

A MANITOBA TEACHER REFLECTS ON A MARKET  
IMPERATIVE FOR SCHOOL REFORM

By

Teresa A. Rogers

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF EDUCATION

Department of Educational Administration, Foundations and Psychology  
University of Manitoba  
Winnipeg, Manitoba

© Teresa A. Rogers, August 2002



National Library  
of Canada

Acquisitions and  
Bibliographic Services

395 Wellington Street  
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4  
Canada

Bibliothèque nationale  
du Canada

Acquisitions et  
services bibliographiques

395, rue Wellington  
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4  
Canada

*Your file Votre référence*

*Our file Notre référence*

The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

0-612-80011-3

Canada

**THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA  
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES  
\*\*\*\*\*  
COPYRIGHT PERMISSION PAGE**

**A MANITOBA TEACHER REFLECTS ON A MARKET IMPERATIVE  
FOR SCHOOL REFORM**

**BY**

**TERESA A. ROGERS**

**A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University  
of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree**

**of**

**Master of Education**

**TERESA A. ROGERS © 2002**

**Permission has been granted to the Library of The University of Manitoba to lend or sell copies of this thesis/practicum, to the National Library of Canada to microfilm this thesis and to lend or sell copies of the film, and to University Microfilm Inc. to publish an abstract of this thesis/practicum.**

**The author reserves other publication rights, and neither this thesis/practicum nor extensive extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's written permission.**

## ABSTRACT

Over the past fifteen years, a global market imperative for school reform has largely gone unchallenged. Apologists try to grapple with the effects of rational planning on the people involved in the school system, but it is unusual to find arguments in the school reform literature that resist the inevitability of the sweeping changes that are occurring in education. This thesis rejects the alignment of education with international market goals for schooling on the grounds that economic rationality undermines the purpose of schools as preparation for participation in a democracy. Outcome based schooling, schools of choice and the publication of standards test results strengthen notions of private interest, individualism and consumerism, and they erode conscious collective efforts to build a common good. The argument of the thesis demonstrates that educational policy in Manitoba during the 1990's was aimed at serving the utilitarian needs of the marketplace and, in effect, the government subordinated the goal of improved student learning to other less student-oriented demands for school improvement. Indeed, from the standpoint of a humanist engaged in a radical democratic project for the realignment of the purpose of schools as preparation for democratic life, Manitoba educational policy was unethical and undemocratic.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
<b>APPROVAL PAGE</b> .....	ii
<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	iii
<b>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION</b>	1
1.0    MY POSITION AS RESEARCHER.....	3
Theoretical Perspectives .....	5
Three Assumptions .....	7
Research Focus .....	9
1.1    PREVAILING RHETORIC ON MARKET REFORM FOR SCHOOLS .....	11
1.2    A COUNTER DISCOURSE TO THE PREVAILING RHETORIC.....	17
1.3    METHODOLOGY AND THESIS ORGANIZATION .....	20
<b>CHAPTER TWO: A TEACHER'S EXPERIENCE OF MANITOBA SCHOOL REFORM</b> .....	25
2.0    SITUATING THE NARRATIVE.....	25
2.1    A RETURN TO TRADITIONAL NOTIONS OF TEACHING AND LEARNING .....	26
Back to “the Basics” .....	26
Reorganization of the School Program .....	27
Standards Testing.....	30
Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment .....	34
2.2    LEADERSHIP REDEFINED .....	37
2.3    THE ROLE OF PARENTS.....	43
2.4    FORMAL AND INFORMAL PUBLIC CONSULTATIONS.....	44
<b>CHAPTER THREE: THE BLUE BOOK</b> .....	48
3.0    THREE CLAIMS TO JUSTIFY SCHOOL REFORM.....	48
3.1    CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION AND ASSESSMENT.....	49
3.2    AN ECONOMIC IMPERATIVE FOR THE PURPOSE OF SCHOOLS.....	56
3.3    MEETING THE NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS AND SOCIETY .....	57
3.4    THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT, INDIVIDUALS AND SOCIETY IN SCHOOL REFORM .....	63

<b>CHAPTER FOUR: AN ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATION OF THE BLUE BOOK</b> .....	67
4.0 <b>CHALLENGING THE RATIONALE FOR SCHOOL REFORM</b> .....	68
4.1 <b>CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION AND ASSESSMENT</b> .....	75
An Incomplete Definition of a Basic Education .....	75
Uniform Standards .....	78
Common Curricular Frameworks .....	80
Contradictory Notions of Instruction .....	81
Intensification of Teacher Work and Constrained Collegiality .....	84
A Loss of Professional Autonomy .....	85
An Absence of Leadership .....	86
Punitive and Arbitrary Notions of Assessment .....	88
4.2 <b>COMPETING PURPOSES FOR SCHOOLS IGNORED AND RE-ALIGNED</b> .....	94
4.3 <b>AN EXACERBATION OF EQUITY ISSUES</b> .....	97
The Commodification of Students .....	97
Effort, Ability and Entitlement .....	101
Awarding and Withholding Privileges.....	103
Schools of Choice and Strengthening Private Interest .....	105
4.4 <b>HAZARDS FOR A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY</b> .....	108
Undermining Democratic Decision Making and Dialogue .....	109
The Development of Antagonistic and Adversarial Relationships .....	111
Blaming students, teachers and parents.....	114
Economic Rationality and the Repression of Critical Thinking.....	116
Equity Issues Unaddressed.....	119
Citizenship, Individualism and the Common Good .....	122
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: EDUCATION FOR CITIZENSHIP AND POLITICAL INCLUSION</b> .....	126
5.0 <b>DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF EDUCATIONAL POLICY</b> .....	127
Consulting the Literature on School Change and School Reform .....	127
Respecting Democratic Processes.....	128
Creating the Conditions for Democratic Dialogue.....	128
Starting With a Moral Purpose.....	131
Addressing Contradictory Aims.....	134
Attending to the Language That Describes our Purposes .....	136
Clarifying Differences Between System and Human Accountability .....	137
5.1 <b>THE ALTERNATIVE: EDUCATION FOR A DEMOCRACY</b> .....	139
A Set of Concepts for Understanding Citizenship .....	141
Notions of Instruction and Leadership .....	143
Reflection and Self Understanding .....	146
5.2 <b>CONCLUDING COMMENTS</b> .....	147
<b>REFERENCES</b> .....	152

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Over the past fifteen years a disturbing shift toward a market-based ideology of schooling has caused policymakers, educators and parents to abandon alternative notions of school reform. A substantial body of well-documented educational research literature (Apple, 1999; Barlow and Robertson, 1994; McLaren, 1999; McMurtry, 1991; Postman, 1995; Taylor, 1996) cautions us to be wary of the influence of market forces on school reform and the corresponding threats to democracy. A market imperative for schooling reasserts notions of individualism and private interest and weakens public support for a common good. Market-driven initiatives such as the setting of standards, provincial testing and schools of choice align schools more directly with serving economic functions and promote a redefinition of citizenship as economic allegiance. Meanwhile, expectations of publicly funded, universal education are quietly being eroded.

Missing from the discussion of the marketization of schools are varied personal perspectives that tell the story of the implementation of market reforms. It has been my experience that Manitoba's pro-market educational policy during the 1990's significantly changed teaching and learning, by creating new tensions within the school community, causing confusion and reinforcing negative teacher beliefs and practices. Disruptions of the status quo were to be expected and even welcomed, and for many teachers this would not have been problematic if the reforms had represented what teachers deemed to be meaningful and worthwhile changes to the process of schooling.

Manitoba school reform was intended to improve the quality of education that Manitoba students received. Curricula were changed and accountability measures were introduced in order to clarify, measure and regulate student learning. This "stick and carrot" approach involved setting performance objectives, quantifying student achievement and then, rating students and schools in the belief that this would improve the quality of learning. Do these methods really improve curricula, instruction and assessment? Do they make learning more educational? School reformers have used these behaviourist approaches in their efforts to demonstrate school improvement in the past to little avail. Yet, once again, they are part of the school improvement package that market reformers contend will make schools more effective and rigorous and prepare students for their role in sustaining the economy. In addition, Manitoba school reform also adopted

market rhetoric laced with assembly-line metaphors and a commitment to the bottom-line. What happens to human beings when words and phrases such as: below standard, uniformity, continuous improvement, efficient, and accountable are used to describe a vision of education? Lastly, in a democracy, government representatives are entrusted with the responsibility of making educational policy based upon the will of the citizens, but their choice of policies ought to be aligned with the principles of non-repression and non-discrimination (Gutmann, 1987). Did school reform in Manitoba honour and respect both of these principles? Thus, the guiding purpose of this thesis is to examine the educational, humanistic and democratic implications of Manitoba school reform during the 1990's.

Preparing children for participation in a democratic society is more critical than ever because of a global world. In the 1996 UNESCO report on education, Learning: The Treasure Within, Jacques Delors notes that the challenge of the twenty-first century will be learning to live together harmoniously in the global village. He contends that the test of our commitment to democracy is how we grapple with the tensions of modern society such as the conflicts that flare up as result of social and economic injustices and which emerge between nations and ethnic groups. Delors argues that the revitalization of democracy is dependent upon citizens learning to live together in their neighbourhoods, cities, regions and countries and that education plays an integral role in helping to make this happen (p.16-17).

The 1996 UNESCO report on education tries to strike a balance between material progress and democratic concerns with equity, inclusion, injustice and respect for the environment. The report recognizes that a social preoccupation with economic growth is unlikely to change in the near future and that democratic interests must have a significant role in education policy. I concur with the UNESCO report recommendation. The school reform that was introduced in the 1990's still shapes the Manitoba school experience and in other countries, such as Britain, where market-driven reforms have been tried and proven to be ineffective, they are being tried again (BBC news, March 2002). The market imperative for schooling continues to play a prominent role in discourse on school improvement; yet, this does not dictate our rejection of alternatives. In fact, the opposite is true. Democratic discourse is needed more than ever to provide alternatives to the market rhetoric that prevails throughout education reforms across the western world in the hope that our commitment to democracy can be renewed. One alternative would be to revitalize notions of citizenship education and the preparation of students for their role as future citizens.

However, this would require a re-evaluation of the purposes of schooling and a new school reform plan for meeting democratic aims through the school system.

I will turn now to a description of the various roles that define my position as a researcher and relate how I believe my interest in democracy and education originated. From there, I will highlight the critical and feminist theoretical perspectives that have guided this study. These theoretical perspectives have led to three assumptions that I believe have greatly influenced this work and I state these as well. The introduction then moves to a delineation of my research focus and a brief summary of the relevant literature. The introduction concludes with an explanation of the methodology and organization of the thesis.

### **1.0 My Position as a Researcher**

I believe it is important to acknowledge my role as a researcher in order to situate my place within this study. As I reflect on the impact of school reform in Manitoba, on me as a teacher and on those with whom I have worked, including students, colleagues and parent communities, I have come to recognize the importance of what Maxine Greene (1978) calls "moral wide-awakeness" or becoming conscious of one's own consciousness. Greene encourages teachers to examine how their realities are constructed and to develop an awareness of the multiple perspectives that influence how we make sense of our lived worlds. She believes that teachers are more than just functionaries because they have in mind a sense of purpose that leads to a desire to create a better world for students. Greene's vision of teachers echoes that of Kieran Egan (1997) who declares that in order to be a teacher, one has to be a scholar.

With these ideas in mind, I will define my position as a researcher. I am a wife and new mother, teacher, vice-principal and university student. I have a love of learning that has been nurtured by many caring teachers, some of whom work in schools and others who do not. My passion is my work as a teacher and vice principal, and I am committed to making the school where I work a place that is caring, just and fair. In fulfilling this commitment, I have searched for a deeper understanding of the way in which philosophy, politics and education intersect and influence what happens in schools. This quest has led to my belief that the purpose of education is preparation for participation in a democracy. It is this conviction that has led to this critical analysis of the educational, humanistic and democratic value of market reforms.

Upon reflection, I believe that my orientation toward a democratic vision of education originated with a series of events that occurred during my first year as an Education student. These events led to my view of schooling as a universal right to which all students were entitled, without fear of discrimination or exclusion.

I came into the teaching profession reluctantly. Given that there were a number of teachers on my father's side of the family, it was assumed that I too would choose an Education program at university. My grandmother had begun her career in a one-room schoolhouse after completing Normal School in Ontario and since that time, two aunts chose to become teachers as well. Being the eldest grandchild and female, it was thought by my family to be quite fitting for me to choose teaching. I would follow in the footsteps of the women before me.

After just four months in the Faculty of Education, I was ready to leave because I did not find the course work very thought provoking. Most of what I remember about my first year of Education was learning how to prepare a lesson plan. We focused on the technology of teaching, at the expense of developing an understanding of the purpose of schools and examining beliefs about teaching and learning. Numerous hours were spent on the generation of seemingly purposeless activities – what teachers refer to as "busy work". While acknowledging the importance of using teaching technologies in helping students learn, I thought teaching was about more than that. I became bored and frustrated with my course work and convinced myself that I needed to find a program that was more suitable to me. I went to see my advisor and told her that I had made the wrong faculty choice and that I wanted out. She listened patiently and suggested that I wait to make my decision until after I had spent time in the classroom. As our first teaching practicum was scheduled to start soon, I agreed.

