larson and Murtadha, 2002). Larson and Murtadha suggest the following guides for the practice and policies of educators striving for equality: children should be able to enjoy good health, good nutrition, and adequate shelter; all children must have the capability to move freely from place to place, secure against assault, sexual abuse and domestic violence; children
should be able to use their senses, to think, to imagine, and to reason – and to do these all in a truly human way; emotions need to be valued – being able to develop attachments to things, and people outside ourselves and to love those who love and care for us, to grieve at their absence and to experience longing, gratitude and justified anger; a person should be capable of practical reason, being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about planning one’s life.

Educational leadership centered on social justice calls leaders to critically and profoundly examine practices and policies to see if those practices and policies fail to serve children - especially the poor, disadvantaged or marginalized. It challenges educators to recognize that education is a value-laden and political enterprise. Adams, Bell and Griffiths (1997) see social justice as a process that takes as its goal the absolute equal right of all individuals to live and participate in a society that they can help to shape and a society that also meets their needs. According to Pounder, Reitzug and Young (2002), educational leaders can become prepared for practices and policies which promote social justice by: an understanding of social justice; an analysis of how school practices and policies support or undermine social justice; and, by developing the ability to interpret processes that undermine social justice while simultaneously offering insights for alternate processes that support social justice. The enterprise of school in a diverse society requires educational leaders commit to practices and policies that recognize diversity as reality. Educational leadership centered on social justice provides a way to proceed that accepts the pluralistic nature of society and provides greater equality and opportunity for all but especially so for the poor, the marginalized, the disenfranchised and the oppressed.
Educational leadership centered on social justice provides a way of evaluating problems of practice and policy to find the right solutions based on freedom and equality. Social justice, as conceptualized by Larson and Murtadha (2002), provides a center for educational leaders to combat what Taylor (1991) cites as two worries or perplexities of modern society – individualism and instrumentalism. Centering educational leadership on social justice leads educators and the students and families they collaborate with to discover what Vanier (1998) calls “our common humanity.” It is in this manner that educational leadership centered on social justice can provide a framework to analyze the practices of educators and the policies of the educational organizations they must implement.

Oppression and discrimination may operate on a series of planes that extend from the individual learner to the societal level and this discrimination and prejudice may be evident in educational leadership practices and educational policies (Pounder, Reitzug and Young, 2002). Many current educational reforms in Canada are being driven by the proliferation of policy mandates emanating primarily but not exclusively from provincial legislatures. Hope (2002) defines policy as a politically derived intervention (often taking the form of a law) whose purpose is to resolve a perceived social problem.

The Agenda sets six priorities to act as a mechanism to bring Manitobans together on five specific challenges that need to be addressed through school change initiatives. These challenges have a combined impact that will necessitate changes in schools. The challenges can be summarized as: aboriginal people, people with disabilities, visible minorities and less educated adults are among the groups who still do not attain sufficiently high levels of achievement to participate in the community; challenges for
schools are created by increasingly diverse student populations, better educated and more demanding citizenry and significant changes in factors such as gender roles and family structures; public pressure to recognize informal and prior learning experiences; the changing demands of skills in the workplace, and a continuously changing labour market which dictate changes in education and training needs for young people; and, a greater desire by community groups to be included and participate in decision-making processes.

Henley and Young (2001) assert Manitoba’s NDP has traditionally “shown a marked inclination for the promotion of social equity” (p.321-322). Manitoba’s NDP clearly identify in their Statement of Principles (www.mb.ndp.ca) that their purpose as a movement is to foster social change toward a more cooperative society and their purpose as a political party is to develop a public mandate for social change through giving individuals greater control in the economy, their workplace, and their community.

Educational policy becomes a critical point for promoting greater social equality. Tarrou and Holmesland (2002) contend that educational policies are crucial instruments for a government to establish social justice as a priority. Ahonen (2002) similarly argues through an analysis of Finland’s educational policies from the 1900s through the 1990s, that the state can play a critical role as the equalizer of opportunity for young people by using the school as an instrument of social justice. Government can choose to create policy to promote social justice and foster equality or not. Government remaining silent on practices and policies which do not dismantle institutionalized discrimination or oppression is not a matter of government maintaining neutrality and is in fact by virtue of the silence, government’s tacit approval of the status quo. Bates (as cited in Donmoyer, 1999) posits that because material and symbolic resources in hierarchically organized
societies are unequally distributed, anything (including educational policy) that makes the status quo seem natural, inevitable, and legitimate aids and abets the privileged class and further disadvantages those at the bottom of the social ladder. Remaining neutral on social injustice reifies inequality and institutionalizes it as inevitable and unalterable. The premise of policy directives remaining silent on issues of social justice will be assumed not as a position of neutrality but acceptance of the status quo of the existing injustices in educational policy and practice.

The _Agenda’s_ priorities claim to provide a framework that brings together committed people in a positive process, which focuses on the social relationships resulting in changed schools. Educational leadership centered on social justice provides an alternative model for the analysis of policy from the 1990s dominant paradigm, which saw educational organizations as business-like entities. ME&Y’s _Agenda_ sets a policy framework for the province’s educational system as it enters the third millennium.

