

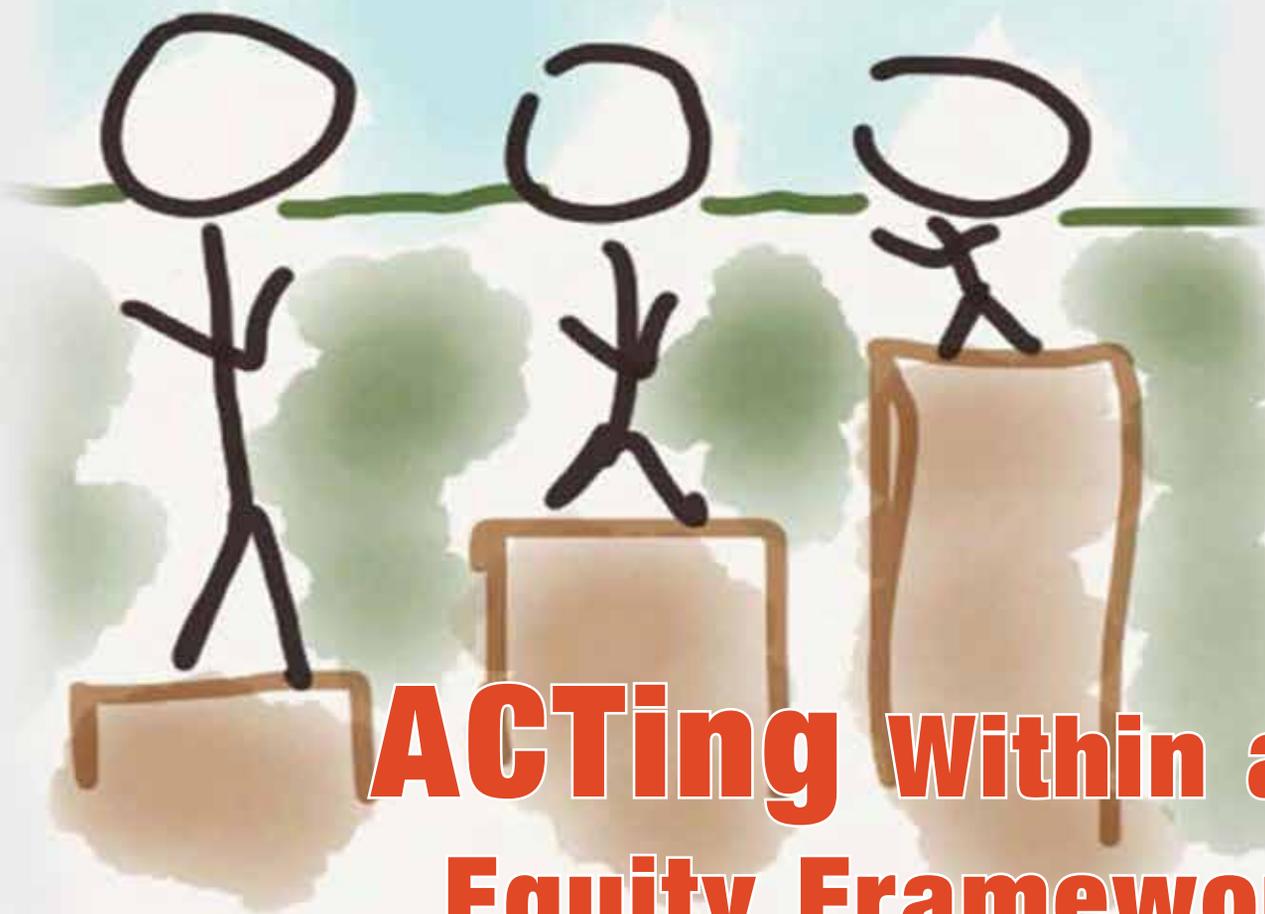


MASS Journal

Spring 2015

The official magazine of the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents

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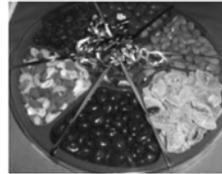
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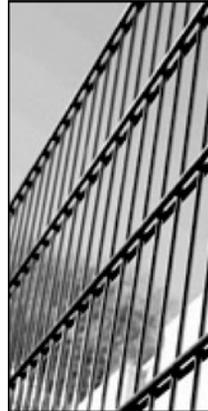
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MASS Journal
Published For:
The Manitoba Association of School Superintendents
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Winnipeg, Manitoba
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Phone: (204) 487-7972
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E-mail: ken.klassen@7oaks.org
Web: www.mass.mb.ca

Published By:
Matrix Group Publishing Inc.
Publication Mail Agreement Number
40609661

Return Undeliverable Addresses to:
309 Youville Street
Winnipeg, MB R2H 2S9
Toll free: (866) 999-1299
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Barb Isaak
Assistant Superintendent,
River East Transcona School Division

The Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS) is pleased to present our spring issue of the *MASS Journal* on the theme of equity.

“Equity” and “quality” are two overarching tenets framing the year-round work of our organization. They are fundamental principles embedded in our priorities and they form the foundation of our belief statements that:

• A shared commitment to raising equity and quality in Manitoba’s public schools will lead to improved achievement for all our students;

• A conscious and persistent commitment to equity, system-wide and across sectors, will lead to poverty reduction, greater inclusion and an appreciation for the riches that diversity brings; and

• A purposeful and sustained commitment to quality education in every classroom will increase the capacity for teaching, learning and leading.

These statements guide the direction, planning and professional learning MASS. Together with our educational partners, we work towards supporting all students in Manitoba, so they receive an equitable, quality public education.

This issue of the *MASS Journal* provides a snapshot of some of the educational work being done to support Manitoba learners. It is encouraging to read about the work that has been done and is currently underway. Holding equity and quality as a “north star” is important and will support the work we do as we strive to meet the needs of our learners.

We are looking forward to increasing our learning in this area during our 2015 Summer Institute with Özlem Sensoy who will challenge our thinking about social activism and will directly tie our learning in our three identified focus areas of aboriginal education, mental health and wellness, and early childhood learning.

La Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS) est heureuse de présenter le numéro du printemps du *MASS Journal* sur le thème de l’équité.

« Équité » et « qualité » sont deux des principes fondamentaux à la base du travail de notre organisme tout au long de l’année. Il s’agit de principes fondamentaux qui font partie intégrante de nos priorités et ils sont le fondement de nos énoncés de principes, soit :

• Un engagement partagé à rehausser l’équité et la qualité dans les écoles publiques du Manitoba entraînera une amélioration de la réussite pour tous nos élèves;

• Un engagement conscient et constant en matière d’équité, à la grandeur du système et dans tous les secteurs, mènera à une réduction de la pauvreté, à une plus grande inclusion et une appréciation des richesses que la diversité apporte; et

• Un engagement ciblé et soutenue pour une éducation de qualité dans chaque classe fera augmenter la capacité de l’enseignement, de l’apprentissage et de la formation de meneurs.

Ces énoncés de principes guident l’orientation, la planification et l’apprentissage professionnel pour la MASS. Avec nos partenaires en éducation, nous nous employons à appuyer tous les élèves du Manitoba afin qu’ils reçoivent une éducation publique équitable et de qualité.

Le présent numéro du *MASS Journal* offre un aperçu d’une partie du travail effectué pour appuyer les apprenants manitobains. Il encourage à lire sur le travail qui a été fait et qui est en cours. Maintenir l’équité et la qualité comme « but ultime » est important et appuiera le travail que nous faisons alors que nous tentons de répondre aux besoins de nos apprenants.

Nous espérons accroître nos connaissances dans ce domaine lors de notre Institut d’été 2015 avec Özlem Sensoy qui mettra au défi notre façon de penser au sujet de l’activisme social et associera directement notre apprentissage à nos trois domaines cernés, à savoir l’éducation autochtone, la santé mentale et le mieux-être ainsi que l’apprentissage de la petite enfance.



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Peter Bjornson
*Minister for Manitoba Education /
Ministère de l'Éducation du Manitoba*

As Manitoba's Minister of Education and Advanced Education, I am pleased to extend my appreciation to the members of the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS) for your continuing leadership and commitment to quality, accessible education for students across the province.

Working together, we continue to make important progress in ensuring our schools are increasingly innovative, progressive and responsive to the needs of all students. By encouraging equity in all aspects of our public school system, you are helping to bring out the best in our students, strengthening our province today and for generations to come.

As you know, education is a vital area of public service, one that empowers individuals to take charge of their futures. By setting high standards of educational excellence, we are providing lifelong learning opportunities for Manitobans to help them grow and thrive, personally and professionally.

My department staff and I look forward to working with MASS members to ensure our schools continue to be synonymous with quality learning and equal opportunity for all.

En ma qualité de ministre de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur du Manitoba, c'est avec plaisir que je remercie les membres de la Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS) pour leur leadership soutenu et leur engagement à offrir une éducation accessible et de qualité aux élèves à l'échelle de la province.

Travaillant ensemble, nous continuons à conjuguer nos efforts pour que nos écoles soient de plus en plus innovatrices, progressistes et adaptées aux besoins de tous les élèves. En favorisant l'équité dans tous les aspects du système des écoles publiques manitobain, vous aidez les élèves à donner le meilleur d'eux-mêmes, ce qui rend notre province plus forte aujourd'hui et pour les générations à venir.

Comme vous le savez, l'éducation est un secteur essentiel de la fonction publique : elle outille les gens afin qu'ils puissent prendre leur avenir en main. En fixant des normes élevées d'excellence en éducation, nous offrons aux Manitobains des possibilités d'apprentissage la vie durant, qui leur permettront de croître et de se réaliser sur les plans personnel et professionnel.

Le personnel du Ministère et moi comptons sur la collaboration des membres de la Manitoba Association of School Superintendents pour faire en sorte que nos écoles continuent d'être synonymes d'éducation de qualité et d'égalité des chances pour tous.