I was assigned to a Special Education class with my collaborating teacher, Pat, a British woman in her mid-forties. The classroom appeared to be chaotic, yet upon closer inspection, there was organization to the students' activities. Under the teacher's warm, caring, creative spirit, the students took risks in their learning, felt good about themselves and were proud of what they learned in school. Although the students were marginalized from the rest of the school by being put into a Special Education class, Pat did what she could to create a sense of belonging for her students, both in the classroom and in the school as a whole. This was no easy task. She struggled to eliminate the discrimination students experienced by challenging

the beliefs of staff and other students in the school about this class. She fought for their right to participate in learning opportunities that were provided for the other students in the school, and she insisted that the students be treated with dignity and respect. At the end of my practice teaching, I sensed that Pat was quite exhausted by her efforts to bring about changes in the school. However, her conviction of the value of working toward making a difference in the lives of her students was unshaken.

Much of what discouraged me from a career in teaching was my notion that teaching was more about perfecting the delivery of a set curriculum than understanding why we do what we do. Being in Pat's classroom challenged me to think about education differently. The experience made me reassess my decision to leave the Faculty of Education because I began to think about the possibilities of education and the role of schooling in creating a more equitable and just society. Teaching is important work. It is much more complex and dynamic than I first understood it to be or how I think many others understand it today.

Teaching is about having a vision of what education could be. While I realize that market-driven school reform is well-established in Manitoba and elsewhere, and I realize that school systems are unlikely to look different in the near future because of the resistance to change and the expense of implementing new changes, I believe that a study such as this one has relevance. In this examination of school reform in Manitoba, I have searched for the deeper meanings hidden within the Manitoba government's actions to improve schools. It is my hope that the ideas that are examined in this study will contribute to similar discussions of market imperatives for schooling and that future democratic debates about the purposes of schooling will continue to focus on these issues.

### **Theoretical Perspectives**

My frustration with school reform in Manitoba led me to the writings of humanists engaged in radical, foundational democratic projects. Writers such as Jean Bethke Elshtain (1993), Paolo Freire (1970), Maxine Greene (1988), Amy Gutmann (1987), Peter McLaren (1999), Chantal Mouffe (1996), Nel Noddings (1992) and Iris Marion Young (1996) propose critical and feminist theories through which we can problematize, contest and reconcile what defines realities. The work of these writers is relevant to this study because they provide compelling reasons for engaging in liberatory projects that renew commitments to educating for a democracy. Through these writers, and others, I have learned that educating for a democracy requires teachers to see students as individuals and imagine what we want for them. As a

democratic teacher, I am committed to the quest for economic and social justice and I begin this quest through my work in the classroom. I am looking for spaces within my work to mediate curriculum and institutional structures in order to enable all students to participate fully in their school experience without fear of discrimination or exclusion.

As citizens, democratic teachers have both the freedom and responsibility to voice concerns. Each of us plays a role in working toward reaching a common understanding with others, while acknowledging our differences. We come to these "social covenants" (Elshtain, 1993) through listening and through dialogue. Collectively, we decide what rules will guide our discourse. Our work is characterized by an ethic of care as defined by Noddings (1992) who claims that schools must primarily be concerned with caring for children. She says that schools should aim first to "encourage the growth of competent, caring, loving and lovable people" (p.xiv). We also need to have an awareness of oppression and an openness to learning about and transforming our world and ourselves. We accept the fact that there will be conflict and that any agreement that is made is provisional, yet we continue to work together because of our belief in democracy and our quest for a common good.

Reassertion of democratic principles is a fundamentally humanist act. My own notions of a humanist can largely be attributed to Paolo Freire (1970) and his compassionate, groundbreaking work, Pedagogy of the Oppressed. Freire described the humanist as someone who works with the oppressed rather than for them. The humanist is someone who recognizes that the oppressed must own his or her struggle. Freire's notion of "conscientizacao" or the development of social, political and economic awareness is the goal to which humanists aspire. They seek to reach this goal by enabling the oppressed to become Subjects (those who know and act) rather than Objects (those who are known and acted upon). A real humanist can be "identified more by his trust in the people, which engages him in their struggle, than by a thousand actions in their favour without that trust" (p.42). A humanist unveils what is problematic about realities and teaches the oppressed how to deconstruct those realities for themselves.

Freire's definition of a humanist calls for renouncing practices that reinforce inequity and exclusion. In support of this thinking about revolutionary pedagogy, McLaren (1999) suggests a starting place for how this work might begin. He advocates the exposure of corporate agendas hidden in educational policies in order to counter the destructiveness of market-based reforms. It is an argument for the



elimination of structures, policies and practices that marginalize the poor, women and people of colour and the reconstruction of a vision of what might be. He contends that the power of revolutionary pedagogy lies in the subject being able to reveal the hidden meanings of the world through narrative. Revolutionary pedagogy is affirming because the subject is able to both name and oppose the hidden practices that lead to exclusion. McLaren explains that through narrative the subject makes a commitment to transform the politics of human exploitation.

It is thus that I begin this journey while recognizing that the project of a radical democracy is never complete. All forms of agreement are partial, provisional and product of a given hegemony (Mouffe, 1996). The authority of the prevailing discourse that espouses a market-based notion of education must be challenged. As I look to finding new ways of reconciling the arguments for economic progress with those of respect for human identity and integrity, I am conscious of the assumptions that influence my work as a researcher.

### **Three Assumptions**

To further clarify my position as a researcher, I will share three assumptions that underpin this study's aim to revitalize the discussion about democracy and education:

- It is a citizen's responsibility to determine whether education leads to democracy.
- Democracy is a human achievement that requires continuous interruptions; therefore, I can reject what others may determine to be inevitable.
- I have faith in the individual and collective capacity of people to work in inclusive ways.

I will elaborate briefly on each of the above assumptions so that readers may engage more fully in the arguments presented and develop their own perspectives.

The first assumption describes my position as to the responsibility of citizens living in a democracy. In Reflections of a Siamese Twin: Canada at the End of the Twentieth Century (1997), Saul describes the Inuit quality of "isuma" to summarize the context of positive nationalism and the public good within which competing social and economic priorities need to be addressed. This concept of isuma as an intelligence that resides in social responsibility has to do with having the will to participate in making and remaking our worlds. In adopting this belief, it is my will to undertake a project that I hope will help others better understand the essentially undemocratic character of market reform.

The changes that have occurred to schooling in Manitoba and elsewhere since the mid eighties are disturbing, and I believe that as a conscientious citizen I have a duty to speak out along with others about what I find objectionable. This sense of social obligation is tempered by the wisdom of Elshtain (1993) who reminds us that to take on a sense of responsibility toward remaking our worlds is not to "lapse into dour moralism, nor to universalize a giddy and boundless compassion, but to take up the specific, concrete, burdens of one's own culture" (p.90).

Accepting the first assumption -- that it is a citizen's responsibility to voice concerns -- implies that we also accept the notion that nothing is inevitable. This leads to my second assumption about citizens having the power to cause things to look differently and that this power resides in our freedom to consider alternatives (Taylor, 1991). The way things are does not dictate the way things have to be. Deterministic thinking is a trap that gives rise to despair rather than hope. It is always within our means to change what we find to be problematic or intolerable. As Greene (1985) contends in the following quote, borrowing the phrase "savage inequalities" from Jonathan Kozol (1991), we can choose to do something about what we see happening to public education as a result of market reforms. Greene (1985) states that "people can choose to resist the thoughtlessness, banality, technical rationality, carelessness and savage inequalities that now undermine public education at every turn" (p.2).

Greene (1988) also rejects the argument of inevitability that is sometimes offered by the apologists of market reform for abstaining from social action to change what undermines democratic society. Greene asserts what she calls the "dialect of freedom" to describe her sense that as human beings we are entitled to freedom and it is our vocation to exercise the freedom that we have to make sense of and change the world. This thesis engages the dialectic of freedom in its refusal to accept the argument of inevitability in order to explain why the school experience of some students is wrought with conflict and exclusion while for others schools are inviting places full of possibilities. Like Greene (1985), I claim that our different realities will lead us to freedom as we identify and push against the boundaries that limit participation through the marginalization and exclusion of students. The rationale of inevitability becomes intolerable when one learns to see how it perpetuates injustice.

This leads to my third assumption. I have faith in the individual and collective capacity of people to create possibilities for addressing societal and human needs within a framework of democratic

principles. It is through an individual becoming engaged with others in a community that notions are contested about who holds the authority to make decisions about education. It is through this engagement and exchange of ideas that democracy takes shape in our daily lives. The will to act or become engaged is presupposed by a belief in the possibility of humanity to transcend what divides us for the good of all.

Elshtain in Democracy on Trial (1993) puts it this way:

The democratic social covenant rests on the presumption that one's fellow citizens are people of good will who yearn for the opportunity to work together rather than continue glaring at one another across racial, class and ideological divides, assuming ill will on the part of others. (p. 33)

For Elshtain, the desire for a community of people to reach a common good is based fundamentally upon a faith in humanity to work collectively to enrich the quality of our individual lives and the life of the community. In accordance with Elshtain, I too believe that working toward a common good is a life-affirming conviction, integral to any discussion of education for political inclusion and one that lends credibility to democratic dialogue about the purposes of schooling.

### **Research Focus**

This thesis will develop a personal perspective about what happened in Manitoba education as a result of market-based reforms. More specifically, this journey is about analyzing and understanding my experiences with school reform in Manitoba as a teacher living in a democracy and working toward enacting democratic principles. My goal is to understand, in human terms, the influence of market forces on education reform and how these economic imperatives violated democratic ideals. I hope to expand my awareness of what it means to be a democratic teacher working in schools at a time when schooling is being influenced and restructured by market-driven ideology. This study is about challenging my ideas and creating a more democratic vision of what might be. Finally, I want to provide both alternative perspectives and actions to the market agenda for school reform.

Through this study, I also hope to better understand how market reform has transformed societal notions about the preparation of all students for participation in a common life. In a democratic vision of Canada, what is it that compromises the opportunity and ability to participate in society? While recognizing that corporate values are presently very much a part of the educational system in Manitoba, I am worried that our commitment to collaboration, equity, inclusion and the building of human capacities for the development of such have been put aside. Market reforms for schooling have been unable to address these

fundamental democratic and humanistic concerns; therefore, proponents of this kind of school reform have yet to justify their agendas for school restructuring. I also object to the aggressive public promotion of market solutions for remedying what market reformers believe to be ailing schools. Market reforms are being hailed in education by more than just the apologists who claim that this shift was inevitable given the new status of economic rationality in political and social discourse. Some market promoters are staunch advocates who tackle educational issues with a mean-spiritedness that has no rightful place in discussions about students, teachers and schools. For example, using a word like "deficient" to describe students who require adaptations and modification to their school program or referring to the transfer of teachers from one school to another as a "turkey trot" (Clifton, 2001).

Presently, there is a renewed interest in revitalizing the connections between education and democracy. As yet, these are small voices in an arena still dominated by market forces, but I am encouraged by the fact that these alternative discourses are starting to emerge. It is crucial that we be reminded of the importance of democratic ideals and the necessity of democratic debate in any consideration of school change. I believe that the time has come to deconstruct the arguments that sustain market ideology. Critical questions, which will bring contentious issues in market ideology to the surface, need to be asked. The conventional wisdom of market rhetoric needs to be refuted. Dewey's (1964) questions about the purpose of schools and preparing students for participation in a common life are helpful in directing this inquiry. His interest in community and democracy led to his proposition of criteria by which we can measure social progress. He states that:

The two points selected by which to measure the worth of a form of social life are the extent to which the interests of a group are shared by all its members, and the fullness and freedom with which it interacts with other groups. (p.99)

Accordingly, if we hope to move forward in our advancement of society through school improvement then we would expect that the goals of school reform would be to improve social equality, freeing more people to participate in democratic dialogue that seeks to build a common good.

In conclusion, this study is about sharing my hopes and dreams for an education system derived from a citizen-based democracy that works toward equity, caring, fairness, respect for difference and a common good. While this may seem too utopian for some readers of this study, I believe it is our ability to

conceive of a world that has respect for the human condition that sustains the struggle we must undertake in seeing our dreams take shape.

### 1.1 Prevailing Rhetoric on Market Reform for Schools

"Kids today can't read or write!" "In the good old days, kids actually learned something in school". We've all heard the constant refrain. It's been repeated throughout years past and seemingly gains credibility every time it is repeated. This unsubstantiated cry is seized upon by proponents of market reform in order to gain support for their simplistic, "can do" (Smyth, 1991) approach to remedying literacy challenges that schools face. The notion that kids today can't read or write is unsupported in literacy research, yet public ignorance about this continues. Using "back to basics" rhetoric in education, at the same time that 'end of century' policymakers speak of the information society and knowledge economy, seems highly contradictory. How does a return to traditional practices prepare students for the entirely new world that awaits them?

The literacy myth is not the only myth that market supporters perpetuate in order to strengthen their rationale for school change. Others, largely advanced in the media, include: education spending has been increased, yet more students are dropping out of school; and big business is creating highly skilled jobs, but graduates do not have the skills needed to meet the requirements of these employers (Barlow and Robertson, 1994). In a later chapter, I will review some statistics that market promoters of school reform use to support their arguments. There is a lack of substance behind this public discourse; however, at this point I draw attention to these popular misconceptions because they were manipulated by education reformers at the end of the century to advance their political and ideological interests. These untruths provide the rationale for opening the door to market influences in school restructuring by circulating the notion that public schools are failing students and society.