**An analysis of the _Agenda’s_ six priorities**

The first priority, “improved outcomes for less successful learners,” is an essential element of the government’s policy to strengthen programs and improve practices for those who are not succeeding. It attempts to focus attention on those students who are socially and economically disenfranchised. This priority calls school leaders to examine what needs to be done for students who are not achieving academic success, because the _Agenda_ claims in the absence of academic success, these students lack the skills needed to secure relevant training and employment and to participate as citizens. This priority calls educators to examine the costs associated with not improving outcomes for less successful learners as individuals and as members of a larger society.
“Priority 1” can be seen be interpreted as promoting educational leadership centered on social justice by providing an opening to rethink educational leadership for poor and marginalized communities by allowing schools to adopt practices tailored for the needs, interests and concerns of the socially and economically marginalized. While “Priority 1” does not direct educators to enter into dialogical processes to liberate the marginalized and poor it does suggest a rejection of hierarchical theories, practices and policies that serve to oppress, it provides for organizing multicultural communities through democratic leadership by advocating for greater collaboration and consultation between educators and those students and their families from Aboriginal communities or from “English as a Second Language” homes. This priority focuses on an action plan on equity and diversity which is currently being developed and circulated for comment, and develops human capacity and life chances through education by placing attention on the reality of the actual real lives of poor, marginalized or disenfranchised students. “Priority 1” takes into account the hardships of the students and their families and calls educational leaders to critically analyze what school practices and policies emerge from the prevailing view of these hardships.

“Priority 2: Strengthening links among schools, families and communities,” recognizes the primary role of parents and families as children’s first teachers and accepts that students are more successful learners when educational leaders collaborate with, and facilitate collaboration amongst, families, the school and the community. It is reasonable to deduce that the priority focuses on building stronger school-family-community relationships to build and maintain healthy diverse, pluralistic communities organized through democratic leadership. An argument can also be made that this priority allows for
educational leadership centered on social justice by rethinking leadership for poor and marginalized communities. This deduction is supported by the priority’s directive for greater collaboration between the partners in education – schools, families and communities, and a rejection of top-down, monological approaches to educational theory, policy and practice as it applies to the poor and oppressed. ‘Priority 2” as a policy statement is silent on developing human capacity and life chances through education. It neither provides a focus for educational leaders on either freedoms to achieve or on capabilities to achieve nor, does it provide direction for educational leaders to examine the lives of the students or their families in light of local policy and practice. The priority does not address the hardships and limitations that students bring to school each day and it does not provide any insight into analyzing what the poor or marginalized are free to achieve or capable to achieve through education. “Priority 2” is silent on freedoms to achieve and capacities to achieve.

ME&Y contends through “strengthening school planning and reporting,” the third priority, that schools are “most successful when they have meaningful, clearly stated goals and a process for monitoring and reporting on the progress being made towards the achievement of those goals.” “Priority 3” indicates that teachers, families, students and communities must participate in the school planning process for the process and plan to be successful. This priority focuses on positive ways of collecting and using data to better inform school improvement. While superficially articulating the need for greater collaboration between schools, families and educators this priority might also be analyzed as an instrument of control and coercion. “Priority 3” is tied to other Department of Education policy, which dictates how school plans are to be developed and formatted for
acceptance by the department. *Annual School Plans* produced by each school must align local school priorities to address the *Agenda*’s priorities. “Priority 3” standardizes and prescribes a school planning process and reporting format regardless of the diversity of the school, the community and the families it serves. It does not: rethink leadership for the poor and marginalized by taking into consideration their needs; organize multi-cultural communities through democratic leadership; and develop human capacity and life chances through education. “Priority 3” is silent on the powerful insights into centering educational leadership on social justice.

“Priority 4: Improving professional learning opportunities for educators” suggests that in order to best meet the needs of students and communities educators must have the opportunity to maintain and improve their skills. This priority identifies the need to concentrate professional development opportunities for educators on such areas as: subject matter, school environment issues, socio-economic conditions and student assessment. This priority is dominated by information computer technology supported criterion reference norms for what constitutes “best practice and research” and on-line professional development projects. “Priority 4” suggests ME&Y undertake a review with respect to the training and certification of school leaders. “Improving professional learning opportunities for educators” does not provide any insight what Larson and Murtadha (2002) contend are critical elements to fight injustice, promote equality and to reculture the profession of educational leadership. As “Priority 4” does not address practices and policies for social justice, it is concluded that the fourth priority maintains the status quo of accepted and institutionalized injustices.
“Strengthening pathways among secondary schools, post-secondary education and work,” the fifth priority recommends stronger linkages between high schools, post-secondary institutions and employment. “Priority 5” suggests school leaders examine such things as: credentialing employability skills, assisting students in a career exploration to address local labour markets and linking some high school credits to a dual system with post-secondary institutions. Very heavy foci of this priority area are the employability skills and job market training functions of schools. Nothing in it addresses the need for liberation of the poor and disenfranchised and a move to center educational leadership on social justice. It does not advance the line of inquiry into practices and policies for organizing multi-cultural communities through democratic leadership and, it seems to disregard poor, oppressed or marginalized students realities or freedoms to achieve or capacities to achieve in favor of training workers to fill particular needs in certain hard to fill job vacancies. “Priority 5” appears to ignore the plight of the learner and the learner’s hardships in favor of the human productivity for society’s machinery; and, appears to be in opposition to the concept of social justice as a new center for educational leadership practice and theory.