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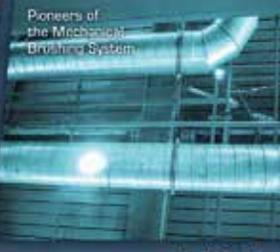
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MASS believes:

- That a shared commitment to raising both equity and quality in Manitoba's public schools will lead to improved achievement for all of our students.
- That a conscious and persistent commitment to equity, system wide and across sectors, will also lead to poverty reduction, greater inclusion and an appreciation for the riches that diversity brings.
- That a purposeful and sustained commitment to quality education in every classroom will also increase the capacity for teaching, learning and leading throughout the system.

MASS Action / Focus Areas for 2014 – 2015

Aboriginal Education	Mental Health and Wellness	Early Childhood Education
<p>Host a three-session Aboriginal Education Institute in Winter 2015 with our educational partners, MASS, MSBA and MASBO</p> <p>Liaise with FNMI partner groups, collect resources for implementation of MASS Call to Action in Aboriginal Education Position Paper, MASS Aboriginal Education Committee</p> <p>Follow-up to 2014 Emamawi Witasoskemitowak Interorganizational Conversation on Aboriginal Education with educational partners, MTS, MSBA and others</p>	<p>Co-host a provincial conference on Educating for ACTION: Mental Health and Wellness in November 2014 – MASS, Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning, Children and Youth Opportunities and Artbeat Studios</p> <p>Assess current mental and emotional health and wellness issues related to public schools and inform MASS membership - MASS Ad Hoc Mental Health Committee</p> <p>Exercise Leadership on the OCCYMH Committee of Healthy Child Manitoba and work collaboratively towards a mental health framework for Manitoba</p> <p>Pursue intersectoral liaison with public and mental health organizations and agencies</p>	<p>Review and rework the original MASS position paper on early childhood education - MASS Ad Hoc Early Childhood Education Committee</p> <p>Develop and present an updated Call to Action for early childhood education - MASS Ad Hoc Early Childhood Education Committee</p> <p>Maintain active MASS Representation on Provincial Early Childhood Committee</p>

EQUITY AND QUALITY

MASS believes that our mandate is to be leaders of learning, primarily in our respective local school systems and also in the broader domains of provincial, national and global public education. As leaders of learning:

- We will learn more about both essential and deep learning. We will work to identify essential learning for each and every child and ensure that this is achieved. We will pursue a better understanding of deeper learning and how we can prepare learners to go beyond our own learning.
- We will take responsibility for our own continuous learning and the learning of everyone we lead. We will create and foster enabling, supportive, inclusive and challenging environments within which we will consciously and persistently model our own active and visible learning.
- We will model learning that is based on robust research, tested through purposeful application in the field and evaluated using a wide range of meaningful data. Our findings will guide us in shaping policy and practice to achieve what is best for the children in our care.

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Acting on a Framework for Equity: What to do & How to do it



By Özlem Sensoy

Few would disagree with the adage that *a good education is grounded in the lives of students*. And in order to make education meaningful for students, educators must understand students' lives; we must understand *who* our students are.

No doubt many educators value getting to know students in terms of their *unique personalities*—their likes and dislikes, temperaments and moods, whether they have siblings, play an instrument or sport, and so on.

But an even more significant, albeit challenging, aspect of understanding students' lives is to know the *group-based* experiences that shape their lives in the social world (for example, their race, ability, class and other group-level identities).

In fact, understanding group-based experiences may be even more important for connecting with students than understanding their personalities. This is because individual student experiences are shaped by broader social and political contexts.

Understanding these can provide powerful insights about who students are, in relation to how they are treated and perceived inside and outside of schools. Group-level laws and outcomes (residential schooling and the Chinese Exclusion Act, as examples) have had long-term impact on Canadian families of non-White/settler ancestry.

Correspondingly, all group-based experiences directly influence who

students and their families are, how they view themselves and how they have been understood by others.

When we take this into account then *a good education is not only grounded in understanding the lives of students but also in understanding the ways their communities have been shaped by social and political contexts*.

Understanding contexts includes recognizing that young people receive their earliest education from their families. For example, language, social interaction, concepts of love, respect, modesty, relations to time, elders and other dispositions are first learned in the home.

Yet when children enter the institutions of schooling there can be a great many shocks, and even subversions, of this early education. This is most true for students whose home culture does not match the dominant school culture.

Equity initiatives are therefore important because they encourage teachers and administrators to recognize that who students are and what they have learned *outside* of school influences how they learn and how they connect to being *in* school.

Countless studies have supported the idea that students' identities shape their learning and their connection to school. In addition, other equally important studies show that *teacher identities* influence the knowledge teachers advance and validate, as well as their assessments of students' skills, knowledge and abilities.

Viewed together these bodies of research are particularly significant. This is because the diversity of student demographics (in terms of identities including race, religion, first language and ability) is not well represented in the demographics of teachers and administrators.

Therefore in order for teachers and administrators to bridge the gap between themselves and students, they need to be proactive. Equity initiatives can help.

Alongside this educational imperative to act for equity, there is also a civic imperative. In Canada there is a legacy of White settler colonialism and a corresponding long history of struggle for rights for immigrants, migrant labourers, women, LGBT persons and other disenfranchised groups.

Movements for equity are integral to our ongoing history. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees group-based rights as the foundation of our multicultural society. Thus, in order to advance a pluralistic and just democratic society, our public schools must prepare young people as citizens to participate in the struggle to not only *preserve* but to *advance* the rights of all Canadians.

Challenges in acting for equity

Despite strong scholarly evidence supporting the imperative to act for equity, as well as the political imperatives for public schools to do so, challenges remain. These include:

- **Demographics:** A predominantly

White, middle-class teacher/leadership population does not demographically match an increasing diverse student population.

- **A Eurocentric standardized curriculum:** A paucity of information about non-dominant cultures and peoples reinforces the idea that certain groups deserve more recognition and power in society.
- **Narrow assessment practices:** A focus on achievement and school success in an increasingly narrow framework crowds out complexity and marginalizes opportunities for funding that supports educators working with non-mainstream families, including translators, Aboriginal support workers and anti-racism consultants.
- **Lack of knowledge of how to promote equity:** In the context of complex political landscape, or a challenging school/community, knowledge about *how to act* in ways that are constructive to wider goals of justice is often not easy to access.

Fortunately, equity-based approaches to schooling have developed as a response to these challenges. There *are* practical things schools and districts can do!

Overcoming the challenges and acting for equity

There are three key areas in which school workers' efforts for equity can be guided. These are:

- Responding to dynamics characterized as both *micro*-level (individual) and *macro*-level (group).
- Evaluating all aspects of knowledge (*in* school and *about* school) as ideological.
- Becoming aware of one's own positionality (both in terms of rank and status) in navigating the terrain of action.

Each of these strategies involves a particular set of understandings and practices. These are outlined (with some examples) below:

Micro-Macro

In order to respond to both individual and group dynamics in school settings, school workers must be able to see both the unique attributes of

a student/family/situation, as well as the group-level dynamics potentially at play in any interaction or situation. Educators can improve their ability to do this by:

- Recognizing that all individuals are members of multiple social groups, each of which have historically had more or less access to social resources and power.
- Practicing seeing at the group level. In meetings, practice moving beyond seeing a collection of individuals with unique traits, gifts and personalities to seeing the group in terms of race, gender, sexuality, class, first language, religion, ability (How diverse is the group now? What blind spots might the group have?).
- Understanding that a colleague/student/family's unique experiences take place within the parameters of broader group experiences. Think about shared group-level (macro) contexts that might lend insight into particular (micro) situations.
- Developing guidelines in school and district policies towards allocating resources to historically oppressed groups. Move the conversations away from a zero-sum-game framework of limited resources, towards an expanding/evolutionary one. The more equity, the better for all, over time, *always*.

Knowledge construction

Equity in schools also necessitates understanding the role of formal knowledge in perpetuating hierarchies. This involves the recognition that all knowledge carries the ideologies of those who produce it.

In other words, knowledge is *socially constructed*. This does not mean that laws of the physical world do not exist, but that we can think about these as either *discoverable* or *knowable*, each with very different cultural implications.

In other words, there is a cultural worldview embedded in every aspect of knowledge. Mainstream knowledge systems conceal the culturally-specific nature of knowledge. Instead such knowledge is generally presented as "objective" and "neutral" and thus

outside of cultural influence. This in turn positions other forms of knowing as culturally-situated (and thus inferior because it is viewed to be biased and "special interest").

Advancing equity by attending to the construction of knowledge can be done in ways that include the following:

- Advancing the notion that there is no neutral text. Identify the ideologies embedded in any text by asking questions like, who wrote and produced this text? Who is its presumed audience? Who will profit from it?
- Developing a tolerance for gender-talk, race-talk, etc. Provide resources including ongoing professional development to learn the connection between language and ideology.
- Ensuring knowledge of current parlance in social equity. For example, why we no longer use terms like "hobo," "Eskimo" or "Caucasian"). Recognize that language is embedded with ideology and perceptions of value go hand in hand with language and labels.
- Understanding privilege. Recognize that inequity circulates via the mechanisms of knowledge about how schools work. Immigrant families, Indigenous families, non-native English speakers and parents who themselves did not complete school often do not have enough of an understanding (nor trust) about how schools work to help their children navigate the system or to challenge it when it has treated their children unfairly.
- Re-evaluating tracking and labeling. Reconsider how the decision making around gifted, special, advanced and other placements occur. What are the demographics of the people making the determinations? Revisit and invite discussion about how determinations about behaviours might be connected to value judgments about groups. For example, determining if a student is aggressive versus assertive, impulsive versus spontaneous, argumentative versus independent.

Positionality

"Positionality" is the recognition

that where you stand in relation to others in society shapes your perspective, what you can see and understand. Members of dominant groups never *need* to widen nor change their perspective (where they stand), because their way of being is considered normal and neutral.

Unlike the dominant group, minoritized group members continuously have to develop a dual perspective about their realities, and also the reality and values of the mainstream dominant

group, so that they can behave in ways that are accepted as “normal.”

As an educator working towards equity, accounting for one’s own positionality means:

- Not assuming that everyone in any given school situations is having the same experience.
- Building a tolerance for listening. If you are in the dominant group (cisgender man, native English speaker, able-bodied etc.,) do not speak first. Instead, learn to be silent about your

experience and listen to those who have different experiences. Seek to understand.