Market supporters of school reform have a keen interest in sustaining myths about public education because they want to increase public acceptance of the idea that the drive toward economic competitiveness on a world stage necessitates school restructuring and funding cuts. Reforming schools begins with aligning the purpose of schools more closely with the goal of preparing workers for their role in sustaining economic growth and, in particular, the profitability and expansion of the free market. Thus, we see in market models for schooling an emphasis on the development of skills and knowledge, namely

traditional basics and technology, that market supporters proclaim to be aligned with the future needs of the marketplace. Saul in The Unconscious Civilization (1995) helps to explain the hold that the marketplace had on society. He states:

We are enthralled by a new all-powerful clockmaker god—the marketplace and his archangel, technology. Trade is the market place's miraculous cure for all that ails us. And globalization is the eden or paradise into which the just shall be welcomed on Judgement Day. As always with ideologies, the Day of Judgement is imminent and terrifying. (p.19)

I believe Saul uses this foreboding description of society's fascination with "corporatism" to reinforce the message that the situation we currently face in education, with the alignment of schools and the market place, is one to which we need to give more consideration. In fact, as Kohn suggests, "we are now living through what will surely be classified as a particularly conservative, even reactionary, era in education" (p.6). It is vital that we understand the goals of the market clearly and inform ourselves of how these goals are accomplished.

Market models of education (Chubb and Moe, 1990; Gerson, 2000; Holmes, 1988; Nikiforuk, 1994) champion choice, privatization, competition and the reduction of government responsibility for social welfare. Apple (1999) states that these goals can largely be attributed to a new power bloc forming within society that is currently advocating a market agenda for schools, which he believes, is representative of a "survival of the fittest" mentality or social darwinism. This power bloc consists of an alliance of neo-liberals and conservatives, religious fundamentalists and the new, accountability-minded middle class. The power bloc sees some members of society faring better than others because of their willingness to work hard, their desire to succeed and as possessing certain natural abilities that lead them to deserve society's rewards more than others. Social difference is largely negated and people are treated as if the playing field was level. I would also add to Apple's analysis of market notions of schooling that it is suggested that charitable organizations will attend to equity issues (Clifton, 2001).

According to Apple (1999) the union of neo-liberals and conservatives has evolved from the neo-liberal embrace of the market metaphor as a tool for creating more effective schools. Markets are believed to be natural and neutral and that those opposed to them are also opposed to effort and merit. He states that for market supporters, it is only "common sense" to accept these notions as valid; thus, their strategies for reforming schools are considered both pragmatic and sensible. Apple explains that neo-liberals claim that

markets are "natural and neutral, and governed by effort and merit... those opposed to them are by definition, hence, also opposed to effort and merit" (p.4). Positive results are the rewards for the effort and merit of the individual actor; thus mechanisms are needed for generating evidence of the entrepreneurial efforts of the actors. Apple goes on to note that this marriage of neo-liberal and conservative agendas for creating effective schools has led to schools of choice, the notion of schools as centres for training future workers and the tightening of controls for evaluating the performance of teachers and students. Proponents of the market recommend allowing market solutions to correct perceived problems in schools, believing that schools ultimately will become more innovative and that there will be satisfaction of individual and societal needs. Concerns shift away from so-called marginal interests such as respect for difference, equity and inclusion toward a preoccupation with the bottom line and the wealth of the nation.

Apple further contends that the conservative influence on educational reforms has led to widespread acceptance of ideas that have little basis in research findings. Reforms such as charter schools, voucher systems and others that at one time would have seemed radical have become commonplace and are now viewed as common sense. He takes the conservative reconstruction of what is common sense very seriously, and argues that the consequences are far reaching. The conservative positions on educational reforms are presented as appealing to common sense, using discursive strategies that are plain speaking. Opponents of conservative reforms are considered part of a conspiracy to deny the "truth" or as advocates of what is "fashionable" in education. Thus, any progressive ideas for educational reform are dismissed as not following common sense.

Appropriation of the term common sense is one example of how the discourse on market reform can be misleading. References to market strategies building a strong sense of community and purpose, attending to notions of diversity or leading to freedom, personal responsibility and fairness (Bossetti, 2000) also need to be examined. A critical reading of the literature reveals the contradictions. For example, it is incongruous that one would seek to build community and attend to diversity while advocating strongly for competition and entitlement. Such disparities in the literature on market-based school reform caution readers to review the arguments carefully. As Bruno-Jofre and Henley, (2000) have argued, researchers wanting to develop a better understanding of Canadian polity need to examine how the market imperative has permeated language and the construction of meanings.

Also important to an understanding of market models of schooling is the development of closer ties between education and business. Corporate involvement in school reform is deemed appropriate and desirable if students are to be prepared for the future, and this includes giving transnational corporations and global organizations the authority to develop educational policy. It is contended that there is a direct link between student performance and the performance of the economy; thus, it is not uncommon to see the IMF, World Bank, MAI and APEC participating in global discussions on education. It is also not unusual to see the content of these conversations, namely the securing of economic interests, influencing what happens in classrooms (Barlow and Robertson, 1994) and in schools worldwide. Both big business and the world money holders have much to gain and much to lose with the ebb and flow of the free market; therefore, untapped resources such as students and schools are being eyed for what contributions they can make to ensure that the market expands. This is of particular concern in light of what is known about the emergence of transnational corporations who dictate social policy and threaten the strength of democratic influence (Dobbin, 1998; Rebick, 2000; Robertson, 1998; Saul, 1995).

In Canada, the expansion of market-driven notions of schooling was supported by the active involvement of both the Economic Council of Canada and the Conference Board of Canada (Barlow and Robertson, 1994; Taylor, 1996) during the early 1990's. Market models of school reform were adopted in Alberta, Ontario and Manitoba. Market reformers suggested that Canada was not ready for the information age and that our economic prosperity as a country would soon be threatened as a result of the implications of free trade and globalization. End of century alarmists raised concerns about society's inexperience with technology and the lack of alignment between schools and the workplace. Thus, economic leaders adopted new roles as authorities on social policy and they were warmly received. Business solutions were sought to address social issues and management gurus were called upon to share their insights on how to create more effective, efficient, accountable and competitive school systems. Stephen Covey, Peter Drucker, Peter Senge, and Ken Blanchard became well-known names in school board offices as schools jumped on the Total Quality Management, Win-Win, and strategic planning bandwagons. Management ideals took root in the school system.

In Manitoba, this economic rationality led to notions of market-driven school reform that caused the school system to be examined for its competitiveness and cost effectiveness. Increased taxpayer



resistance to previous funding levels was used by the government to respond to the public's cry for financial accountability in schools. "Reduce the debt" was a popular mantra and the government used this mantra to substantiate the reduction of social spending. This approach met with some success. During the last seven years that the Conservative government of Manitoba was in power, public school funding was slashed by \$135 million dollars (Winnipeg Free Press, March 14, 2001).

Society's acceptance of market schooling rhetoric as conventional wisdom has led to the withering of critical discourse -- discourse that would bring to the surface contentious issues in market education and propose alternatives. This is unlikely to change as long as citizens continue to passively accept the market imperative and fail to voice concerns about the absence of competing notions of schooling. Economic viability, accountability and other market values should not be the predominant measure of what is possible in our schools.

While market models are beginning to be found wanting, there is a considerable range of responses to market reforms by academia. One view, such as Michael Fullan's (1998), suggests that market reforms for schools are inevitable and that it is our role as educators and educational policymakers to adapt our ideas to supporting a market imperative for schools. These apologists for market influences on schools operate from a scientific paradigm and are concerned with finding methods for instituting market reform more effectively and with being able to reproduce these methods in other places. Fullan never reaches the level of critique in his analyses of market reform and never questions the "one-size-fits-all" approach to school improvement. Criticism of market reforms for schooling is dismissed as resistance to change.

Like Fullan, his colleague Hargreaves (1997), is yet another supporter of scientism who is concerned about what happens to people during the implementation of school-based market reform. He describes some of the dangers of school reformers following a market imperative, but his focus is on helping people manage the inevitable shift in education in allowing the needs of the economy to dictate what happens in schools. In Hargreaves' opinion those who reject market notions of schooling are avoiding the inevitable. He believes that "adopting the ostrich position toward economic change makes no sense" (P.10). While I agree that we should not stick our heads in the sand, I will argue that there are alternatives to acquiescing to economic determinism.

Cuban (2000) offers a second perspective on possible responses to market notions of schooling. He adopts an historical perspective on school change as he traces our current "intractable dilemmas" in education to their historical roots. These dilemmas include the modern preoccupation with competing concepts such as: public versus private; democracy versus indoctrination; freedom versus accountability and a common good versus personal liberty. He is interested in the historical patterns of school reform and the school system's apparent resistance to change. Cuban does not reject the inevitability of the market and instead, is searching for ways to overcome the intractable dilemmas. He encourages his readers to question the underlying assumptions of school reforms such as schools of choice and voucher systems; however, Cuban does not move beyond a description of the historical tensions that exist between competing civic and individual values.

Mc Murtry (1991) also analyzes market-driven school reform from an historical perspective, however, he distinguishes himself from Cuban (2000) by rejecting the inevitability of the market imperative and deconstructs claims made by market reformers that the purposes of the market and education are compatible. McMurtry contrasts the goals of the market with those of education, reveals their contradictory aims and contends that complying with market demands for schooling is reductive and threatens the foundations of democratic society. McMurtry argues that the subservience of education to economic determinism robs society of its capacity to think because aligning the process of schooling with market demands strengthens the idea of education as indoctrination into a consumer society. Therefore, while it may be important at times to allow market imperatives for schools to influence education as needed, society cannot allow economic requirements to negate the role of education to "produce societal thinking that is autonomous, critical or dialogical" (p.215).

Having outlined the rhetoric of market reform that dominated public discourse on school reform during the 1990's and summarized some of the ways in which academics are responding to the implications of market reform, I would like to explore more fully the rhetoric that supports Mc Murtry's (1991) view of a market imperative for schools. This rhetoric postulates a different way to think about teaching and learning, individual and societal needs and the role of schools in meeting these needs. It is a discourse that provides the foundation for this thesis and my examination of the non-educational, dehumanizing and undemocratic dimensions of market reform. It is also the discourse that substantiates my contention that

market reforms should be widely debated and that, as citizens, we should reassert the more educational, and ultimately more meaningful, place of democratic principles in education.

## 1.2 A Counter Discourse to Prevailing Rhetoric

Throughout the history of education, there have always been competing purposes in schools and dialogue about these competing purposes is critical to any discussion of democracy. In recent times advocates of schools as job training centres have been dominating the dialogue. While it is not ahistorical for ideological struggles to favour schooling for economic and vocational purposes, I believe the extent to which corporations are influencing what is happening in schools is increasing. Moreover, society has been lulled into a false sense of security in that we believe our children and our schools will somehow be looked after if we simply adhere to corporate strategies.

The metaphor often used in discourse about school reform is that of a swinging pendulum. This metaphor has been evoked many times to show how disparate ideologies have led school restructuring crusades. Even though school systems could benefit from reform, whenever the pendulum swings too far in any direction it is cause for alarm. Elshstain (1993) explains:

Education in and for a democratic culture is a porous affair, open to the wide world outside the door and beyond the playground, but that does not mean it must needs become the playing of purveyors of passing enthusiasms, whether political or ideological. The danger in continuing down our present path is that our understanding of education itself is increasingly imperiled because we have done too little to protect education, from heavy-handed intrusion by those who would have both education and the child serve this political master or that ideological purpose. (p.88)

The education pendulum has swung dangerously far in the direction of market models, leaving democratic models in peril. We have become a society addicted to ideologies and currently we are addicted to corporatism (Saul, 1995).

Market models of education claim that taxpayers are not getting their money's worth from schools because schools are not cost-effective and students lack the skills needed for the future. In contrast, democratic models argue that while neither adequately nor fairly funded, schools are producing talented and capable young people. While democratic educators do not agree with the conclusions reached by market reformers about schools, it does not mean that the status quo is acceptable. There is a democratic reform agenda for schools that contends that the moral purposes of education must be reclaimed. If we are to find possibilities for answering the social and political questions that Carneiro (1996) describes such as

social exclusion, poverty, ethnic prejudice or urban violence, we need to find ways to support the development of conscious collective efforts for social progress. With Carneiro, I believe that within education lies the possibility for resolving our current social dilemmas by stirring the human conscience and transforming hearts and minds.

Democratic educators use imagination to conceive of a world that is more caring, humane and just. This vision is antithetical to the social darwinist perceptions of the world perpetuated by market ideology. In a democracy, teachers strive to animate each student's sense of responsibility (Elshtain, 1993) through promoting both self-understanding and an understanding of others. Rather than advocating the market ideas of competition and entitlement, democratic models engage students in learning to work collaboratively toward a common good. Fenstermacher (1994) explains that education for a democracy teaches students how to:

form common space, common speech, common commitments, while respecting and preserving our differences in heritage, race, language, culture, gender, sexual orientation, spiritual values, and political ideologies. (p.5)

Market models of education, on the other hand, are quick to find fault with schools, blaming them for failing both students and society. The tone of market rhetoric is often condescending and patriarchal. In contrast, democratic agendas for reform document the challenges that schools face, while calling on school communities and governments to work co-operatively to make changes. Many of the democratic arguments, while just as urgent as those proposed by market supporters, are written more compassionately and, I believe, more honestly. The language used to describe democratic agendas for school reform has emerged from progressive notions of schooling that have a long history of championing freedom and justice.

Writers Bruno-Jofre and Henley (2000) propose that pedagogical principles are needed to develop a democratic orientation that "works across difference and cultivates a public culture characterized by a critical engagement with lived experience"(p.40). The renewal of democratic principles in teaching and learning would teach the skills needed for developing shared understandings and values, addressing the needs and talents of individual children and eliminating forms of exclusion. In addition, there is a need to move beyond appreciating and celebrating difference toward clearly defined antiracist and multicultural curricula. By teaching of civic responsibility, we encourage students to be positive agents of social change.