“Priority 6: Linking policy and practice to research and evidence,” advocates that policy and practice be based on research and linked to student learning results. This priority contends educators, but particularly educational leaders, to base decisions of what happens in schools on the best available evidence availability within and from beyond Manitoba. While “Priority 6” is a broad and wide reaching policy statement, it does not articulate a vision for centering educational leadership on social justice. It does not push social justice into the forefront of the lens examining practices and policies in
Manitoba’s schools. This priority is devoid of substance that addresses: rethinking leadership for poor and marginalized communities, organizing multicultural communities through democratic leadership, and developing human capacity and life chances through education and thus is silent on the concept of social justice as a center for educational leadership.

This analysis of *The Agenda’s* six priorities for student success against Larson and Murtadha’s (2002) three themes of inquiry for centering educational leadership on social justice have resulted in only two of *The Agenda’s* priorities being found to center educational leadership on social justice. These two priorities are: “Priority 1: Improved outcomes for less successful learners,” and “Priority 2: Strengthening links among schools, families and communities.” Priorities 3, 4 and 6 are largely silent as government policy to center educational leadership on social justice. “Priority 5: Strengthening pathways among secondary schools, post-secondary education and work,” can be analyzed as promoting social injustice and oppression by fostering an approach to education which forces the poor, oppressed or marginalized to aspire to nothing greater or more than the productivity their birth and circumstance affords them. “Priority 5” dehumanizes education by centering the function of education on employment skills and labour contribution.

**Conclusion**

The *Agenda* is the NDP’s first full scale policy for the province’s education system since winning the 1999 election. The *Agenda* proposes to provide guidelines which allow everyone interested in public education to work together to make Manitoba’s schools as good as they can be. The six priorities while intended to guide the future work
of educational leaders, and others, by building on past successes and by stretching the capacities of those committed to education to achieve more, fall short when analyzed against the themes Larson and Murtadha (2002) argue can construct theories, systems and processes of educational leadership for social justice. Only two of the Agenda’s priorities: “Priority 1: Improve outcomes for less successful learners,” and “Priority 2: Strengthen links among schools, families and communities,” are found to push the concept of social justice to the center of the profession of educational leadership.

“Priority 5: Strengthen pathways among secondary schools, post-secondary education and work,” appears to move theories, systems, and practices of educational leadership away from the concept of social justice. Three priorities: “Priority 3: Strengthen school planning and reporting,” “Priority 4: Improve professional learning opportunities for educators,” and “Priority 6: Link policy and practice to research and evidence,” are silent in response to Larson and Murtadha’s call to center educational leadership on social justice. Failing to examine, question, and redress inequalities and injustices institutionalizes and reifies them to the extent that the inequalities and injustices become viewed as natural or unalterable (Larson and Murtadha, 2002).

In 1999 25% of children in Manitoba lived in poverty, ranking the province the second highest among all of Canada’s provinces for child poverty (McKie, 2002). Aboriginal children and children living with single mothers represent the majority of the children in Manitoba living in poverty (Social Planning Council of Winnipeg). Manitoba’s poor (as determined by Statistics Canada using the “low income cut-off) are also made up of recent immigrants and visible minorities. 50% of recent immigrants to Canada residing in Manitoba live in poverty, while 32% of Manitoba’s visible minorities
live in poverty (Lee, 2000). It is important to note that child poverty occurs in the context of family poverty – the two are inseparable.

While the percentage of children living in poverty has declined from 1999 to 2000 across Canada, Manitoba’s rate of decline is less than that of the national average rate of decline. Manitoba’s rate of children living in poverty in 2000 was 22.1 percent while the national average was 16.5 (Reynolds, 2002). In 1998 the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg released a report, “Child Poverty in Manitoba,” that emphasized that education is a “social and economic investment” in youth to fight the vicious cycle of families living in poverty.

The six priorities should be reexamined, and where necessary amended or replaced by ME&Y to address the lived realities of the poor - the Aboriginal communities, single mothers, recent immigrants and visible minorities. ME&Y should consider analyzing the Agenda from the perspective of the marginalized and oppressed who are served by and are part of Manitoba’s education system. Manitoba’s NDP government might ask itself the question of whether the Agenda centers the profession and practice of educational leadership on social justice as a provincial policy truly committed to greater equality and freedom for all of those in society. ME&Y, using Larson and Murtadha’s (2002) three themes should consider the direction the Agenda is moving the province’s education system in, with special attention paid to the plight of the poor, marginalized and disenfranchised of Manitoba for whom education is so vital.
References


Manitoba Education and Youth. (2002). Manitoba K-S4 Education for Student Success


Handbook of research on educational administration (pp. 443-462). San Francisco: Jossey Bass Inc.