- Lowering defensiveness. Recognize that dominant group members (men, and White folks in general) tend to dominate because we are socialized to take up more space. Practice not “answering back.”
- Inviting diversity. If you are chairing the meeting, specifically invite different voices into the discussion. Make efforts to ensure equitable participation.
- Using *status*. When in leadership positions, use your status to make space for marginalized voices. Interrupt dominant voices. Set agendas that spotlight non-dominant members of the community.
- Recognizing *rank* and forging alliances. Think about when your rank gives you power (such as if you are White, cisgender male). Work across rank, in collaboration with marginalized colleagues (such as Aboriginal, trans or women colleagues). Strategize together to interrupt oppression, build trust, develop meaningful alliances.
- Becoming aware of barriers to action. Educate yourself and colleagues about the barriers to equity that non-dominant populations face.



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The big picture: Working for change

It is integral to citizenship in Canada—as a pluralistic nation state that values social diversity—that we continuously work towards equity. This can begin in schools.

By specifically acting in ways that promote equity, administrators can encourage school workers to move beyond understanding students as individuals and to instead seek broader and more complex understandings of individuals embedded in social contexts.

Through these actions it is possible for real changes to begin in schools and for these changes to ripple out to create a more equitable society. ■

Özlem Sensoy is a professor at Simon Fraser University.

Equity: An Ethical Journey for MASS

By Ken Klassen and Coralie Bryant

At our 2013 MASS Summer Institute, Pasi Sahlberg addressed the relationship of equity to quality in school systems, based on his interpretation of recent PISA results. Most compelling was a graph with comparative results for different countries.

According to Sahlberg, years of addressing equity concerns moved Finland's school system significantly along the equity axis of the graph, without a corresponding rise of its profile on the quality axis. After years of committing to equity, the leap in quality came, putting Finland in its enviable position near the top.

This resonated with Manitoba educators; it affirmed our commitment to building more inclusive school systems and gave hope that, with time and effort, we too would see this corresponding leap in quality. In response, MASS identified equity and quality as guiding principles in their most recent statements of organizational priorities.

With the Social Planning Council and other educational partners, MASS and its members enthusiastically participated this fall in an equity study which included an online survey completed by most superintendents and a series of regional focus groups, attended by a large percentage of superintendents. This study is described in another article in this issue by Dr. John Wiens, our chief investigator, on page 19. A report on the study is expected in late summer of 2015.

At the 2014 MASS Summer Institute, Simon Breakspear was asked to take MASS deeper in our understanding of equity and what this commitment would mean to us as educational leaders. He challenged us with the observation that affixing equity as a stated goal could be seen as "leading with our chins," requiring much courage, persistence and, above all, a very clear shared understanding of what we mean by equity.

It may be fair to ask whether all the recent talk and activity around equity concerns represents a new direction for MASS, an educational buzzword that might soon fade or an overly optimistic reaching for the North Star, when we should be satisfied with getting to North Field?

To explore the journey of MASS towards this commitment to equity, I invited Coralie Bryant, our long serving and most recent past-director of MASS, to join in a conversation on this topic.

Ken: Coralie, what is your perspective on this—is all the recent talk about equity really a new direction for MASS?

Coralie: You are quite right; this is not a new direction. I became a member of MASS in 1995, when Strini Reddy was the executive director. His gift was to broaden the sense of purpose for MASS and to articulate a vision that directed MASS to commit to the original purposes of public education and its role in maintaining a strong democracy.

In the late 90s, a MASS Public Education Committee was given the responsibility of developing the MASS Statement of Beliefs in Public Education.

It begins, "Public School is the only societal institution where children from diverse backgrounds gather for a common purpose." Although you could make a connection to equity in virtually each of the stated purposes of public education, this one is the most direct: "To educate each child in a manner consistent with justice, fairness and equity."

The second section reminds us that to achieve these purposes, we must "provide safe, caring and welcoming learning environments for all children; and engage all students to their individual capacities." This document has been the banner for MASS since that time, appearing at the start of our annual strategic plan and heading the "About Us" section on our website. It was revised and updated in the mid-2000s.

The Public Education Committee also produced a video featuring Strini, in which he explores four topics concerning public education, including "The Value of Public Education in a Diverse Society." Strini demonstrates how critical it is for a democracy to provide an equal opportunity for every child in order for our diverse society to become fully educated.

Above all, Strini is a storyteller and his stories of how schools and systems were making efforts at that time to provide those opportunities still make this delightful viewing, even today.

The video was sent to every school board in Manitoba. Many of them used it at their board meetings to stimulate discussion about our role in public education. Following in that tradition, a more recent set of DVDs was produced by MASS. These videos featured a variety of powerful Manitoba voices speaking in strong support of a high quality and highly equitable public education system.

And Ken, I seem to recall an early paper on equity that came on the heels of these two publications. Is that right?

Ken: Yes, Coralie, an article on equity by another former executive director of MASS was published in 2005, in the



context of proposed provincial legislation outlining appropriate education for all students and a recently unveiled provincial aboriginal education action plan.

Arnold Reimer defined equity as equity of resources, process and outcomes. He also insisted that equity could no longer be equated with equality—fairness would require compensatory funding, flexible and highly varied programming and a deeper understanding of equity of outcomes.

He asks, “Can we hope for equity in post-school life outcomes? Can we realistically expect that somehow our public schools will bring social justice and economic equity to our society?”

Equity issues continued to be addressed by MASS in a series of similar articles, discussion papers and more recently, in a number of significant position papers, in which members of MASS take clear positions of advocacy in such crucial areas as early childhood education, aboriginal education, and mental health and wellness.

Each of these papers contain recommendations and calls to action which seek to engage the broader Manitoba community in the interest of addressing the inequities which continue to limit educational, and indeed, life outcomes for some of our children.

These position papers have also played a pivotal role in focusing the strategic planning of MASS and continue to give clear direction to professional learning in our organization. Any thoughts on that, Coralie?

Coralie: Those papers have had an influence beyond our organization, including the adoption by MTS and

MSBA of the position paper on aboriginal education, and the creation of a provincial committee by Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet to consider the recommendations of our paper on mental health.

Around the time Arnold Reimer was writing that paper on equity, MASS organized its first major conference (2003) for the wider community on aboriginal education. An overwhelming response from the educational community led MASS to organize a province-wide biennial conference series, Educating for ACTION, teaming up successfully with Manitoba Education on The Engaged Learner (2008), Social Justice (2010), Sustainability (2012), and Mental Health and Wellness (2014).

The first conference set the model for broad-based collaboration with community and educational partners in planning the program which has strongly contributed to the impact of each successive conference. The theme of equity was strongly evident in each of these events.

These large-scale conferences have been important for MASS members and their divisional teams who attended from every school division in the province. Our summer institutes in Hecla and Elkhorn have also provided the opportunity to explore themes of equity in the in-between years.

According to many members, the most worthwhile professional and personal learning experience on their journey towards a fuller understanding of equity has been a series called Ethical Leadership.

Beginning in 2007, a group of 20 superintendents met in three or four mini-retreats each year, in sessions with guest facilitators, including Robert Starratt of Boston University, David Hansen of Columbia, Nel Noddings of Stanford, Michael Fullan of the University of Toronto, Jon Young of the University of Manitoba and many others.

The Ethical Leadership sessions were open to a new group each year and many of the original participants continued for multiple years. These sessions gave superintendents an opportunity to explore the ethical dilemmas they face in their everyday work, many of which concern giving each child the fullest chance of a good education in a safe and caring environment.

Ken, you were one of the original supporters and organizers of that series, and also attended the meetings of the Social Justice Coalition, which MASS helped to launch.

Ken: I do consider the Ethical Leadership sessions to be the most important professional and personal learning experience I have had in my entire educational career. I am so glad you brought this concept home to Manitoba from a session at American Educational Research Association.

The chance to go deeper in my understanding of ethical leadership and all this entails has strengthened my sense of responsibility and equipped me with true “response ability.” I no longer see ethical leadership as simply the exercise of moral or servant leadership or even transformational leadership.

It includes all of that, but it is not just about avoiding doing the wrong thing, or doing good things. It is about purposefully and persistently doing the right thing—doing what is right for all.

The theme for our upcoming summer institute is *Acting Within an Ethical Framework*. I think this says it all. Responsibility is shared by MASS and superintendents to advocate for a truly equitable public education system for all.

Over time, our MASS priorities have been sharpened to focus on aboriginal education, early childhood education, and mental health and wellness. All of these areas have become areas of action



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and advocacy for us, in the pursuit of broader educational and societal equity.

One last thing I wanted to mention is the Social Justice Coalition, which is an open group of people from different sectors who meets once every six weeks or so. Anyone is welcome, just contact one of us for the next meeting details.

The conversation between colleagues centres on key issues of social justice and equity in schools and the community, sometimes facilitated by special guests or with presentations from local organizations or members of the group itself.

This is where educators and other members of the community can speak passionately about their personal and professional experiences in matters of equity and inequity.

We all go away with a renewed sense of purpose and commitment. What a great way to recharge the batteries for the long haul—purposefully and persistently working together towards a more equitable system, society and world!

Coralie, I think you were one of the founding members of this group and now I have the privilege of continuing to meet up with you there. Thanks for the insights into the journey of MASS and its members towards a model of ethical leadership based on a commitment to acting within a framework of equity.

Coralie: It is encouraging to see MASS's growing commitment to equity and the ways in which we have contributed considerably to the level of conversation, to the way education in this province is thought about and even to some change in policy.

And many school divisions have taken initiative locally in the areas of aboriginal education, early childhood education, wellness and meeting the needs of an increasingly diverse population. There is no question that Manitoba schools are more humane places today.

Ken: There are many reasons for optimism and hope, but I am also reminded of the words of Niigaan Sinclair, in a recent address to our membership, that we have only taken the first few of the hundred steps towards a commonly desired future.

Coralie: True. As a province, we are no closer to reducing childhood poverty, the federal government has yet to equalize funding to band schools, much greater support for the mental health needs of youth is needed and early childhood education is not yet the priority of provincial or federal governments.