Moreover, democratic models of schooling make education funding a priority and seek to have schools funded fairly. The democratic agenda for schooling includes having former education funding levels restored. Reducing the deficit and building a surplus of funds in a rainy day account at the expense of students is not sustainable logic for democratic educators. We contend that students have the right to current and adequate learning resources, to learn with smaller numbers of students and to be schooled in well-maintained buildings. Deficit reduction should not compromise our social commitment to provide students with the best possible education we can imagine. This is the least we can do to prepare students for their active and full participation as future democratic citizens.

The democratic agenda also respects the professional judgements of teachers. Teachers are given the autonomy to decide how to teach their students prescribed curricula, without interference from the school board or province, provided students are able to express reasonable view points and do not fear discrimination (Gutmann, 1997). Teachers are treated as respected professionals who are entrusted with the responsibility of teaching future generations. Notions of accountability come not from student performance on achievement tests, but rather the extent to which teachers respond with care and conscience to the faith society places in them.

No discussion of school restructuring is complete without attending to the context within which all of our efforts are made. Currently, this context is being shaped by the active participation of transnational corporations that have taken an interest in the development of educational policy. When corporations operate outside of national boundaries they are not always obligated to consider the impact of their actions on others (Barlow and Robertson, 1994) and this poses new challenges for democracies. Big business is dominating discussions about the purpose of schools and alternative agendas are having difficulty being heard. This is a direct threat to the democratic influence that citizens can have on the development of educational policy. While it may be argued that corporate involvement in schooling causes public opinion to become irrelevant and public resistance futile, I believe we have a choice. We can choose to allow globalization to renounce our roles as citizens or we can begin to strengthen the primacy of democratic agendas.

### 1.3 Methodology and Thesis Organization

The method used for this study is a variation on a reflective approach as developed by John Smyth (1991) in Developing and Sustaining the Critical. I agree with Smyth that the reflective approach represents a refreshing counter-discourse to entrenched, technicist views. The complexity of the economic and social issues we currently face demand thinking that is beyond the applied science mentality of what Smyth calls the "can do men" who convince us that as soon as they get the right mix of techniques our problems will magically dissolve. Smyth (1991) draws primarily on the work of Schon (1983) when he observes that the value of practitioner-driven knowledge is often overlooked and that the focus on research has primarily been on the products of what other people have thought. Smyth argues that the value of research lies not in providing solutions or answers, but in finding tentative understandings of situations that confuse, perplex or frustrate us. He suggests that our research needs to be explored, confirmed or rejected on the basis of how it fits with our experience. Narrative helps us move from a problem-solving approach to a problem-framing one.

Benhabib's (1990) analysis of Arendt's use of narrative also offers compelling reasons for choosing a narrative approach over an inductive one. Benhabib explains that Arendt, who resisted explanations of her methods, believed that "to place the present in an inevitable line of continuity with the past will lead to failure in appreciating the novelty of what has taken place" (p.114). Like Arendt, I have rejected the use of inductive methods of science for examining the effects of school reform on my students, their parents, my colleagues and on me. I believe that the stories of my experiences with the implementation of market imperatives for school reform will be better able to offer new perspectives on its implications for schooling and humanity. I concur with Arendt who sees the capacity of narrative for thinking "morally anew in the face of the unprecedented" (p.122) and for providing the inspiration for political action. Moreover, as Benhabib contends, analogical thinking can reinforce the normalization "of the unacceptable, of the unprecedented, and the outrageous" (p.123) through the use of generalizations about patterns and rules. Narrative helps us to see the uniqueness of experience and thereby renounce what is intolerable or unacceptable.

Benhabib (1990) explains that Arendt rejected chronology as the natural structure for narrative and that she wrote in such a way as to express the fragmentariness of experience and reduce the tendency of

history to conserve and justify experience. Arendt wanted to "preserve the past without being enslaved by it" (p. 121). I began chapter two with the intent of writing a chronology of my experiences with school reform, but found that the organization of my anecdotes did not suit a chronological re-telling. My experiences with school reform did not adhere to a simple cause and effect relationship. I found that I was able to give a more meaningful account of my experience with school reform by gathering the fragments of thoughts, feelings, events and conversations and sifting through them to find the threads that I believed told my story of market-based school reform in Manitoba. As Benhabib explains, for Arendt narrative was:

an exercise in thought, the chief task of which is to dig under the rubble of history and to recover those "pearls" of past experience, with their sedimented and hidden layers of meaning, so as to cull from them a story that can orient the mind in the future. (p.113)

Thus, it is through narrative that I begin the quest to understand what my experience with Manitoba school reform was all about.

Both the social and political context of teaching in Manitoba will need to be defined for the purpose of this research, as social settings set limits and one needs to see past these limits (Smyth, 1991). Reflection helps teachers make connections between their work and the social and political climate. With these insights, we are better able to identify problems, overcome constraints through questioning notions about power and ideology and see possibilities for a better world for those with whom we work and live. Reflecting on teaching, in the sense proposed by Smyth, enables teachers to become more than just functionaries who carry out the job of teaching (Greene, 1985). Giving voice to our experiences as teachers helps us to make sense of the world around us. Through narrative, we locate ourselves historically and derive meaning from this articulation of consciousness. Smyth cautions that because of the complexity of the work that teachers do it can be difficult to obtain a stable image of oneself and of the interactive part we play in the creation of events that occur in schools and classrooms.

Smyth (1991) proposes four "moments" of reflective thought to help teachers begin to understand their practice: describing; informing; confronting; and reconstructing. He credits Paolo Freire (1970) with providing the inspiration for these four moments which are intended to help teachers reflect on our practice, uncover the forces at work that constrain and inhibit what we do and begin to work at changing these conditions. He suggests questions to help teachers begin to understand the complexities of our work and make sense of our lives as teachers. I propose to use a variation on Smyth's questions in order to examine

critically educational reform in Manitoba and my reaction to it. Moreover, significant to an understanding of the approach that I have used for this thesis is the idea that I chose to conduct a comprehensive examination of the implications of market-driven school reform in an attempt to comprehend and explain its varied dimensions. While I have separated the effects of school reform in Manitoba on teaching and learning, individuals and society, it is important to remember that these distinctions have been created for the purpose of this thesis. In reality, the implications of market notions of schooling cut across this artificial division of the implications.

Smyth's first stage of reflective thought calls for description. This stage is addressed in chapter two where I provide a narrative of my experiences as a classroom teacher and vice principal implementing school reform in Manitoba during the 1990's. I first situated the narrative with a brief overview of the past ten years of my career and a description of each of the schools in which I have worked. From there, I illustrate, without any analysis, key stories, conversations and observations that depict my experience with implementing school reform in Manitoba. Both the events and my feelings about these events are organized thematically according to various features of school reform such as standards testing, the role of parents and the restructuring of schools. The process of writing this thesis often triggered for me other memories of my experiences with school reform and I added these thoughts to the narrative as they occurred to me.

Chapter three examines one particular document, A Blueprint for Action (1994), from the series of publications that were produced by the Manitoba government to describe educational policy. This book became known as the Blue Book and from this point on I use this term for A Blueprint for Action. My description of the Blue Book will explain the reasons why the Manitoba government believed that the school system needed to change. Subsequently, I will address the following questions to gain a more thorough understanding of the Manitoba government's intentions and plans for school reform:

- In what ways did the Blue Book claim school reform would improve schooling in the province?
- What needs of students, teachers, parents and society did the Blue Book identify?
- How did the Blue Book describe the role of government and the role of students, teachers and parents in supporting school reform?

Chapter four will probe the Blue Book for its fit with democratic principles. The objective of this chapter is to determine the implications of Manitoba school reform from educational, humanist and political



perspectives and to verify whether or not the government's mandate for school change could be substantiated. In so doing, I will examine the following questions:

- What evidence supports the statements in the Blue Book about failing schools and dissatisfied parents?
- Did the notions of teaching and learning as described in the Blue Book strengthen the goal of educating for a democracy?
- What did school reform mean in human terms?
- What were the potential hazards of the reforms and their implementation for democratic citizenship?

Chapter four will refer to the relevant literature, the Blue Book and my school experiences in order to find some answers to these questions. In deconstructing the declarations that the government made in the Blue Book about the state of education in Manitoba, I will suggest alternative reasons for why the changes were made. Chapter four, furthermore, will also verify the legitimacy of the government's authority to make the changes that were made to education. From there, I plan to examine the government's notions of curriculum, instruction, assessment and the role of the principal in preparing students for participation in a democracy. I also examine the language and the beliefs that drove school change in addition to the implications of school-based market reforms for human beings. In concluding chapter four I will review Manitoba school reform and its implementation for a fit with democratic principles.

Smyth's (1991) fourth stage of his framework for developing reflective thought asks researchers to construct a vision of what might be. Chapter five of this thesis will suggest guidelines for implementing school reform by attending to democratic aims and propose a notion of citizenship education as a vehicle for preparing students for their role as citizens in a democracy. This vision will be based on the democratic principles of equity and inclusion, consensus building and a belief in the common good. Questions to be addressed in chapter five will include:

- What would education in Manitoba look like if educational reform sought to embrace teaching for a democracy and working toward a common good?
- How might we better attend to the needs of individuals and society as a whole?
- What would education for democratic citizenship and political inclusion look like?

In Chapter five, I will conclude this thesis by proposing specific suggestions for expanding the current reform agenda, so that it might include democratic notions of curricula, instruction and assessment. I will

identify the spaces wherein we might publicly debate school reform in Manitoba. Finally, I will explore how we might work collectively toward creating an educational community that sets the conditions for developing an enlarged view of our social possibilities. This is an ambitious project and it is not free of risk, however, as Maxine Greene (1985) wrote:

It is disruptive to look at things as if they could be otherwise. There is a tension in this looking; there is a blank resistance for awhile. But then resistance, imagination, open capacities, inventiveness, and surprise are shown to be joined somehow. (p.15)

I conclude this project with a summary about what I have learned and determine how I will attempt to act in the future. What influence can I have on the decisions that are made both in the schools and the school division in which I work? This study is about the exploration of both the range and limitation of human action, including my own. It is intended to revitalize a democratic agenda for schooling and to prompt a critical examination of the market imperative for Manitoba school reform.

## CHAPTER TWO

### A TEACHER'S EXPERIENCE OF MANITOBA SCHOOL REFORM

In the past ten years that I have been a teacher in Manitoba, I have noticed a dramatic change in Manitoba schools. Chapter two of this thesis is a narrative in which I retell a selection of stories, conversations and observations. This narrative represents the beginning of my discomfort with school reform that follows a market imperative. The recollections in this narrative are pieced together thematically and are not told in chronological order. They represent my experience of Manitoba school reform from a variety of vantage points as I have held several positions, at several schools in Assiniboine South School Division in Winnipeg. For easier reading, I describe each of the schools where I have held these various positions in order to provide a context for the reader. The context is further developed from a social and political perspective throughout the narrative as I describe how the world outside the school during the implementation of school reform influenced what was happening inside the school. I have added subtitles for each of the stories that link my experience with school reform to the Blue Book. These reflections are an important starting point for what lies ahead in this thesis. From my personal observations of school reform, I will build the argument that the changes that were made to Manitoba schooling were non-educational, dehumanizing and undemocratic.

#### 2.0 Situating the Narrative

My teaching career began at Charleswood Junior High in Assiniboine South School Division in Winnipeg, Manitoba during the early 1990's. This dual track school offered programs in English and French to students in Grades 7 through Senior 1. The school was situated in a very affluent suburban community that largely consisted of white students. The position that I held for three years was to teach English to French Immersion students. After three years of working at Charleswood, my teaching position became redundant due to provincial cuts to school funding and, in March of my last year, I was asked to work as an itinerant teacher for the school division. However, three months later, I was assigned another position. This position was at Westdale Junior High. This single track school offered an English program to students in Grades 7 through Senior 1. It was an economically diverse community of families who were very affluent, working class and living in poverty. The school was also ethnically diverse, with a number of students who were aboriginal and others who were political refugees. A few teachers referred to the school

as the "Ghetto School of the School Division." Many other teachers had a strong sense of pride and commitment to the school. The position that I held for one semester was to teach a group of students from across the school division who were caught in the program restructuring that began with the Blue Book; therefore, they were unable to move with their peers into high school. This class was referred to as the "nine and a half" class or more disrespectfully, as the "sweat hogs." I spent one semester at Westdale before moving on to Shaftesbury High School which offered English instruction to students in Senior 2 to Senior 4. Like Charleswood, Shaftesbury was situated in a very affluent community; however, Shaftesbury had more students from different ethnic origins. There were Italian, Greek, Philippine and East Indian students. With a reputation for a strong academic program, Shaftesbury teachers prided themselves on their high expectations for learning. I held a number of positions at this school and this included a continued role in working with the nine and a half class or as, it was re-named, the Senior 1 Extended Program. After several years at Shaftesbury, I returned to Westdale as vice-principal.

Having described the various schools and communities in which I have held positions during the implementation of the Blue Book, I will turn now to a description of my experiences with market-based notions of schooling. I believe that each of these stories illustrates the varied implications of market reform for students, parents and teachers. I begin with four stories that are related to a return to traditional notions of teaching and learning. The first story describes a pivotal event that focused my attention on school reform. The second story relates my concern for students who were caught in the restructuring of the school system. The third story tells of my frustrations with standards testing, and this section concludes with some general reflections on the changes that have occurred in curriculum, instruction and assessment.