These are realities that make real progress very challenging for school divisions. This makes it even more critical that we continue to press forward locally,

provincially and federally in the interests of the health and wellbeing of our children and of all of Canadian society.

This association has made its stand clear. That took some courage, I think. But we still have a long way to go and much to do together. ■

Ken Klassen is the executive director of MASS.

Coralie Bryant was the executive director of MASS for more than eight years.

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Educating for ACTion:

Improving Equity of Opportunity

By Meg Crane

The Educating for ACTion: Mental Health & Wellness conference, hosted by the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS) in November 2014, highlighted how taking care of students' mental health can improve their equity of opportunity.

One of the organizations which MASS brought in as a partner for the conference was Artbeat Studio in Winnipeg. Artbeat's vision, "To enable consumers of mental health services to engage in artistic expression that promotes recovery, empowerment and community," made the non-profit a perfect fit for the conference.

Over two days, speakers discussed how to promote good mental health for today's youth. A common theme at the conference was that young people need to belong. The repercussions of not belonging are devastating and include poor academic performance, addiction and mental health issues, according to Dr. Gabor Maté one of the keynote speakers.

Creating an environment that makes all students feel safe and welcome is key to promoting good mental health. As Debra Pepler noted during her keynote speech about navigating the digital world, "Belonging to a peer group is the most important thing for youth."

Dr. Stan Kutcher pointed out in his plenary address on school mental health that physical health and mental health are no different—someone who is not physically healthy is not healthy; someone who is not mentally healthy is not healthy. In order to improve achievement, Kutcher said schools need to be structured for students to mentally thrive. For example, he suggested that school start later in the day for high school students, as they function better later in the morning. Peer mentoring also improves



Tracey Lintott was thrilled to bring home the prize painting at the MASS conference.

the school environment. Training teachers to identify students having difficulties, track students and help them through life difficulties are also extremely helpful in supporting students' mental health.

MASS was not only concerned about the health of the youth who conference participants work with; the association organized two support lounges to help take care of the mental health of all attendees, who ranged from students to educators. The most popular lounge was the one with Mortimer and Miss Jayne, two therapy dogs. First Nations Elders and school counsellors were also available to meet with participants.

The conference was well planned and offered support for participants and great advice on encouraging the mental health of youth. More than 750 people attended both days. About 90 students participated in the main conference on Thursday and then had student sessions on Friday. Building on the success of this conference, MASS is already looking forward to another large scale conference in April 2017, partnering with MTS on the theme of Human Rights. Keep an eye out for more details at www.mass.mb.ca. ■



Therapy dogs Mortimer and Miss Jayne were excited to visit conference attendees.

Sunshower for Guidance Counsellor

Leading up to the Educating for ACTion: Mental Health & Wellness conference, Kildonan-East Collegiate guidance counsellor Tracey Lintott saw the painting donated by Artbeat Studio to be raffled off on the last day. *Sunshower* was painted by Kathleen Crosby. The painting is meant to be a reminder that people have the choice to make a better life for themselves and that they need to help one another through difficult times.

The painting touched Lintott. "I want that," she said to herself. She made the image of the painting her screensaver on her computer and thought about where she would hang it—her counselling office at school? Perhaps her cabin?

After the final plenary speech, the draw was made. The group of about 750 attendees knew precisely the moment she won—Lintott shouted out in glee and ran to the stage. All her positive thinking had paid off. The painting was hers!

Working Towards Equity in Education

By John R. Wiens

HUNGER

HOUSING

POVERTY

VIOLENCE

EDUCATION

In 2012, the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg invited interested parties to discuss the possibilities of studying efforts to achieve greater equity for students within Manitoba's public education sector.

Schools systems appear to be a small part of the poverty suite affects, such as positive home life, adequate shelter and food. Nevertheless, schools have a significant and direct impact on the quality of young people's present lives and future prospects. As such, and without negating or ignoring other factors, it is important to consider what is being done to serve students.

The intent of this research was to determine what school systems and schools do to provide an equitable education for all; what special arrangements and provisions are and can be made for those who come to school disadvantaged, disenfranchised and marginalized by socio-economic circumstances.

It is no secret that inequities exist pre-school and outside of school. While many come to school well fed, well dressed, encouraged and supported by their homes, and free from adult

responsibilities, we are aware that too many come to school hungry, cold, on their own initiative, carrying with them responsibilities for themselves and their siblings, or even the adults in their lives.

Schools often see children coping with scarce resources and supports. These students often represent families and communities that are likewise struggling. In Manitoba, thousands of families are unable to provide recreation, travel or even a healthy breakfast to their children, yet they usually assume their children will have the same access to educational opportunities as others.

School is the refuge and escape for many children and young people. It is the only place where they are freed from the encumbrances of the adult world which they inhabit; a world where they must worry, or watch their caregivers worry, about food, shelter and clothes. We want our schools to be safe havens for these students, where they are loved, appreciated and valued and where they can be successful learners, no matter the social and economic circumstances in which they may live.

With this goal in mind, the Equity in Education Steering Committee was

established to conduct a study exploring and documenting the efforts of Manitoba school divisions to address equity challenges. Committee membership included the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg (initially Marianne Cerilli, now Christina Maes-Nino), Manitoba Education (Sheila Giesbrecht), the Manitoba Teachers Society (Terry Price and Sarah Gazan), the Manitoba School Boards Association (Carolyn Duhamel), the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS) (initially Coralie Bryant, now Ken Klassen), and myself (John Wiens) as member-at-large and researcher.

The study sought to examine how Manitoba public school systems view educational equity, what they see as its core values, how they organize and resource schools, and what initiatives they have implemented to make schools more equitable. The study also invited school divisions to identify the challenges which prevent them from achieving equity objectives and potential actions, practices and policies which might assist them in their striving for equity.

The research effort was structured to provide opportunities for divisional leaders to reflect on issues of educational equity and to share their initiatives.

They also shared their thoughts about what else they might do and what public and private dispositions and resources they might need. In doing so, we wanted to help school divisions continue their efforts to achieve greater equity in their schools.

The research project included a web-based survey sent to all superintendents in Manitoba and a series of five focus groups in the MASS regions. Both activities were organized and implemented with the assistance of the executive director of MASS, Ken Klassen, and the active support and co-operation of most divisional superintendents. In total, 34 participants representing 30 school divisions participated in the survey and all but four divisions participated in the focus groups, often with more than one representative.

For MASS, this research study builds on work that began with its series of professional development sessions on ethical leadership and continued with a 2012 MASS Summer Institute presentation by Pasi Sahlberg. He identified a strong correlation between student

academic achievement and socioeconomic status.

For MSBA, the study is a natural extension of its longstanding and ongoing advocacy around poverty reduction and reflects its much earlier intervention at the national level, which led the Canadian School Boards Association to create the Poverty Intervention Profile and related tools for use by public schools boards across Canada.

For other participants, this research endeavour is an extension of their work in the area of the effects of poverty on student success and well-being. For all participating steering committee organizations, this project is a much needed attempt to retrieve an equity conversation that has lost societal support over the past three decades, being replaced by a much less ambitious human project under the vocabulary and umbrella of adequacy.

In a democracy, as recent events and public discourse have demonstrated, the idea of socioeconomic adequacy is simply not robust enough to support a rich, inclusive participatory democracy.

The survey results indicate that, while most school divisions have engaged in an initial discussion on the deleterious effects of poverty on student success in schools, many have not developed policies, practices and activities to mitigate those effects. For example, whereas 20 divisions reported some divisional activity in targeted staffing, only eight reported that initiatives to reduce the negative impact of poverty were embedded in division policies and practices.

The numbers are similar in regard to overall awareness and planning; to subsidized activities which, while valuable, appear to be more ad hoc than embedded; to divisional advocacy beyond traditional communities and within schools; to targeted budgeting for needy schools and communities; to board access to and use of equity-related data; to diversity and inclusion initiatives; to parent and school community partnerships; to teacher and staff supports; to classroom and academic supports; to additional multi-dimensional supports for physical and mental health issues;



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and to accommodation of different cultural norms and practices.

Divisions fairly consistently reported coherence of activities and practices with embedded divisional policy in the areas of school safety, school culture and student leadership and slightly less so for discipline, attendance and social support policies.

This coherence was also reflected in teaching and learning issues, such as pedagogical practices, curricular choice, authentic assessment and cultural proficiency, as well as for Early Years literacy and numeracy support, and student transitioning. Finally, about 80 per cent of school divisions reported some coordinated activities or embedded policy providing multiple pathways to student engagement or re-entry into the system.

Focus groups conducted in the five MASS regions were robust with 54 superintendents and assistant superintendent participants, representing all but four of the school divisions in Manitoba. In addition, three board chairs in three different regions responded in writing to the focus group questions.

All participants identified equity as a foundational principle and goal for both schooling and democracy, and saw education as part of the solution to achieving equity for all. Policies and practices across school divisions covered the scope and range of the survey questions from teacher preparation and development to student engagement and student voice to system culture and affirmative action.

Signs of success ranged from student participation and school completion to student and teacher well-being. The focus group conversations also identified a variety of other potential initiatives to achieve student equity in Manitoba schools. Participants expressed appreciation for a forum where they could share and think together about how to improve policies and practices. Such forums are essential for creating “fertile ground in which to plant and nurture” fundamental ideas about educational purposes and the ways and means to ensure equity in school for all students.

The final study report being co-authored by John Wiens, Sara Gazan and Sheila Giesbrecht will be completed

by June 2015. Intended as a reader-friendly resource for use by all interested in and working for equity in public education, the final report will provide more detailed information about both the survey and the focus groups results summarized above and allow divisions to determine where they are in relation to the data and how they might use it to the advantage of their students and their schools.

It is the hope and intention of the Steering Committee and the original

group of collaborators that the final report of the Equity in Education Project will provide resources, impetus and opportunity for more dialogue, direction and action to address equity issues in public schools. It is our collective and profound belief that the future of our young people and democracy rest upon our building a more just and equitable world! ■

John Wiens is a professor at the University of Manitoba.

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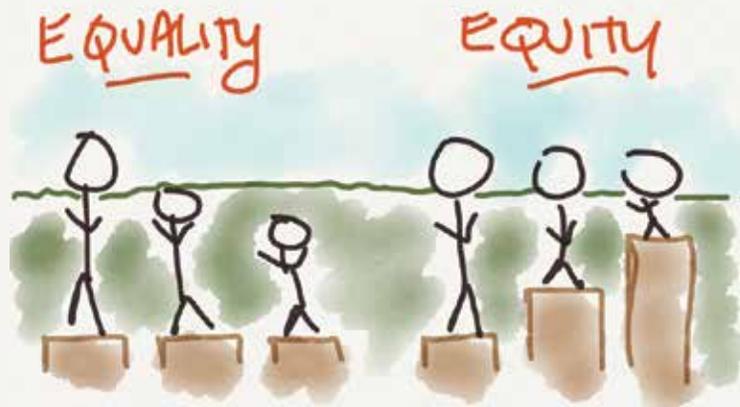
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L'inclusion scolaire pour les enfants avec des troubles du comportement

Par Simon Laplante



Sketch by Randy Dueck, superintendent of Hanover School Division, on his iPad using Paper53 during a MASS session on equity.

Les divisions scolaires du Manitoba proposent de nombreuses approches pédagogiques dans la quête d'une éducation qui se veut inclusive pour tous les enfants atteints d'une grande variété de troubles du comportement. Les défis pour une éducation inclusive sont nombreux : empathie communautaire pour ces enfants, ressources humaines qualifiées, connaissances approfondies et partagées chez les éducateurs des troubles du comportement et ressources financières adéquates.

Ces défis poussent chaque division scolaire à trouver et adopter des solutions, parfois très innovatrices, qui reflètent non seulement les grands principes d'une inclusion réussie, mais aussi les réalités de chaque communauté scolaire. Malheureusement, cette dichotomie dilue parfois les principes de l'inclusion au profit des ressources limitées dont dispose les divisions scolaires.

Et pourtant une « école inclusive est celle qui va au-delà de la normalisation. Elle se donne comme mission le plein développement du potentiel de chacun de ses élèves ». ¹ Selon la perspective ou la définition adoptée, ces programmes ou stratégies se situent donc à des niveaux très variés sur le continuum de la pédagogie inclusive.

Dans cette perspective, il n'est donc pas surprenant de voir qu'il existe dans nos communautés scolaires de la confusion, de la résistance et beaucoup de questionnement. ² D'un autre côté, il est rassurant de voir que nos communautés

scolaires cherchent des solutions et se préoccupent de ces enfants à l'élémentaire et au secondaire qui font face à de nombreux défis au niveau du comportement.

Un aspect important et souvent oublié dans cette quête d'une éducation inclusive réelle reste les défis rencontrés par les parents et les familles de ces enfants. Le but de cet article est donc de proposer un cadre de référence pour les éducateurs ³ pour mieux comprendre les énormes pressions sociales et émotionnelles que vivent (et survivent) les parents et les familles des enfants avec des troubles du comportement.

Bélangier cite plusieurs recherches (Beauregard, 2006; Doyle, 2001; Leatherman, 2007; Salisbury, 2006) qui démontrent que si les parents et les communautés scolaires sont en général très positifs envers l'inclusion, ils le sont moins lorsque l'expérience inclusive devient inefficace soit par manque de connaissance ou de ressource ou encore par des perceptions négatives véhiculées dans la communauté.

Dans ce contexte les parents et les familles font face à de nombreux défis. Dans sa recherche sur l'impact des troubles relatifs à l'alcoolisation foetale sur les relations familiales, scolaires et communautaires des parents, Laplante ³ a interviewé huit familles (parents) qui ont un enfant atteint du syndrome d'alcoolisation foetale.

Cette recherche fait ressortir une nomenclature de cinq dimensions (vulnérabilité, complexité, ténacité, capacité et complicité) vécues par les parents dans leurs relations entretenues avec la communauté scolaire, le couple, leur famille et finalement le trouble du comportement lui-même.

Malgré le fait que cette nomenclature soit fortement liée à la présence de troubles relatifs à l'alcoolisation foetale au sein de la famille, le présent article propose que les manifestations de ces dimensions sont tout-à-fait applicables aux relations vécues par des parents avec un enfant atteint de d'autres troubles du comportement (Asperger, Autisme, OCD, etc.). Une meilleure compréhension de ces cinq dimensions permettrait, on le souhaite, aux éducateurs de mieux apprécier les défis de ces parents et de mieux planifier des interventions inclusives.

La vulnérabilité

Les parents des enfants avec des troubles du comportement sont souvent vulnérables dans la mesure où ils n'ont pas de références (absence de normes) pour la discipline de l'enfant. Ils ont tendance à se percevoir souvent comme inefficaces, bien que fiers de réussir avec l'enfant.

Ils remettent en question leurs approches et leurs réactions et cela cause souvent des frictions dans le couple. Les comportements agressifs de certains enfants menacent la sécurité des autres membres de la famille.

Les parents se sentent souvent isolés et jugés par les autres membres de la communauté. Les parents sont souvent hésitants et très émotifs face aux difficultés de l'enfant. Accepter que le comportement ne soit pas nécessairement intentionnel joue ici un rôle important dans la perception que la communauté a des comportements des enfants et de la réaction des parents face à ces comportements.

Il est difficile de comprendre qu'un individu puisse agir avec violence surtout lorsque le déficit cognitif est invisible ou que l'individu en question présente généralement des habiletés cognitives normales. Il est difficile de comprendre qu'un parent puisse choisir d'ignorer les comportements négatifs de son enfant dans le but d'éviter une escalade de ces comportements.

La complexité

Il s'agit ici d'un ensemble d'émotions directement liées au degré de difficulté à comprendre les causes du trouble et ses conséquences sur les habiletés intellectuelles et émotionnelles d'un individu ainsi que sur les relations sociales de ce dernier, surtout dans le contexte où le trouble est souvent une déficience invisible.

Comprendre le trouble du comportement demande beaucoup de patience et de temps pour les parents. L'incohérence entre les comportements et les habiletés cognitives de l'enfant crée souvent beaucoup de conflits pour le couple. Il est difficile pour les parents de comprendre ce qui se passe, car il y a souvent un manque d'information sur le trouble qui peut se manifester de différentes façons chez les enfants.

La ténacité

La ténacité se caractérise par le caractère d'un individu ou une organisation qui garde espoir et n'abandonne pas un projet ou une cause. Le parent se donne des stratégies pour gérer le comportement et les besoins de son enfant à long terme.

Dans ce contexte, les parents doivent développer un modèle de discipline qui soit adapté aux besoins de l'enfant, modifier ce dernier et les attentes au fur et à mesure que l'enfant grandit et que ses besoins changent.

Les parents adaptent leurs attentes selon les difficultés de l'enfant et non selon le modèle de discipline qu'ils ont vécu avec leurs propres parents. Le couple doit continuellement redéfinir ses attentes et ses réactions. Le couple comprend que le trouble du comportement sera une préoccupation à long terme.

La capacité

La notion de capacité représente un ensemble des moyens financiers, émotionnels, physiques et intellectuels dont disposent les parents pour non seulement

éduquer et inclure les enfants ayant des troubles du comportement dans la famille et la communauté, mais aussi gérer à long terme leurs besoins et les coûts associés au trouble.

Les comportements de l'enfant peuvent gruger les capacités intellectuelles et émotionnelles des parents. Les parents se sentent souvent inaptes à gérer les comportements de l'enfant à la maison comme sur la place publique.

Les comportements parfois destructeurs de certains enfants ont aussi un impact économique. Pour les couples qui ont un enfant, un adolescent ou un adulte atteint d'un trouble du comportement, la planification à long terme et les considérations financières deviennent aussi importantes.

La complicité

Cette condition représente l'ensemble des relations positives entretenues par les parents dans des contextes publics ou privés et basées sur une entente profonde, spontanée et souvent inexprimée entre eux. La complicité entre les partenaires au sein du couple fait référence à l'habileté de chacun à lire les émotions de l'autre, à connaître les limites de chacun.

Les troubles du comportement de l'enfant a pour effet de rapprocher les partenaires ou de les séparer. L'intensité des comportements force les partenaires à s'appuyer mutuellement sans arrêt ou alors est source constante de conflits et de remises en question. Le fait que les partenaires soient généralement conscients du degré de difficulté auquel ils font face et que leur réussite avec l'enfant est source de fierté renforcent cette complicité.

Quelle que soit la nature de la famille (biologique, adoptive, d'accueil), les parents qui sont responsables d'un enfant avec des troubles du comportement vivent de nombreux défis au sein du couple et au sein de leur communauté. Les cinq dimensions présentées dans cet article se veulent une plateforme pour aider les éducateurs à mieux comprendre les besoins de ces parents et mieux encadrer les discussions inévitables et essentielles entre parents et éducateurs dans la planification des interventions auprès de ces enfants.

Bélangier² démontre que les parents d'enfants ayant des besoins particuliers

ont des opinions très variées en ce qui concerne l'inclusion scolaire de leur enfant. Certains ne souhaitent pas voir leur enfant dans une classe régulière car leurs besoins sont trop sérieux pour faire partie de cette classe.

D'autres parents croient que l'inclusion de leur enfant dans une classe régulière est essentielle et leur permettra de mieux s'intégrer et de participer dans leur communauté. Dans les deux cas, ces parents s'entendent pour dire qu'une inclusion réussie demande beaucoup de planification, de collaboration, de formation chez les enseignants et de ressources.

Les émotions vécues par les parents qui vivent sous le même toit qu'un enfant avec des troubles du comportement méritent donc d'être clarifiées car elles permettent aux intervenants de mieux centrer les stratégies et les supports. Il serait intéressant de voir comment les notions de vulnérabilité, complexité, ténacité, capacité et complicité se manifestent dans le cadre de l'établissement scolaire, en particulier chez les éducateurs qui accueillent au sein de leur classe ces enfants ayant des besoins particuliers au niveau du comportement. ■

Simon Laplante is a professor at the Université de Saint-Boniface.