## **2.1 A Return to Traditional Notions of Teaching and Learning**

### **Back to "the Basics"**

In September of 1992 at a "Meet the Teacher" night, I had my first encounter with the tumultuous political and social climate that was brewing outside my junior high classroom door as a result of the Manitoba government's decision to implement school reform measures. This was an experience that caught me completely by surprise because I was largely unaware of the changes that were being made in education. During this particular evening, after I had finished a general discussion of what and how I would be teaching in my Grade 8 English class, a parent asked about the teaching of grammar. I explained that, at

our school, we followed a writing process where grammar was taught within the context of what the students were writing and that we dealt with grammar concerns as they emerged from student writing. The parent who had asked the question became quite angry at my response and stated that during her school years, grammar was more of a priority and students could read and write -- unlike today. Before I was able to interject, a parent, whose daughter I had taught the previous year, began a voracious defence of my teaching style. She claimed that as a result of my methods, her daughter's confidence about learning had increased and that she was reading and writing more than before. My lack of experience left me unprepared for this unexpected outburst of emotion from the parents. A heated debate ensued about the "back to basics" movement - some people for it and some opposed. It was with some relief that we ran out of time and I had to cut the dialogue short.

This event marked the beginning of my awareness of the sharp, rigid polarizations that were building within our school community and the province as a whole as a result of Manitoba school reform. The "back to basics" rhetoric was stirring emotions and causing parents to doubt the quality of education that their children were receiving and more parents were demanding that teachers return to more traditional methods of teaching. Progressive teaching and learning was also undermined by a return to the practice of retention and, as I was to learn, the introduction of the credit system at the Senior 1 level was to produce candidates for retention that I would have the pleasure of teaching.

### **Reorganization of the School Program**

One of the school restructuring measures that was put into effect by the Manitoba government was the re-organization of schools into Early, Middle and Senior Years programs. I became quite familiar with some of the implications of this change when I was asked to teach Senior 1, mathematics, science, English and social studies in a self-contained classroom to all of the students in the school division who had failed two or more of these core subjects at Westdale Junior High. This position was created as a result of the re-organization of schools into Early, Middle and Senior Years programs. Many schools across the province were not structured according to the grade levels associated with these programs. Thus, funding and facility issues arose and various means of reconciling these dilemmas were employed. In our school division, neither of the two high schools was staffed to teach Senior 1 classes. The students who were deemed to

have too few credits to move on to a high school were placed in this newly created class. The students I was to teach were caught in the system change and there was nowhere for them to go.

While some of my colleagues pitied me because of the position I was to fill, I decided that I was going to try my hardest to make it work. Little did I know that this was going to be the most difficult and profound challenge of my teaching career. These students helped me to grow as a teacher, and this is something for which I will be forever grateful. The fact remains, however, that these students should never have had to endure the injustices and lack of humanity that resulted from being pawns in a financial cut back game.

On the first day of school, 17 boys and 1 girl bravely entered Room 203 on the second floor of Westdale, having awkwardly made their way past much smaller and younger students. My review of the cumulative records showed that many had been former recipients of funding for extended support in the classroom. Due to financial restraints, previously connected teaching assistant support, divisional psychologists, psychiatrists and social workers were officially discontinued. Essentially, the class and I were on our own all day long, under the watchful eye of the principal whose suggestion it was to create the class rather than leave the students out of the school system altogether. Having been labelled "failures", the students lacked the confidence needed to engage in learning activities and they resisted many of my early attempts to peak their interest. Not surprisingly, our lone girl dropped out of school. Battles with drug addictions and social-emotional difficulties regularly threatened student attendance. Of those students who were able to attend, many nursed bitter resentments toward their former teachers and the school system. For some students, they thought being put in the class had been a punishment for not being sufficiently compliant the year before. Other students attributed their having to repeat Senior 1 to never having been good at school.

As my time with the Senior 1 class drew to a close, the principal began to involve me in board office meetings to discuss and make recommendations for the next year's class. Assiniboine South valued the opportunity to think out loud with teachers about issues and dilemmas that arose within the school community. This conversation at central office further contributed to my understanding of the impact of school reform.

The first recommendation I made to the superintendents and program directors was to cancel the class. I explained why I felt that the formation of the class was a "Band-Aid" solution to a system problem. I related my belief that it was not in the students' best interest for the class to continue. The degradation and isolation that the students experienced was avoidable. I asked the superintendents and directors to consider the image of the 16-year-old boys in my class, many of whom were already shaving, driving up to our junior high school. They parked in the parking lot beside the teachers' cars each morning and walked, with their heads down, into the school, past the other students. It was a daily humiliation that was painful to watch. It reinforced the students' perceptions of themselves as "losers". I sensed that the superintendents were listening closely and that there was support for what I was saying. To my dismay, however, I later found out that my suggestion to have the class disbanded was rejected. Furthermore, the superintendents denied the request for the class to have access to school-based resource and counselling support and a teaching assistant. It was later explained to me that my recommendations were refused due to the funding limitations. Some of my suggestions, however, were implemented. For instance, the class was renamed Senior 1 Extended and moved into a high school setting. The students were able to take some option courses at the Senior 2 level while repeating previous courses and divisional specialists were assigned to the class.

After some deliberation, I agreed to teach the class again. Although I fundamentally disagreed with it, my rationale was that if the class had to exist, I was determined to do what I could to make it the best experience possible for the students involved. I have wondered whether or not I made the right choice. If I had refused on principle to take the class, would it have been disbanded? Deep down in my heart, I know it wouldn't have been. Someone else would have been found to teach the students. Taking the class for another year enabled me to continue to fight for its dissolution.

My second year of teaching the Senior 1 Extended class was somewhat better as a result of the changes that were implemented; however, it continued to be a dehumanizing experience for my students. Moving into the high school did not end the marginalization we felt from the rest of the school. We were unable to access support from the school-based guidance counsellors and resource teachers who had been given a "hands-off directive" by the principal. This caused a great deal of anger and animosity from teachers in the school toward the class and toward me. The resource and support teachers were furious with

the principal's decision because of the impact it was having on the students and the rest of the school. When I asked the principal about this, she agreed that the lack of support was wrong but that a clear message needed to be sent to central office. She believed that the superintendents needed to know that the lack of funding support was having serious implications for the students and the school. Once again, these needy students became pawns in the financial cutback game. By October, we had won a small victory. The students were given a part-time teaching assistant. When central office again asked for a review of how the class had been working and for proposals for the following year, I went ready to plead with our superintendents to disband the class for the next year. The decision was finally made to do just that. Staffing allocations were assigned to both high schools in order to offer Senior 1 level courses and the next year, the program was cancelled.

This experience with school reform led me to question the intentions behind system restructuring. I also wondered about the government's reasons for not providing adequate funding for schools to support the school system's transition to the new structure for school programs. It appeared that the students who were implicated in the system-wide changes by being retained and by being denied access to school supports mattered little to the government's goals of school improvement. This both frustrated and angered me. Retention had been a school practice that had thankfully waned over the years and I was happy to see it pass out of favour with educators and policymakers. As I became more involved with the implementation of the Blue Book, and in particular, the preparation of students for the provincial standards tests, it became evident to me that schools were about to adopt a number of more traditional teaching practices and methods.

### **Standards Testing**

A second restructuring measure put into effect during the 1990's was the re-introduction of provincial testing. In this section of the narrative, I will reflect on a personal experience with administering an English standards test to a group of Senior 1 students at Westdale, where I now work. I will then describe a second experience that occurred several years earlier while working as an English teacher at Shaftesbury High School. In this second example, I will tell the story from my perspective as a colleague of teachers who were preparing Senior 4 students for writing the provincial standards test for the first time.



During the 1999–2000 school year, I was assigned to teach a Senior 1 English class and my students wrote the provincial standards test. In the weeks leading up to the Senior 1 standards test, everyone -- students and teachers alike -- was very edgy. My students acted out in ways that were highly unusual for them. I witnessed behaviours that I had never seen before from this group of students. They were unusually boisterous. It was more than the typical rowdiness teachers come to expect in June. During conversations about their work, some of the students burst into tears. They talked about their feelings of the pressure of doing well in school and their worries about the standards exam. I was not the only teacher who observed this change in behaviour of students. Student rowdiness was a daily conversation among Senior 1 teachers of students taking the exam. I agreed with my colleague's observation that this was a different, more intense kind of stress than usual for this time of year.

Teachers also commented on the stress that they were feeling and this was demonstrated in unusual ways. Some of my colleagues expressed suspicions of other teachers and wondered if they were following the curriculum, doubting the strength of teaching in certain classrooms. It was feared that if some teachers weren't doing their job properly, the school would suffer the embarrassment of poor results. The government had dropped the practice of publishing results in the paper, but the school division still published results within the division and these were shared with teachers. Teachers measured the achievement of their students against the achievement of other classes. We prepared ourselves for which classes would do well and which classes were likely to have difficulty. Preparing students for "the test" became the sole focus for several weeks prior to the dates scheduled for testing.

The climate within the school changed during these few weeks prior to the standards tests, and the change was not good for anybody. Activities that had previously been supported by teachers, such as band tutorials, thematic units, gifted art sessions and other wonderful curricular experiences, came under attack as the standards test approached. Teachers refused to allow students to participate in these curricular opportunities as they felt pressure to get the students ready for the exam. They worried that the students' absence from the class would disadvantage the student from doing well on the test.

After the first day of writing the English standards tests, my students would make comments such as: "If we fail, it will be all your fault". Others demonstrated considerable frustration with the fact that I followed the provincial test administration instructions that forbade me to answer questions during the test.

Little did the students know that being unable to answer their questions caused a real dilemma for me as a teacher. I believe in re-framing questions for students so that they understand what is being asked of them. If a student doesn't understand the question, their answer doesn't accurately reflect what they know or don't know. Re-framing a question would have helped put the students at ease and would have resulted in answers that were more reflective of what they actually knew. On the other hand, I didn't want to be one of the teachers who "cheated" on the test and gave her students an unfair advantage by answering questions. My colleagues and I had agreed to follow the rules, and I honoured this agreement, even though it caused me some discomfort.

The year my students wrote the provincial standards test, teachers from within the division marked the exams. The province had discontinued the practice of marking the tests under direct government supervision, and they had passed this responsibility onto school divisions. Teachers from various schools gathered at the board office and marked the papers that were numbered to maintain the anonymity of the student. Once again, I found myself at odds with the purpose of this practice. In real life, the people who know my work evaluate me. Did students not deserve the same treatment? Could teachers not be trusted to provide a reasonable measure of what their students have learned? What purpose were the evaluations to serve?

When the results of standards tests were published within the division, school by school, the reaction among staff was varied. One teacher whose class did well was suspected of skirting the rules. Another teacher who had many students in her class who struggled academically was pleased that her students did what she thought was reasonably well – for them. I felt frustrated when I read my students' responses and could tell that they had misread questions or answered only part of the question. My first reaction was a vow that, for the following year, I would teach my students how to take tests better -- how to give the answers the test makers wanted to see. This was not a very satisfying resolution to the problem. The mark received by some students was not an accurate or fair representation of what they knew or could do. Their performance on the test did not fit with the series of assessments I had made over the course of the year. Consequently, the results seemed confusing and unfair to the students. The arbitrariness of the standards testing process made it difficult to understand once again the reasons for subjecting students and teachers to this new regime of accountability that had begun with the Blue Book. It was evident to me that

student learning had not improved as a result of standards testing nor was it a very accurate reflection of what students had learned throughout the school year.

An earlier incident that occurred at Shaftesbury High School provides another example to illustrate this point. In this case, I was not the student's teacher, but a colleague of his teachers. "David" was a gifted English student. His writing, a delight to read, was often passed around the English department office. Inevitably, it was clever, well-written and filled with the kind of nuances one might see in a more experienced and mature student. His participation in class discussions on selected readings was reported to be insightful and, at times, astounding. Thus, the news that David did more poorly than expected on the Senior 4 standards test came as quite a shock to all of us in the English department.

At this time, the provincial government seconded teachers from school divisions in order to mark the provincial standards tests. Given that we had teachers on staff who had participated in the marking, it was well known that at times the marking could be quite challenging as teachers had difficulty agreeing on how certain answers should be evaluated. All of David's teachers commented that they believed that an oversight had been made in the assessment of his provincial exam, and they encouraged him to challenge his mark at his expense. Much to David's teachers' surprise, he lost. The decision was incomprehensible to all of us in the English department. For a school that had taken great pride in the academic rigour of its programs, David's test results indicated to us that there was a fundamental flaw in the testing process. School reform efforts prior to the Blue Book had rejected provincial standards testing and I was dismayed by its return, given the potential for punitive repercussions for students. At the time, there was talk of the standards tests at the Senior 4 Level accounting for 50 % of the student's final mark.

While David's teachers trusted their professional judgement, his performance on the standards test caused us to question whether they should be teaching more directly to the test. The teachers involved in this situation did not view this question lightly. At issue was professional integrity, namely what they believed was in the best interests of their students. Was it better to teach in a way that they valued or teach what students needed to know for the test to enable them to gain access to other opportunities?

I conclude this section on the Blue Book's restoration of traditional notions of teaching and learning with some general observations about how the Blue Book changed teaching and learning. First, I will begin with a description of a shift in the kinds of courses students selected in high school after the Blue

Book was published. From there, I share some examples of how school reform has altered teaching and learning both in my classroom and the school division.