In our quest for an effective and inclusive pedagogy for children with behaviour difficulties, we often forget about social and educational challenges parents face. This article discusses the five dimensions (vulnerability, complexity, tenacity, capacity and connectivity) that characterize the nature of emotions and relations experienced by parents with children affected by FASD, which could be used to better understand the reality faced by all parents of children with behaviour difficulties.

Understanding these five dimensions offer an opportunity for educators to appreciate the profound impact children have on parents' self-perception and relationships, and could help us better plan around the needs of children.

For the English translation and a complete list of references, go to www.mass.mb.ca.

First Nations Youth Mobility in Manitoba

By Sheila Giesbrecht and Emily Grafton



Tell me about your interest in mobility

Sheila: Years ago, I lived in New Mexico and worked with migrant workers in vineyards. I noticed workers' children often joined them for parts of the year and were educated in educational programs at other times.

Living in both New Mexico and Illinois, I noticed the transient nature of migrant farm families and the educational programming designed to support them. Returning to Manitoba, I was struck by the parallel between the mobility of migrant farm children and First Nations youth.

Emily: While co-leading a pilot project on student mobility with MFNERC, I met Sheila. This project looked at what experiences might arise for students transitioning between First Nations schools and Manitoba public schools. We facilitated seven partnerships between First Nations and provincial schools with high rates of student mobility to look at on-going challenges and improvement opportunities. It became evident that mobility is a regularly occurring obstacle.

Why are students mobile?

Sheila: Student mobility is often related to socioeconomic status. Low income families may move to pursue employment and affordable housing. Others experience family disruptions, homelessness, military assignments or educational opportunities.

Emily: In my work with MFNERC, it became clear the reasons First Nations students move are often different from those of non-Indigenous populations. These reasons seem to be ignored or misunderstood.

While the factors Sheila describes influence First Nations student's mobility, other factors are equally common. Many communities participate in land-based economies, so students will be on trap lines or hunting for extended periods.

Indian Residential Schools have resulted in a legacy of distrust and resentment towards state education systems. Also, as a result of the reserve-making process, many communities have familial relations and obligations in other communities, which can result in students moving back and forth.

Some students must transition after elementary or junior high, as secondary level education is not offered in their community. The remoteness of many Manitoba First Nations communities means some lack important services that people must travel to use.

What is the impact of student mobility?

Sheila: In general, literature indicates that the negative impact of mobility on student achievement is small (Jones, 1989; Mehana, 1997). Instead, it is the intertwined variables that surround highly mobile students that impact academic achievement.

The National Commission on Migrant Education indicates that, in general, "less than great life conditions

Over the last four years, Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning and Manitoba First Nations Resource Centre (MFNERC) have collaborated on the Student Transition Project. In 2013, Brandon University's VOICES project joined, providing additional support through monies and graduate research support.

This project focuses on supporting First Nations students transitioning from band-operated schools to public schools. Seven communities have participated and developed insights and exemplars.

The project suggests areas needing additional exploration and conversation. The following is a conversation between Manitoba Education's Sheila Giesbrecht and Emily Grafton, who was a researcher with the VOICE project at MFNERC, about one of these areas: mobility.

surround highly mobile students, (Martinez, 1994). Because of frequent moves, mobile students face isolation, family separation, socio-economic disadvantage, lower levels of parental education, low graduation rates, limited language proficiency, poorly funded and insufficient educational programming (Aescher, 1991; Pribesh & Downy, 1999).

Mobile students face multiple barriers to academic achievement, high school completion and post-secondary attainment. They are more likely to experience academic, social and emotional challenges. Large gaps in instruction; a lack of educational continuity; adjusting to different academic standards, curriculum and expectations; new school environments and lack of appropriate placements challenge their success.

Research indicates that students who change schools four or more times by Grade 6 are a year behind (CRESPAR, 2000) and experience increased grade retention and school leaving (Guevermont, 2007; Jimerson, 2002). They also face additional social challenges with each move (Pribesh & Downy, 1999).

Emily: These challenges are all experienced by First Nations students. More importantly, perhaps, is the impact mobility has on First Nations students' access to cultural education and Indigenous-based knowledge systems.

In Canada, indigenous peoples have been restricted from practicing our own cultures and knowledge systems. The Indian Residential Schools are an example. Today, efforts are underway to introduce and maintain cultural practices and knowledge systems in education systems, as well as to provide our peoples with self-determination for our own education (Royal Commission Report on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996).

The impact of this restriction created various student experiences. Important to the issue of student mobility is the impact on cultural identity and knowledge transmission. Student mobility can limit access or interrupt cultural education programming. To stress cultural programming is not to place its value above or in replacement of other programs, but to signify its importance in ensuring a positive and successful education experience when mitigating student mobility.

What is the impact of student mobility on schools?

Sheila: Highly mobile students pose challenges to educational systems. School divisions with high numbers of mobile students face disproportionate attendance patterns and challenges as students enter schools throughout the year. Adequately securing funding and translating this funding into staffing positions, calendar decisions and educational services can be a challenge as student numbers fluctuate.

Schools and classrooms also face additional stress in working with mobile students. Tracking credits, the transfer of records and adequate testing and placement of students can be time consuming and costly to schools and divisions (Neuman, 1988; Sewell, 1982). Academic rigour and curriculum congruence is difficult to maintain for classrooms with high numbers of mobile students.

Classrooms with high numbers of mobile students tend to review curriculum repeatedly, have less curriculum continuity and face adjusted academic standards (CRESPAR, 2000). Students may fail to receive adequate academic supports, receive appropriate placement and have completed credits transferred successfully between institutions (ERIC Digest, 1991).

Literature also indicates that students who enter the classroom mid-semester are often judged unfavourably by teachers (Neuman, 1988; Sewell, 1982).

Emily: These issues also exist for First Nations students. In Canada, education is a provincial jurisdiction, except for schools in First Nations communities which are funded by the federal government. The federal and provincial governments provide very different budgets to these schools, resulting in a funding deficit for the federally-funded schools (Mendelson, 2008; Swayze, 2005).

When students move back and forth from federal to provincial schools, they are in effect moving back and forth across a funding gap. This means that the schools in First Nations communities have fewer resources and may have different rules. This can lead to regulatory inconsistencies.

What is the picture in Manitoba?

Sheila: There is little provincial research that gives an accurate picture of First Nations mobility within Manitoba or across Canada (Education Policy Institute, 2009). Divisional reports provide good starting points for discussion. For example, the Winnipeg School Division publishes the Student Demographic Report each year. The 2013-14 report indicates that 21 per cent of elementary students and 18 per cent of high school students were mobile during that school year. Several schools faced mobility rates of over 60 per cent (Winnipeg School Division, 2013).

The Manitoba Centre for Health Policy provides additional information about student mobility (2008) and supports the idea that students from low socioeconomic families experience more school changes. Statistics Canada suggests that aboriginal families are more mobile than other Canadians (2001). This high level of mobility creates challenges for planning and implementing programs in education, social services, housing and health care.

Emily: One of the challenges in addressing student mobility amongst First Nations students is that we lack data. It becomes difficult to craft effective supports when the extent of the challenges is not understood.

I noticed during my involvement with this project that the methods for tracking student mobility do not provide the picture that we need to understand mobility amongst First Nations students in Manitoba. This often leaves a school with a statistical picture of how many students transfer in and out each year. It does not, however, capture the variables of students who might transfer multiple times in an academic year or the reasons for their extended leave. In my view, without data to lead policies and programs, the schools felt limited in building solutions.

What are some practices that you would recommend in addressing high rates of student mobility in First Nations communities?

Sheila: Since the 1970s, states with high mobility have experimented with a variety of ways to link health and

academic information. The Ford Foundation developed a paper “passport” for students moving between states. Students carried their own passports to facilitate enrolment in appropriate educational programs. Developing linked student records would help to alleviate the challenges schools face in supporting mobile students.

Many jurisdictions working with migrant farm workers in the US have been successful because they have developed common curriculum and programming. For example, a student moving between Mexico and California can move between clusters of schools and continue with similar educational programming. Some schools use modular-based instructional units, while others use more hands-on project-based approaches. Some districts hire teachers that move with students between areas with high mobility.

Many programs have also identified core instructional strategies that appear to mediate cultural, socioeconomic and systemic differences. Strategies such as high expectations, outcome-based education, constructivist strategies, developing meta-cognitive skills, sequential skill instruction and the use of alternative cognitive models have shown success.

Emily: Educational programming and effective instructional strategies are important. Effective policy makers create practices based on proven outcomes, research and best practices. Yet, practices that are Indigenous-centered to support highly mobile First Nations students do not exist.

While the conversation on this is mounting among academic and policy-makers, we do not have theories or tested

practices to draw from. So, we must look to non-Indigenous-centered practices for inspiration. The challenge is that these practices are simply not Indigenous-centered.

Can a formal education system capture the learning potential, opportunities and outcomes that arise from a student spending time participating in land-based economies, such as the trap line? How can a semester system be built around the requirements of seasonal time spent on the land?

Many Indigenous scholars, however, are critical of Canadian education practices. There are large pools of work that demonstrate how these practices can be assimilative (Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Burns, 2000). Questions emerge: Will these practices work in an Indigenous-based setting? Can they adequately deal with factors of colonialism? Will they be assimilative? Thoughtful Indigenous-centred practices need to be developed.

Sheila: I suspect that multiple and flexible entry points is another important piece. Additional academic research, especially within Manitoba’s context, would be a valuable policy tool.

What do you think a Manitoba model for highly mobile First Nations students could look like?

Sheila: When I think of highly mobile students within Manitoba, I can imagine successful programs that are modelled after migrant farm worker programs in the US. I imagine First Nations students who are able to study consistent thematic units within their home communities and urban centres. I imagine the use of extended learning

opportunities and benchmarks to assess skill completion and the use of linked student records that supports continuous services and supports. I imagine teachers of mobile students working collaboratively across First Nations and public systems to support students.

Emily: How can we apply these practices in Manitoba? There are many best practices that work to ease the challenges in immigrant and agricultural families that can be useful guides. However, there is a difference that cannot be ignored. There is a legacy of colonialism.