### **Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment**

After the Blue Book was published, I noticed some gradual changes in the kinds of courses that students were electing or avoiding to take at Shaftesbury High School. Art, music and language classes were dropped or replaced with extra courses in mathematics and English classes. I was teaching Spanish at the time and students would come to me with sad faces and explain that they could not continue in the course because it conflicted with the scheduling of a second or third mathematics or English class.

Conversations with the students and their parents typically did not alter the students' decisions to drop "option" classes for more "core" classes. Teachers gave numerous reasons, such as: many jobs required another language; life was not just about employment; and, most importantly, the student enjoyed the course. Many students and parents, however, simply could not conceive of continuing with option courses because they feared that this would interfere with their child's acceptance into a university. Given the affluence of the Shaftesbury school community, students would drop option classes and take private music, dance and language lessons instead. Private lessons were substituted for other areas of school involvement as well. Teachers had observed that participation in extra-curricular activities was dropping. Compared to their previous experiences in other schools, the students at Shaftesbury appeared to be reluctant to get involved in after-school programs. Teachers also noted that there was a correlation between the lack of extracurricular involvement and a lack of spirit and vitality in the school.

Course selection, beliefs about the importance of so-called core classes over option classes and the expanding notion that what was dropped from a student's experience of school could be paid for privately all signal to me subtle, but significant, changes to the teaching and learning process. A student's experience of school had become much narrower in recent years. The effects of curricular reforms on instruction and assessment further transformed this process.

After the Blue Book was introduced, a period of frantic work began as teachers re-aligned instructional and assessment strategies with the outcomes designated for our particular grade levels and subject areas and we prepared students for the provincial standards test. It was my experience that teachers were prepared to work hard at implementing the departmentally mandated curricular reforms, but at times

we found ourselves in situations which challenged our beliefs about teaching and learning. Many of us discovered that with the new school reforms came reduced flexibility in adapting curricula to fit the needs and interests of students and that we had diminished professional authority for making decisions about student learning.

It may appear contradictory to some readers of this study that I would make this observation given the increased attention to instructional diversity in school reform under the rubric of differentiated instruction. Expanding the repertoire of instructional strategies used in classrooms across the province has been both important and necessary. What has been reduced is the space within which teacher and student can initiate starting points for learning. Outcomes and standards are foremost in what we do in the classroom and the needs and interests of students are pushed to the sidelines. On one hand teachers are asked to diversify how we present information and how it is assessed in the classroom, but the content of learning is largely directed by the prescribed outcomes and standards that must be completed in preparation for "the test". Ever conscious of the competing forces of time and the perceived need to cover all these curricular outcomes, teachers have reduced flexibility in making learning be genuinely responsive to the students.

An example of this occurred during my last year at Westdale before I left for my maternity leave. A national election was being held in Canada that year and I decided to incorporate the teaching of election issues, in particular, the way elections are handled in the media. After first checking with several teachers on my Senior 1 team to see if they were interested in planning the unit together, I planned the unit with my students. I decided to split the class into different political parties. Each party was responsible for decorating their party headquarters, assigning roles to members of the group, and researching the various political platforms. Every day, we scanned the newspapers for columns, editorials, and cartoons and monitored the progress of the election. In addition, students were assigned the task of exploring their local community to learn which political party was most represented by the signs in people's yards, the names of local representatives and to talk over election issues with their parents and friends.

There were many more of these kinds of activities -- all of which were generated by the brainstorming that my students and I participated in prior to the start of the unit and as the unit progressed. Because of my students' excitement with the project, the three weeks I had planned to use for the unit

expanded into six. However, I was confident that the students were learning many valuable and important skills and therefore, I made a conscious decision to continue with what we were doing. At the end of the unit, I began to match outcomes and standards with what the students had learned and discovered that while I was able to connect the learning to some of the outcomes, there were several that I didn't teach. Moreover, a reporting period was approaching; thus, I was in a dilemma.

My teaching prior to the elections unit had addressed some of the outcomes that I had missed, but not to the extent that I was comfortable communicating to parents that these outcomes had been taught. Moreover, the school division's prescribed weightings for the provincial outcomes further added to the situation. At that time teachers were instructed by central office to weight each provincial outcome according to a percentage that had been specified by the school division.

For that term, in consultation with the school principal, I decided to weight the outcomes differently and the next term I concentrated more closely on attending to the outcomes that I didn't teach. I also made a more conscious effort to ensure that I didn't get myself into a similar predicament by the end of the next reporting period. However, the implications of this were such that I would begin with the list of outcomes and standards and plan the units that I taught accordingly. While the students were not left out of the process entirely, my instructional planning began differently than it had with the election unit and I believe that the effectiveness of both the instruction and student learning was negatively implicated by this change. However, I believed that it was my professional responsibility not to continue teaching the way I did with the elections unit. This was a difficult decision to make because I do not think that my teaching has improved by adhering closely to the teaching of outcomes and standards.

In addition to the changes in instruction, assessment has taken on a new level of importance. Before the Blue Book, instructional and assessment priorities were more balanced. We now spend more time on assessment and reporting and attach more importance to the assessments that we make. A few years ago, our school division introduced new report cards aligned with the provincial outcomes that had been developed at that point. In conversations with some teachers, I have heard them state that neither the students nor their parents can expect students to do as well in school as they might have prior to the report cards being introduced. These teachers have interpreted the new reporting system using the language and beliefs reflected in governmental reforms. The standards for "Outstanding", the highest category of

evaluation, is perceived by teachers to be so advanced that few students could ever hope to attain this level of excellence. Some teachers share this information with both students and parents at the beginning of the year so as to avoid raising false hopes about doing well in school.

As already noted, the school division has also designated weightings for each outcome in several subject areas. The weightings must be followed when grades are calculated at the end of a term. As a teacher I find this directive from the school division to be very restrictive in both planning instruction and evaluating my students' progress in their learning. At each of the three schools where I have worked in the division, teachers would work together as part of a team, planning instruction around the needs and interests of the students. As a team we would set learning objectives and agree upon how we would weight them in the final report. Depending on how particular units and lessons were taught, we occasionally changed our minds in order to be fairer to the students.

The absence of this flexibility has changed things. Some teachers refuse to follow the school division's directive on weighting objectives, both covertly and overtly. Others follow the directive, but with reluctance. Most of the time, I am in the latter category because I am torn between following the school division's directions and the loss of my ability to adjust weightings of grades to reflect the needs of my students and the curricula that has been taught. Over the years, the school division's decision to mandate the weightings of outcomes has been a source of considerable friction among teachers, breaking down formerly well functioning teams. Teachers retreat to their respective classrooms and do what their conscience permits.

Students' selection of courses, reduced flexibility in the classroom and an increased emphasis on assessment are just a few of the implications of the Blue Book on teaching and learning. In addition, the Manitoba government also redefined the role of school administrators and I believe that this significantly changed the role of educational leaders.

## **2.2 Leadership Redefined**

For the past four years, I have been privileged to act in the capacity of vice-principal at one of the junior high schools where I was formerly a teacher. The final section of this narrative is reflective of my perspective on school reform from my new position as a school administrator. I will begin with a discussion of some issues that have arisen as a result of my work with the mathematics teachers in our

school. What will follow is a story about a professional development opportunity that was sponsored by Manitoba Education and Training and a related conversation with a parent. Finally, I will conclude the narrative with an observation on schools of choice.

Perhaps one of the biggest challenges I have had as a new administrator was in my work with our mathematics teachers and their implementation of new mathematics curricula. Since it first arrived at the school, teachers have been asking for more time to teach mathematics, believing that the curriculum as it stands is too lengthy and too demanding for many of our students. In frustration, some teachers have resorted to giving students units to work on independently at home, while others have significantly compacted what is taught so that they can say the curriculum has "been covered". Requests have been made by teachers who teach mathematics and science to just teach mathematics prior to the standards test and to focus solely on science after the test has been written. Some students complain that they have to teach themselves concepts they don't yet understand, and that the whirlwind pace of some units is frustrating for many others. Students correctly perceive that these teachers are trying to "cram" in the teaching of skills before the compulsory standards test has to be written.

For the mathematics teachers, the perceived pressure of covering the mathematics curricula before the standards tests is so great that requests are made of me to limit the "disruptions" to their classes by cancelling student participation in the so-called "extras" in a school day such as choir practice, band tutorials, gifted sessions in art or writing, attendance at student workshops, etc. If a student is struggling in mathematics, teachers object to these activities more strongly. In either case, teachers cite the degree of difficulty of mathematics curricula and concern over teaching all of the standards and outcomes before the standards tests as the reason for wanting to keep students in class.

In the course of my supervisory work with the mathematics teachers, I find that when faced with a lack of student success with prescribed standards and outcomes, I fall back on my central beliefs about what is right for students. Teachers have to begin with what students already know and are able to do, help them experience success and then move forward. Sometimes this attitude is a source of relief for teachers who are struggling with student achievement, and at other times, it presents additional difficulties. There are some teachers who refuse to consider what may be right for their students outside of a standards and outcomes framework. They cite fear of lawsuits and abandonment of professional ethics as reasons for



inaction to my suggestions to begin with what the students know and to diversify instruction to meet the needs of the students. For these teachers, the situation is straightforward and conclusive. Standards and outcomes are read with as little liberal interpretation as possible. Furthermore, this holds true even when teachers see students who are typically very strong mathematics students struggling. They explain that it is not their job to question departmental curricula no matter what the cost may be to students. While I believe that this is probably an excuse for some teachers not to diversify instruction, given that the Blue Book states that teachers can adapt up to 50% of a curriculum, these same teachers use the language of the Blue Book to support their arguments.

Whether the Blue Book intended for the outcomes and standards to be applied with such black and white thinking is not relevant. What is critical is the fact that some teachers have adopted the language of the Blue Book to support teaching practices that exclude some students. For example some teachers have endeavoured to reward students with the participation in science labs at lunchtime if students are compliant and do their homework. These teachers admit that lack of student success is cause for concern, but they state that no other choice is possible. Neither poverty nor race and its accompanying social issues is cause for differentiating instruction. These teachers report that all students have to meet standards and outcomes regardless of the fact that the playing field may not be level. If outcomes are not met, then students will fail the grade. The fact that students are having difficulty with learning the new outcomes and standards is blamed on the students' unwillingness to work hard or on a departmental/divisional mandate over which the teachers are powerless.

As might be expected, the number of students who failed courses at Westdale was very high. We have made many responses to this situation and some of the things we have tried have worked very well for our community. Innovative and exciting programs have arisen from initiatives generated by the school staff and sometimes these innovative programs demand that we not comply with system requirements. Whenever this causes difficulty for central office, we state our case confidently that we believe that what we are doing is in the best interests of students. Unfortunately there are many students that we are still unable to reach. They have stopped attending school or classes or sit passively in class and refuse to engage in classroom activities. While the school staff has tried a number of things in an effort to connect students,

sadly, there are still too many students that we don't reach. Many of these students aboriginal and all come from low income families.

Yet another practice that some teachers discuss more frequently and more insistently is the notion of creating homogeneous classrooms, and I believe that this too has been as a result of the Blue Book. Every spring I meet with all of the teachers to begin creating class lists for the following year. In the first couple of years that I was at Westdale, the mathematics teachers would plead with me to permit them to group students according to ability. The fact that the mathematics teachers were asking for this type of grouping was not unusual. Each year there were always teachers who sincerely believed that student achievement outcomes would improve by grouping students of similar abilities, and of course, the belief that teaching such classes would make the work of teachers easier was also a consideration. Teachers would cite that grouping students of exceptional abilities with students of average abilities was unfair to the brighter students whom the teachers argued were held back by the students who struggled. Furthermore, by having all of the students of average abilities or lower in the same class, the teachers could teach at the level of the students and cover more curricula. This request contradicted earlier statements from the mathematics teachers who had stated that they were reluctant to diversify instruction by starting with where the students were at in their learning because this meant they were not teaching to provincial standards. Nonetheless, since the publication of the Blue Book I believe that the cries for grouping students of homogeneous abilities have grown stronger.

Manitoba school reform also had implications for diversifying instruction in other ways. My role as an instructional leader often requires me to attend sessions sponsored by Manitoba Education and Training, so that I am clear about changes that are being implemented across the province. I recall one of these sessions during my first year as an administrator that was intended to clarify guidelines for differentiating between modified and adaptive programming. With copies of Individual Education Planning: A Handbook for Developing and Implementing IEPs, Early to Senior Years (1998) in hand, we left for the workshop hoping to better understand which students would be candidates for modified programming according to the descriptors provided by the department. After three hours of presenting the Student Educational Plans, case by case, the ministry official either confirmed or denied the fit of each plan with the guidelines provided by Manitoba Education and Training. The experience left me feeling

frustrated and angry because I found that I was more confused than when I began. Furthermore, some of us had the feeling that even the consultant was unclear about the criteria for identifying the students on a case-by-case basis.

One of the things I learned from the session that day was that the muddle and confusion of using terms like "adaptation" and "modification" were likely to continue. I also sensed the need for schools to do extensive, costly and time-consuming assessments on the small percentage of students that the province believed needed modified programming. Since that day, the befuddlement has dissipated somewhat. What has taken its place is one of three things: courage to carry on and do what school staffs, in collaboration with parents and the child, feel is right or passivity and reluctance to address this issue altogether. The following conversation illustrates what I perceive is an example of the latter response.