Many of Canada’s Indigenous education experts are critical of perpetuating colonialism or instilling neo-colonialism. A Manitoba model, therefore, would need to bridge best practices while supporting Indigenous-centric perspectives, values and practices.

Existing research frameworks could aid this. The First Nation Centre’s OCAP (ownership, control, access and possession) is one example that requires researchers to entrench their intent, process and outcomes within a framework of decolonization.

I think we can do that, but we need to start a dialogue about student mobility in Manitoba’s First Nations communities. It is long overdue. ■

Sheila Giesbrecht is a student success consultant for Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning.

Emily Grafton is from Manitoba First Nations Resource Centre.

For a complete list of references, go to www.mass.mb.ca.

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Equity & Early Education

A student investigating the natural world.



By Elaine Lochhead

Early childhood development and its societal importance have gained global attention. Governments and nations hold forums on early care and education. World researchers and experts agree that early childhood and education need attention.

Young children play a vital role in society now and for the future. As Irwin, Siddiqi and Hertzman (2007) wrote in *Early Child Development: A Powerful Equalizer*, “What children experience during the early years sets a critical foundation for their entire life course.”

Schools are asked to do many things beyond what was expected of them when the Public Schools’ Act was formulated. Conversations have moved to equity and dialogue has changed. Do equity and early childhood education go together in Manitoba? What is truly possible? Why should we look at this? What should our actions look like? What data do we look at to determine success?

Equity is a multifaceted and complex issue. It can also be stated simply—all children are entitled to equitable educational opportunities and an expectation of equity of outcomes. The complexity comes when we try to determine how this is possible as creating equity does not mean treating everyone equally.

This statement often garners controversy; some argue that everyone should have the same program and opportunity. Creating equity suggests providing each student with the resources

necessary for an education of equal quality to that of any other program across Manitoba. However, the same is not equity. Equity means that some children will have different opportunities than others based on socio-economic factors and cultural differences.

We do not enjoy equity in Manitoba schools. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (2012) says, “The highest performing education systems across OECD countries are those that combine quality with equity. Equity in education means that personal or social circumstances such as gender, ethnic origin or family background, are not obstacles to achieving educational potential (fairness) and that that all individuals reach at least a basic minimum level of skills (inclusion).”

“In these education systems, the vast majority of students have the opportunity to attain high level skills, regardless of their own personal and socio-economic circumstances.”

Why is it so important that we have equity for our children? Early interventions can change the paths of children who are deprived of opportunities for growth and development available to others. Research tells us that the earlier the intervention, the more successful it will be.

The current mandate of public education begins at age five in kindergarten and we know interventions made even at that age can make a difference. Is the answer to provide full time kindergarten for everyone? Would that be equity? Do we attempt to provide the same services in Thompson and Virden as in Winnipeg?

Equity is not sameness; it is ensuring those who do not have supports to provide a strong early childhood experience get supports. An equity based approach for early childhood and education means resources must become a right, not a luxury.

Strong pre-school programming provides more success for children. Currently, that is not an option everywhere in Manitoba. In rural locations, pre-school programming is often non-existent and in many urban settings it is limited. Public schooling beginning in Grade 1 is mandated, but many children enter school with greatly differing levels of experience, vocabulary and social skills.

The Manitoba Association for School Superintendents (MASS), as part of the public school system, shares the legal mandate to support the learning of children from Kindergarten to age 18. But the Manitoba Department of Education and Advanced Learning has created the Early Childhood Education Unit, which focuses on children from birth to age eight. Trustees and administrators across the province also recognize the value of good early education practices and are looking for effective ways to provide strong programs for our children.

Some school divisions are adding time to half-time kindergarten programs or creating full-time kindergarten. Others are providing a junior kindergarten experience and others are providing a hybrid approach using early childhood educators.

School divisions focused on providing quality programming in the early years are struggling to find the best options. Decisions are being made about where to put enhanced programs and whether they need to become division-wide. Trustees and senior administrators are concerned over the increased cost.

The MASS Early Childhood Education Ad Hoc Committee has been looking at early childhood education and has collected information from all the school divisions in our province. As public schools, we know our current limits of responsibility, yet some school divisions have stepped outside the traditional boundaries and have initiated pre-school programs.

The Department of Education has stepped outside their traditional mandate and created the Early Childhood Education Unit. We have heard the challenges that face rural and urban divisions. We have heard from school divisions who have started programs for children prior to kindergarten age and those who have committed to full day, every day kindergarten.

Why have school divisions done this? The general consensus in Manitoba is that children need to have quality programs to support their learning. All school divisions want their students to do well, achieve their potential and

reach beyond their potential. Regie Routman (2014) says, "The earlier we intervene, the greater chance we have to effectively reduce and eliminate the achievement gap in the long run."

Knowing the critical importance of early learning, the MASS committee will be releasing a new position paper that looks at the vision of Early Childhood Education providing recommendations for the future of early childhood learning in Manitoba public schools.

When school divisions look at equity and early childhood education, the conversation starts with data that shows where the needs of their students are greatest. When school divisions analyze data, it is readily apparent that some students come to school with different skills sets. Some are ready to learn complex concepts while other students come with fewer social skills, weaker vocabulary and academic skills that could be considered below the norm.

The big question is, how do we provide different programming for one region or ward in a division or for a single school and not necessarily for all the others? This is a difficult conversation, but equity requires us to engage in conversations and actions that tackle this dilemma.

In my home division, our data identifies which kindergarten students have

the greatest needs. We provide a hybrid model of pre-school and kindergarten for students of kindergarten age. While this is popular in the five identified community schools, it creates conversation in other schools around when they might get this programming. Students of kindergarten age attend kindergarten in the morning and have the opportunity to attend a nursery school program in the afternoon.

These children have a full day of learning, even though the province currently supports only half-day kindergarten, which is not actually mandatory. This type of programming puts demands on early childhood consultant and pressures on divisional budgets.

As divisional leaders, we have the challenge of determining what programs students in other schools may need and whether or not we can afford the programming there as well. Those answers are always challenged by communities who want the same. Dare it be repeated? The same is not equity!

Other school divisions are introducing different models of early learning. They are tracking students, collecting longitudinal data and looking at patterns in results over time. We know what the research says; early learning is critical for our society.

Researchers across our country have studies that show that brain development and language development are at their peak in the early years. The more stimulating the environment is for a child, the better the child flourishes.

As educational leaders in our province, we see the need to advocate for equity, for strong early childhood programs, with qualified instructors and early years teachers. We also see the need for development programs that help each child develop skills and knowledge in a manner that allows them to have greater success in school.

Early childhood programming affects families and all of society. The need for family support is critical for effective early childhood learning. The current research tells us more about brain development and the importance of early learning than we ever knew before. Researchers around the world are trying to find ways to help families

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understand the importance of providing a stimulating environment rich in language for their children.

Public schooling is an institution still accepted as critically important within our society. So, should we play a greater role in early childhood education prior to kindergarten? Many researchers believe so, based on our established role in society.

Child care is best suited to provide this support with staff trained in the delivery of early language and learning; however child care is not a required or mandated

organization. If equity is the ideal, how can it be reached if organizations or institutions are not able to deliver what is necessary for effective learning?

Facts that no longer can be disputed show that early childhood is the most important developmental phase and that early childhood experiences affect us for the rest of our lives.

Investment in early childhood is the most powerful investment any country or province can make. Achieving equity is complex, messy and difficult, and requires collaboration from all partners.

Understanding these critical facts, education must continue its quest for equity for all children and must take an active role in engaging in early childhood learning. ■

Elaine Lochhead is the assistant superintendent of student services at Seine River School Division.

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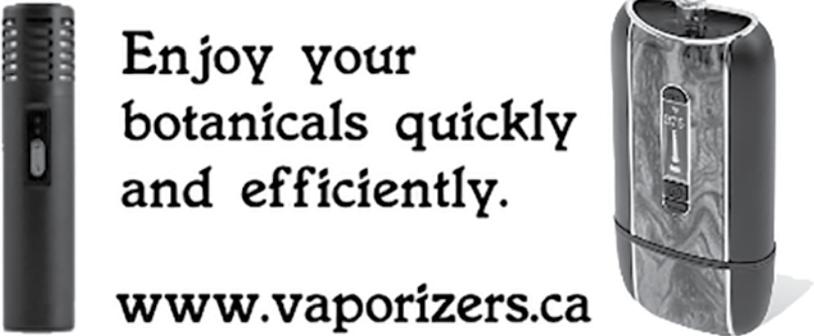
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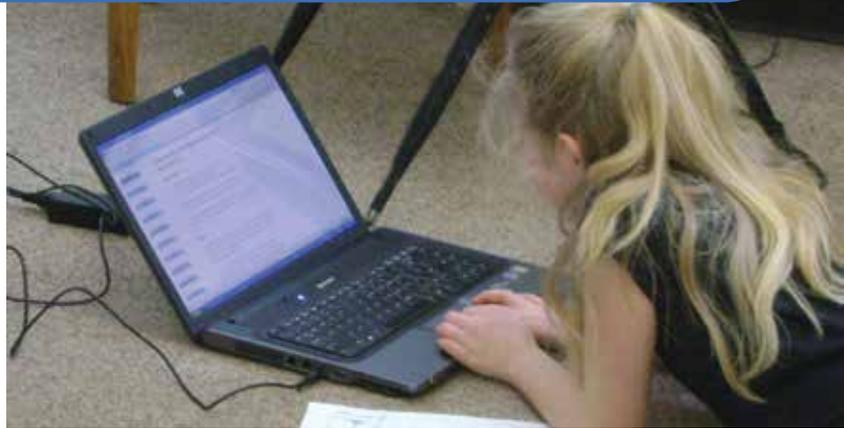
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200912-24N0391-EP

Connectivity & Technology Access:

Leveling the Bar



Technology allows students around the world to connect.

Having access to technology is important in many classrooms.

By Tim De Ruyck and Reg Klassen

Computer labs used to be their own entity in schools and computer courses were separate from other classes. Depending on their size, schools would equip and maintain one or more of these labs, often serviced by a single dial-up Internet connection. Email was still a novel idea and there was reliance on fax machines for sharing information outside the school.