One of the concerns that I have about Manitoba Education and Training's new preoccupation with accountability can best be illustrated by a personal conversation that I had with a friend's sister who does not live in our school community. Because my friend's sister knows that I am a vice-principal, she called to ask for my advice in working through a problem that she had with her son's school. Sandra said that she had a conversation with teachers from her son "Sam's" school and was told that he would never do well academically. Sam is in Grade 4. The teachers claimed that he would probably find employment as a skilled worker and that she shouldn't worry about his grades or what he was learning. He would always be "slow". Sandra came to me and asked two things: Did the school have a right to treat her son in this way? Could I give her some ideas about how to work with the teachers?

My first response was to tell Sandra to take her son out of the school; however, she didn't want to do this. She said all she was looking for was a way to work through the problem because her son enjoyed school and she wanted it to stay that way. Sandra also said that both she and her son were connected to the school community and she wanted to first try and resolve the issue with Sam's teachers. I suggested that she speak with Sam's teachers and ask about making adaptations to his instructional program. After the meeting, Sandra called me to say that Sam's teachers had said that he didn't qualify for making the necessary changes. In fact, she had used the word "modify" instead of "adaptation" and was corrected by the teachers in what she described as a haughty tone.

I believe that it is also relevant to this story that Sandra is a single, working class mom of two boys and she struggles to put food on the table. From my experience, I believe that sometimes parents with less influence and financial resources are not always treated with the respect that they deserve.

The last observations I make about school reform in my capacity as an instructional leader relates to the schools of choice legislation that was introduced by the Blue Book. First, I need to state that parents should have the option of placing their child in a different school when they are concerned about the well-being of their child, as in the story of Sam. In this way, schools of choice has been beneficial for students. However, I also believe that there are several drawbacks.

When students in our school choose to attend another school, conversations are often held between administrators which are meant to be a quick calculation of how much time, energy and money the student is going to cost the school in terms of in-school, divisional or out of division supports. I know that a great deal is riding on my responses. If a student is academically strong, has parental support and does not place a demand on valuable resources such as time, energy and personnel (which administrators guard so fiercely), then the student is almost always accepted. If, however, the administrator senses that the student applying may have social-emotional or academic needs that will put a demand on these resources, the responses can be quite different. Sometimes that ends the conversation and I am not surprised to learn that the student was not accepted at that school. Other times, this kind of information leads to the beginning of some genuine, constructive dialogue about how this student needs to be supported.

The outcome of conversations about schools of choice applicants depends on the disposition of the principal, the resources that she has at her disposal, and whether the school board or superintendent directs the school administrator to take a particular student. However, that being said, the school administrator has considerable influence in making decisions about a schools of choice applicant.

Schools of choice programs were sold to the public on the premise that parents would have more power to choose which school their child attended; however, this can be misleading. From my experience, it is the schools that have the power to say "yes" or "no" to a particular child, depending on whether attending to the learning needs of the student will draw on school resources and whether or not there is space available in the school. Parents are becoming aware of this and are sometimes outraged by the lack of "real" choice that they have. Some parents have resorted to hiding information from the school in order

to increase the chances of their child's acceptance into the school. Thus, even though the Manitoba government intended school reform to be beneficial for parents, sometimes this was not the case.

Schools of choice legislation also exerts pressure on school staffs to demonstrate their ability to produce students who excel on provincial standards tests. Westdale Junior High was a school where there were a number of students who were not able to meet provincial outcomes and this resulted in a large number of students being recommended by their teachers for retention. The Blue Book stated clearly that the Manitoba government supported retention and several teachers in this school supported this belief. Teachers have commented that as school administrators we give too much attention to the difficulty that students have in meeting provincial standards and that we should invest our time in publicly highlighting in the local newspaper the performance of students who score well on standards tests. Recently, a student scored 100% on a standards test and the staff insisted that we advertise this accomplishment. In the minds of some teachers, this would reverse public and divisional perceptions of our school as a failing school.

While we refused to advertise in the local newspaper individual student accomplishments, our school division has responded to the competition for students in other ways. We have used administrator meetings to learn how to prepare school brochures to advertise our school programs. The title, "Gifted programming" was resurrected to replace what we had formerly called "Challenge Programming" so that we would attract parents who were looking for this kind of curricula. Moreover, we spent more time talking about gifted instruction and finding ways to increase the visibility of the kinds of gifted instruction that our schools offered. Lastly, a group of administrators went on a tour of neighbouring school divisions to investigate the possibility of adapting their school programs to meet the needs of our students. While I acknowledge that inter-school visits have value, the reason behind these tours was to attract more students to our schools. I believe that all of this activity can be attributed to schools of choice and I find this use of our time as school administrators quite frustrating. In the past, we spent more time directly related to supporting teaching and learning and I believe that this was a more valuable and important use of our time.

In addition to the changes that have occurred to curriculum, instruction and assessment since the publication of the Blue Book, the Manitoba government's plan for school reform had implications for parental involvement in schools. The government created Advisory Councils for School Leadership and directed schools to expand the involvement of parents in school decision making.

### 2.3 The Role of Parents

When the directive came from the government that every school in the province was to have a parent advisory council, Assiniboine South School Division was already there. Although we did not call our parent organizations, Advisory Councils for School Leadership, they essentially had the same responsibilities. For years, our schools had enjoyed strong relationships with active and involved parent councils. In the schools where I worked, many parents were already active in important aspects of school activities and decision-making. They provided input on topics such as the development of new courses, attending to social-emotional issues and the setting of directions for their schools. Moreover, parent councils had a voice in school-based and divisional budgets. We had moved beyond parent councils' acting in a fund-raising capacity or rubber stamping ideas generated by educators. With the Blue Book, however, our parent councils were asked if they would like to become Advisory Councils for School Leadership and realign their role with the government's description of what this organization should be doing. All but one of our parent councils rejected this offer. The reason cited by the presidents of our parent councils was that they were uncomfortable with what they perceived to be an adversarial role for parents in the government's vision.

Also with the publication of the Blue Book, the school division began asking parents to join a number of school and divisional committees. Sometimes this parental involvement was helpful and at other times, the school division realized that the inclusion of parents on a committee was not appropriate. Perhaps the example that stands out the most had to do with the selection of school administrators.

In 1996 central office decided that parents would have more of a voice in the selection of administrators. A panel of senior administrators, trustees, school administrators and parents interviewed any teachers or current administrators who submitted their names as candidates for administrative positions. Teachers were also included as a new addition to the interview panel and student participation was sought through surveys. I became interested in the selection of new administrators because I had been thinking about applying for an administrative position, and I was curious to see how this new role for parents would unfold. The practice of involving parents directly in the selection of school administrators lasted two years.

This new parental role was short lived for several reasons. Some administrators believed that parents influenced the decision making in ways that were not ultimately beneficial to the selection of a suitable school administrator. The popularity (or lack of it) of teachers among selected parents and students influenced the deliberations more significantly than it was felt it should have. Parents were easily swayed by the opinions of others, and they mounted pressure to choose or not choose a particular candidate. In one instance, the confidentiality of a candidate's participation in the interview was breached when a parent involved in the process was overheard talking about the interview at a local supermarket check out line. Moreover, with the addition of parents and teachers, the selection panels were quite large and the process of making a decision became quite cumbersome. Decisions about appointments often took several weeks longer than had been the case previously.

Direct parent and teacher involvement in the interview and selection of administrators did not last. When consulted, parents responded strongly that they wanted to be kept informed and to be able to offer suggestions and advice as to administrative appointments, but that final decisions should rest with the teachers and administrators in the schools and central office. This experience with a re-defined role for parents was problematic because the Blue Book ostensibly made some negative assumptions about parental involvement in schools that were unsupported by Assiniboine South's experience in working with parents. However, our school division followed the directive by the government to involve parents more and this was to the detriment of parent-school partnerships.

I conclude this narrative with a description of two events that are related to the government's process for the development and implementation of school reform. The first experience describes my involvement in the creation of a common curricular framework for the teaching of language arts and the second event recounts a secretive meeting with a Minister of Education who requested some informal feedback from teachers about the Blue Book.

#### **2.4 Formal and Informal Public Consultations**

Shortly after I began working at Shaftesbury, I was asked to participate in a two-day session for teachers from across the province to review a new framework for the teaching of English Language Arts. The Common Curricular Framework for English Language Arts (1998) was one of several documents that an inter-provincial group called the Western Canadian Protocol for Collaboration in Basic Education

produced in accordance with school reform initiatives that were cited in the Blue Book. Participants were to read the document and, along with other teachers, make recommendations for changes.

My colleagues at Shaftesbury were quite cynical about the development of a common curricular framework for teaching English Language Arts, believing that it was another layer of bureaucracy and a waste of taxpayers' money. We had been excited about the prospect of new curricula for the teaching of English but, as due dates for the curricula's intended release were long past due, we had become somewhat jaded. At the first of two sessions held by Manitoba Education and Training teachers were given instructions to review the common curricular framework for repetition, sequencing of skill development and ambiguity of wording. We were told that the goal was to make this document "teacher-friendly". We were also told that the provincial government valued collaborating with teachers and that this session was evidence of that commitment. After editing the framework document, we began to look deeper into the curriculum guide to make recommendations on content. Teachers in our group began to discuss the various skills that had been assigned to corresponding grades levels. We had a lively discussion about which skills constituted a more sophisticated demonstration of a skill. There was a wide range of opinion and I believe that teachers supported their opinions with solid arguments. We came to the conclusion that a more general listing of curricular objectives would allow teachers, in collaboration with their school communities, to make decisions about curricula that were right for them. In addition, a more general listing of objectives would be more useful than the highly repetitive organization that had been proposed.

On the second day of our session at the offices of Manitoba Education and Training participants shared any further insights gained from deliberations with colleagues in the field and began the job of recording this input. At the end of the day, however, the session leaders informed us that, regardless of our input, only minor editing changes to the original document would be accepted. A committee of people representing the western provinces had already approved the document and it was too late to incorporate any of the feedback we had generated.

When I returned to my school, I was embarrassed to report to my colleagues that the opportunity for providing any meaningful feedback never really existed. I wondered what was the point of going through all this? It was something that was done at considerable expense. Teachers were brought in from across the province. Out of town teachers were guests at various hotels in the city and there were costs



associated with substitutes, mileage reimbursement and meals. I was frustrated by this experience because what I had been led to believe was that this was an opportunity for teachers to critically review the curricular framework, make suggestions for changes and that these changes would be considered in a revised form of the document. The fact that this last step didn't happen was fodder for the cynicism of my colleagues at Shaftesbury. That being said, however, the experience was an instructive one as the discussion that I had with the other teachers from around the province supported my belief in the value of teachers sharing their respective ideas about education and schooling.

My involvement in the development of a common curricular framework was not the only time that I felt shut out of the process of providing the government with feedback on the Blue Book. A second experience occurred a short time later. Shortly after the Blue Book's publication, an informal opportunity for discussing the Blue Book's implications arose at the school where I am currently vice principal. One of the teachers on staff informed me that the Minister of Education at the time was coming to her house for a secret meeting. She said that she had been asked by the Minister to gather a group of educators to provide him with some information about the effectiveness of school reforms, but that the meeting needed to be kept in the strictest confidence. She then told me the names of some educators she had invited to her house and apologized for not inviting me. She didn't give a reason as to why I was not invited. When I heard the names of those who were invited, I drew my own conclusions. It was my opinion that I had been excluded from this dinner because I had voiced my objections to the Blue Book on several occasions. This experience reinforced for me the notion that anyone who disagreed with the direction of school reform went unheard and that the government was not interested in listening to citizens who were in disagreement with the Blue Book.

In summary, I believe each of these experiences provides an example of how Manitoba school reform did not, in my mind, improve teaching and learning. Instead, ideas and practices that I thought had waned and been discarded were revived. In the next chapter, I will turn to the Blue Book itself and seek to discover its message about why the government believed that market notions of school reform were necessary and how teaching and learning would improve.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE BLUE BOOK

Having narrated a selection of stories, conversations and observations that I believe are pertinent to a discussion of the effects of market reforms in education, I will turn now to the Blue Book's explanation of what needed to be restructured in Manitoba schooling. What was the rationale given in the Blue Book to support the changes that were made? After examining the Blue Book's justification of school reform, I will then describe the government's position on how school restructuring would improve teaching and learning and meet the needs of individuals and society. Lastly, I will examine the Blue Book for its' description of the role of government and citizens in bringing about both educational and societal change.

The Blue Book, or what was formally called A Blueprint for Action (1994), was one of several blue paperback books that were published during the 1990's to outline the Manitoba government's educational policy. These books included titles such as: The Action Plan (1995); and A Foundation for Excellence (1995). Each of these books detailed the government's rationale and plans for school change; however, the Blueprint for Action (1994) or Blue Book was the first to set school reform in motion. It gave a clear indication that the goals and philosophical underpinnings of the government's agenda for school reform were aligned with a market imperative for schools. Coincidentally, blue is the colour associated with the Conservative Party that introduced the Blue Book.

#### 3.0 Three Claims to Justify School Reform

At the beginning of the Blue Book was a letter from the Education minister at the time, Clayton Manness, to the citizens of Manitoba. In it, the government stated several reasons for making changes to the education system. First, the government declared that if young people were to be prepared to "compete successfully in today's competitive world" (p.1), Manitoba schools needed to change. The reason, although not directly stated as such, lay in the fact that schools were not more closely aligned with serving economic functions. Concerns about schools and schooling that were expressed in the opening letter, and later in the body of the Blue Book, were about individual and societal prosperity, preparation for work and the ability of the students and the province to compete for employment. The letter cautioned that without the changes proposed by the Blue Book, both Manitoba students and the province as a whole would experience serious repercussions in the future. Second, the Minister of Education claimed that he had spoken with many

Manitobans who had expressed concern about the quality of the province's educational system and these people supported school reform. Finally, the Minister stated that he knew that many citizens shared his vision of education; thus, giving the government a mandate for school reform.