Today, schools have become hubs of intricate wireless interconnectivity, with insatiable appetites for speed and storage capacity. Computer classes are mostly a thing of the past. Teachers and students use technology as an integral part of day-to-day teaching and learning across all subjects. Many students own devices, communicating through ever-changing social media platforms.

This pervasiveness of technology has created learning opportunities for students that have never been available before (Fidel, 2015, p. 207). As a result, learning environments have changed as this technology has increased student interactivity, engagement and achievement. Therefore, quality access to technology and connectivity have become a part of public education, as essential as textbooks and chalkboards were.

Real-time information about world events provides immediate access to students with Internet connectivity. Remember when instructors recorded a news broadcast or television special and played it in class? We discussed the old information as if it were current. Today, students are watching world events as they unfold, before the evening news.

Technology allows students to pursue knowledge based on their interests and opens a world of information beyond what is taught in classroom. High level connectivity allows students the option of real-time collaboration with students anywhere in the world. Students with access to collaborative online tools can consult with remote experts and can share their final product with people around the world (Boss, 2015, p. 112).

Divisions have struggled to keep up with the demand for connectivity and the variety of ever-evolving devices, spending millions of dollars on infrastructure and hardware to ensure technology does not create an environment of haves and have nots within public education.

In a survey of school divisions conducted in February 2014 by Innovative Technology Services of Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning, it was noted that an estimated \$39.3 million had been spent within Manitoba's public school divisions on connectivity infrastructure. Along with the estimated

\$2.2 million in annual operational costs, this has been extremely difficult for school divisions to absorb, with many rural divisions having to finance the associated costs over multiple years.

These are also dollars that could have gone elsewhere to support student learning. With the increased cost of connectivity and technology there has been no corresponding decrease elsewhere in budgets.

In Saskatchewan, an initiative known as CommunityNet was launched in May 2001, at a cost of \$71 million over six years. The intent was to broaden high speed Internet access for public education, post-secondary education, libraries, health, government and First Nations communities across the province.

The initiative had a dramatic and immediate effect on high speed Internet access, growing from just eight communities with high speed access in 2000 to 366 connected communities within three years. The annual ongoing cost to public education is \$3.7 million.

In Manitoba, many individual school divisions are paying back the multi-year loans needed to finance the necessary infrastructure that they were required to fund locally.

Manitoba has a great expanse of geography that is challenging to navigate. Communities in some regions are small, remote and isolated.

These communities have not enjoyed many modern conveniences that the rest of Manitoba has. This geographical challenge has been an acceptable rationale used to perpetuate the argument that it costs too much when it comes to Internet connectivity.

Consideration of cost alone is the wrong place to begin. The discussion needs to begin by asking, "What is equitable for all students in Manitoba?"

What is more concerning in the discussion is that it may be masking a deeper

issue. All of our large urban centres in Manitoba have Internet connectivity; we assume it should be that way. An opposite kind of assumption exists as well, which is that small, rural and remote communities, particularly in the north, are unable to have connectivity due to unreasonable costs of provision.

Our societal acceptance of this current situation adds another layer to an already existing acceptance of haves and have nots. How we act towards other groups of people or communities is an indication of how we

think about them. "Our prejudice toward others guides our thoughts, organizes our values, and influences our actions" (Sensory & DiAngelo, 2012, p. 32).

Although the number of students who are able to participate in Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) programs continues to increase, there is a gap which school divisions are struggling to address. In 2014, Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning published a document titled "Bring Your Own Device Guide," where it is noted (p. 2): "Regardless of the

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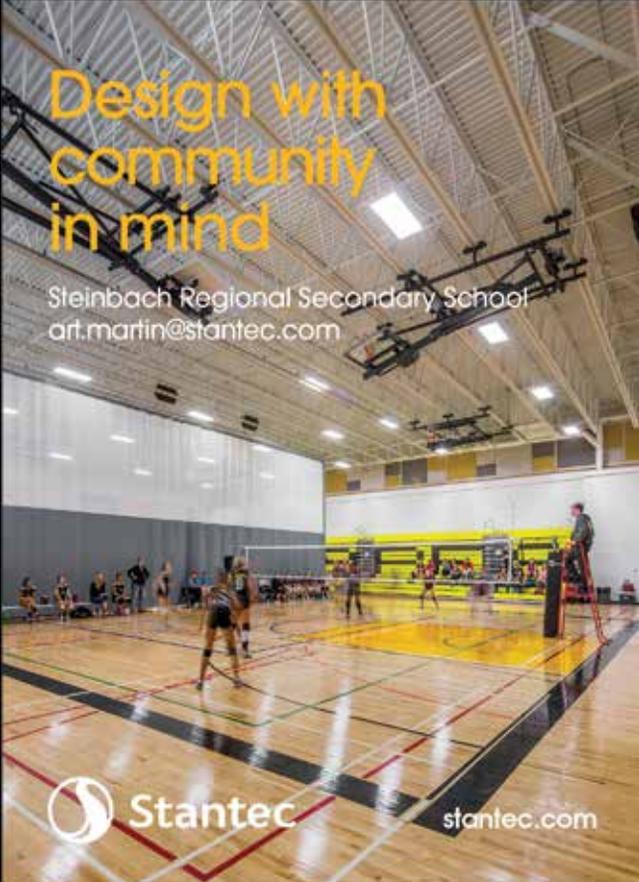


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BYOD model selected by a school division, equity in access to devices is a primary concern to Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning and it must be addressed.

It is critical that all students have access to the tools and information needed to be successful in their studies. This should extend to allowing students to take school-owned devices home, if necessary, so that they can have access to their school work at home as would students who use their own devices. Establishment of a BYOD program must take the question of equity into account and provide a solution for students who do not have access to a personally owned device.”

Over the years, we have gone from separate computer labs, to computers in classrooms, to mobile labs, to students needing Internet access on their individual devices. In response to the growing need to access to devices, divisions have increased technology budgets substantially, with some divisions implementing 1:1 student to device ratio initiatives.

The cost of hardware acquisition provincially within public school divisions has also been in the tens of millions, in

addition to the costs of connectivity. According to the 2014/2015 Manitoba Frame Report (p. 38-39), in one school year Manitoba public school divisions spent \$48,293,786 on information technology and management information services.

Part of the issue lies in the fact that provincial funding of school divisions is largely based on enrollment, with arguably not enough of a differential to recognize the increased cost of connectivity for rural, northern and remote divisions with smaller enrollments. Ultimately, the divisions with the highest costs in these areas have the least capacity to generate funds.

Conversely, in metro school divisions, where geographic and infrastructure challenges do not exist to the same extent, divisions benefit most from property assessment and provincial funding based on enrollment. If we truly believe education must be equally accessible for all, then concerted efforts are needed to ensure infrastructure and equipment are part of the equation.

School divisions in Manitoba receive an annual grant from the Manitoba Text

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Book Bureau of \$60 per student, designated for textbooks and other educational material. However, hardware is not on the list of purchasable items.

When the Manitoba Text Book Bureau came into existence, this may have made sense, but, today, in order to access the vast richness of online material, hardware is a necessity. It can be argued that much of what is contained in textbooks is available online. Therefore, the use of the textbook grant requires a different alignment for this century. If we are to move forward in an equitable manner for all students, divisions will need greater flexibility in using the grant to access educational resources for their students.

In conclusion, the complexities that come with connectivity and the hardware necessary for access cannot be minimized to questions of affordability or expense. Currently, our actions indicate that equitable learning opportunities for students are based on convenience and affordability. If, as a province, we believe in equity for all students, then we need to deliver.

Wilkenson & Pickett (2010) state, "greater equality, as well as improving the wellbeing of the whole population, is also the key to national standards of achievement and how countries perform in lots of different fields" (p. 29).

Recent achievement scores by Manitoba students indicate room

for improvement. Providing modern resources would be a significant step. Thus far, we have found arguments keeping us from providing equitable learning opportunities for all students. It is imperative that we work collectively towards eliminating the inequality of lack of consistent connectivity. ■

Tim De Ruyck is the superintendent of Turtle Mountain School Division.

Reg Klassen is the superintendent of Rolling River School Division.

For a complete list of references, go to www.mass.mb.ca.



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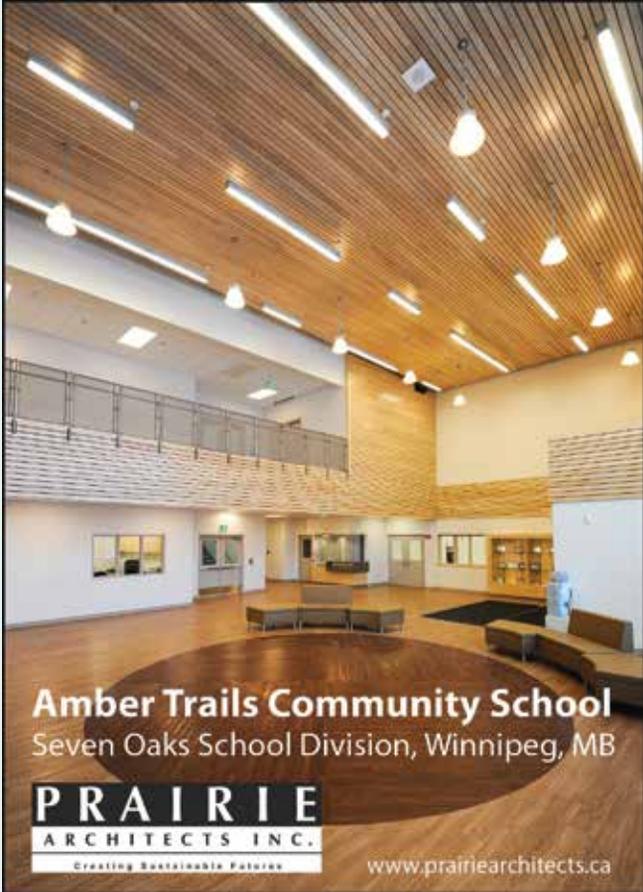
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