The government's vision of education was described in the Blue Book under six headings called "New Directions". The areas targeted for renewal included: defining essential learning; setting educational standards; improving school effectiveness; increasing parent and community involvement; implementing distance education and technology; and restructuring teacher education. During the Conservative government's term in office, four of the six New Directions were implemented. A turnover of government from the Conservative Party to the New Democratic Party in the late 1990's led to many of the Conservative government's plans for school reform in the areas of distance education and technology and teacher education not being fulfilled.

Throughout each explanation of the six "New Directions" are the government's notions of the school system's difficulty with consistency, clarity and accountability and low expectations for student achievement. In the sections that follow, I will use the Blue Book to expand on the government's view of problems facing the Manitoba school system and explain how school reform would address these concerns. I draw information from each of the "New Directions" to answer the following questions: What was the government's position on how school reform would improve teaching and learning? What needs of individuals and society did the Blue Book identify? How would students, parents, teachers and society as a whole benefit from school reform? According to the Blue Book, what did the government see as its role and the role of Manitoba citizens in bringing changes to Manitoba schooling?

### **3.1 Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment**

Many of the actions undertaken by the Manitoba government were done under the umbrella goal of reforming teaching and learning. For example, efforts to improve parent-school relationships are intended to strengthen the quality of education students receive. For this next section, however, I will focus specifically on issues and actions identified by the Blue Book that related to curriculum, instruction and assessment.

"New Directions 1: Essential Learning for Today and Tomorrow" stated that teaching and learning in Manitoba was problematic for the following reasons:

- there was no uniformly applied or universally accepted definition of basic or essential education
- there were no uniform expectations of student achievement
- some schools motivated students to learn, others did not
- some schools provided unsatisfactory learning experiences
- some teachers continued to use unsatisfactory ways of teaching and learning
- some schools did not fully integrate technology and distance education into schooling, resulting in a limited use of technology by some students
- not all students were prepared for using technology in the workplace or in post secondary education and training
- more students needed to have access to learning opportunities through distance education

The Blue Book suggested that these challenges would be remedied by improvements to curriculum, instruction and assessment.

The Manitoba government's plan to improve curriculum involved defining the basic skills, attitudes, knowledge and behaviours that all students should have upon completion of Kindergarten to Senior 4. It was stated that by completing this task there would be more consistency and clarity about what Manitoba students were learning. A basic education, as described by the Blue Book, was one that focused on skill development and achievement through both traditional and "enhanced basics". Enhanced basics included communication, problem solving, human relations and technology. The "enhanced basics", or "foundation skills", were said to be fundamental to the teaching and learning process. Thus, the Blue Book announced that these foundation skills would be part of instruction in every subject area and at each level.

In addition to defining foundation skill areas, the Blue Book declared that school subjects would be designated as "Compulsory Core Subject Areas", "Complementary Subject Areas" or "Supplementary Subject Areas". Compulsory Core Subjects included; language arts, mathematics, sciences and social studies from Kindergarten to Senior 2. Increased time was given to the core subjects in the early and middle years, particularly language arts, to improve literacy skills and build a foundation of knowledge. The Blue Book stated that there would be more flexibility in school programming at the senior years, where at the Senior 3 and 4 levels, the compulsory subject areas were reduced to two subjects, language arts (in both English and French) and mathematics.

Some courses were deemed less important because they were not designated as "core subjects" and because less time was assigned to the teaching of these courses throughout the instructional day. These courses included:

- second languages
- the arts
- physical education
- additional sciences, social studies, mathematics and language arts

There was no mention of teachers attending to antiracist, multicultural or citizenship education in the Blue Book, nor to ensuring that curricula were gender inclusive.

Other curricular priorities included integrating technology into all subject areas and expanding apprenticeship opportunities. Students who wished to complete a technology program during the senior years were given a special status in that the courses listed as non-compulsory could be completely replaced with technology education courses. It was noted that more of a focus on technology would help Manitoba to be more competitive in a global economy and apprenticeships in school programs would make learning more relevant for students, add flexibility and strengthen the transition from school to work.

The second objective for curriculum reform involved demanding academic rigour from all schools across the province through the setting of curricular standards and policies, as they related to student achievement. As noted earlier, the Blue Book suggested that many schools did not have high expectations for their students. Thus, the Manitoba government decided to implement province-wide standards that would state consistent expectations for student achievement that were "uniformly applied" (p.6). The Blue Book claimed that the standards, stated as expected outcomes for student achievement at Grades 3, 6, Senior 1 and Senior 4, would reflect instructional material covered in the core subject areas, the foundation skill areas, the needs and demands of society and the developmental abilities of students.

The Blue Book declared that a universal set of curriculum standards in public education would hold students accountable, providing "uniform checkpoints for assessing student achievement" (p17). The standards would ensure that all students were able to read, write, think, collaborate and compute at a "high level" (p.17). The government repeated throughout the Blue Book that the same high expectations for learning should be applied to all students within a supportive learning context. Because of this belief, the Blue Book declared that " less than five percent of the student population" (p.14) would require modified

programming. These actions on behalf of the government indicated that uniformity across the school system was both desirable and possible.

A third objective was that the Manitoba government wanted to develop curricula that were "universally accepted" (p.6). To that end, the Blue Book announced the government's commitment to the development of common curricular frameworks that were aligned with other western and national initiatives, such as the Western Canadian Protocol project. It was noted that the western provinces and territories would be collaborating on projects related to the development of English and French curricula, distance education and technology, aboriginal education, teacher preparation, special education, student assessment and other areas.

In summary, curricular reform in Manitoba centred on specifying what students would know and be able to do, placing more of a focus on core subjects such as language arts and mathematics and setting high expectations for all students to meet the standards set by the province. Both technology education and apprenticeships were given increased emphasis and the government stated its commitment to developing common curricula. The Blue Book also announced that a process for revising curricula would be established that was "consistent with the goals of the larger society, economic, and intellectual milieu of the "information age" (p.15).

I will turn now to examining the notions of instruction in the Blue Book. As stated earlier, the government suggested that unsatisfactory teaching and learning experiences were causing students to lose their motivation for learning. Teachers, schools and the system as a whole were identified as helping to create a situation that stifled a student's desire to learn. To engage students more in their learning, the Blue Book identified specific teaching practices that needed to change and pledged to provide teachers with more appropriate teaching resources. Principals were called upon to provide what the Blue Book termed "instructional leadership" through monitoring the implementation of the government's vision of teaching and learning. Highly detailed directives were given to school principals to ensure that the instruction of students followed a certain protocol.

The Blue Book named several teaching practices that needed to change in order to better motivate students. First, teachers should stop teaching to large numbers of learning objectives without determining whether they held all students accountable to high expectations. Second, teachers must decide whether or

not students were actually learning. If students were learning, what and how were they learning? Third, active learning was not being used as often as it should be in classrooms. Teachers emphasized low level thinking skills such as knowing, recalling and comprehending, whereas high level thinking skills should have been the focus. Finally, teachers were not giving students enough opportunities to practise what and how they were learning.

The Manitoba government responded to these perceived difficulties in teaching and learning by declaring that it would be involved in making improvements in the materials teachers used in the classroom and in the methods used to teach students. Teachers needed to be told what and how to teach. The Blue Book announced that the new curricula produced by Manitoba Education and Training would set high expectations for students and clarify outcomes and standards for learning. Using the new curricula, teachers would then incorporate best practices, such as active learning, into their teaching methods. The Blue Book noted that the instruction students received should enable them to assimilate, construct and reconstruct what and how they are learning. It was not sufficient for students to just acquire information, facts, concepts, ideas and knowledge.

According to the Blue Book, the principal's role in school reform was to create a school environment where students would be motivated to learn, providing them with more satisfactory learning experiences. The Blue Book noted that motivating students was sometimes difficult work, but that the solution lay in focusing on a student's desire to learn. The Blue Book stated:

Schools are challenged to provide learning environments which recognize that students come from diverse cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic backgrounds. While many students come to school with numerous and complex needs, increasingly, schools must recognize these students' desire to succeed and achieve their highest potential. (p.20)

As primary instructional leader of the school, the main task of school principals was to set diversity aside and "target"(p.20) a student's desire to learn through establishing effective learning environments. The Blue Book suggested that any student could be motivated through the use of educational content, teaching practices and relationships among school staff, students, parents and the community. Students would become motivated when school staff sought to "nurture, empower, challenge, and connect students to the past and present as well as prepare them for the future" (p20). The principal was to support the

the development of this kind of learning environment, while ensuring that schools were "effective ... uniform... and consistent..." (p.20).

The school principal would initiate major projects in creating effective learning environments and the plans for these projects would be submitted annually to the Minister of Education and Training. A list of what was to be attended to by school principals was provided in the Blue Book. Among the items on this list were the following: the school's mission; goals; code of behaviour; strategies for creating a supportive learning environment; plans to deal with discrimination and violence; and initiatives for including business, industry and labour partnerships.

The Blue Book also stated that the government would communicate expectations about instructional delivery and school learning environments to principals in order to ensure that schools were kept accountable. School plans would provide a measure of whether or not the school was meeting these expectations. If the province determined that schools were "consistently underachiev(ing) " (p. 22), principals were expected to correct the situation. The Blue Book reasserted a hierarchy of authority for the implementation of school reform. The government served notice that a failure to reform teaching and learning along the guidelines proposed by the province would result in consequences.

Assessment practices were another objective of Manitoba school reform. The problem with assessment, as noted earlier, was that expectations of student achievement varied from school to school and student to student. Some schools demanded a great deal from students and expected them to meet high standards for learning, while in other schools the quality of student work was questionable. The Blue Book indicated that this flaw in schooling would be corrected through establishing four "uniform checkpoints" (p.17). At grades 3, 6, Senior 1 and Senior 4, student achievement on the provincial standards and outcomes would be measured by student performance on tests at each of these levels.

The Blue Book announced that each of the tests, with the exception of one at the Senior 4 level, would be used for diagnostic purposes in order to improve student achievement. The test results would form a sizeable percentage of a student's final grade. The apparent reason for this was to ensure that both students and teachers adhered to the accountability measures put in place by the province. Although the weightings given to the provincial tests have changed since the publication of the Blue Book, the proposed weightings at the time for Grades 6, Senior 1 and Senior 4 were 25%, 35% and 50% respectively.



Recognition was given to students with differing abilities and a list of possible responses to students who were having difficulty was provided. Included in the province's list of suggestions of how to help students meet provincial expectations were the notions that students may have to spend more time in school, be assigned lower grades, be provided with supports, and fail a course and/or repeat grades. It was clear that assessments of student performance as they pertained to the standards were to be applied consistently to all students regardless of cultural, linguistic or economic privilege.

The Blue Book also declared that schools would be required to assign grades to students beginning in Grade 6. These grades would reflect student achievement in the core subject areas of language arts, mathematics, sciences and social studies. These grades would be supplemented by anecdotal comments from teachers about student growth and achievement. This decision, once again, was explained as a response to the need for consistency and accountability in reporting.

Another assessment reform involved transcripts for Senior Years students. It was stated in the Blue Book that all of the courses a student had taken from Senior 1 to Senior 4, and the grades assigned to these courses, would be included in a high school transcript. As well, any courses that were not completed would be noted on this transcript. These guidelines signalled a change from past practice where students could re-take a course to better their mark and have that better mark be the one officially recorded. Courses that had been dropped by the student simply did not appear on their written record. The Blue Book claimed that by detailing all of the courses a student had taken or attempted, student achievement was more likely to be assessed and reported effectively and accurately.

Manitoba assessment reform included public reporting of student achievement on standards tests. Teachers and schools would be open to public scrutiny and held accountable for the education that a student received. Unsatisfactory ways of teaching and learning would be forced to change because of this public scrutiny. Should parents not be satisfied with the schooling their child received, they could exercise the right to change their child's school through the new schools of choice legislation that was announced in the Blue Book. More will be said about schools of choice later in this chapter; however, it will suffice for now to note that schools of choice was an integral part of the government's plan to improve the school system's accountability.

In conclusion, the Blue Book claimed that it would improve teaching, learning and schools because it was their mandate to do so. The Blue Book was a means for the government to meet their commitments to the public for reforming public education. Schools would be improved by defining a basic education, setting high standards for student achievement, telling teachers what and how to teach and by measuring the performance of students, teachers and schools in meeting provincial standards. Uniform expectations for student achievement were held for all students and the school system was opened to public scrutiny. The failure of schools would be judged by the public, and as a result, provide the incentive for schools to align themselves more closely with provincial standards and outcomes.

The Blue Book, however, went farther than only making claims about improving teaching and learning. It argued that the changes that were about to be introduced would advance the quality of life for individuals and for all of society. The following sections will examine in more detail what the Blue Book had to say about the goals of schooling. What purpose did schools serve in preparing young people for the future? I will then explain how the government defined the specific needs of parents, students, teachers and society and how school reform would address these needs.

### **3.2 An Economic Imperative for The Purpose of Schools**

The Manitoba government's agenda for school reform proposed to meet the demands of individuals and society by sustaining economic viability within the province and by providing the means for individuals to prosper financially. In reviewing the Blue Book's statements about the purpose of schooling, the following notions support the idea of schooling as preparation for work. Students needed a basic education so that they might:

- achieve individual success and prosperity through competition with others
- expand employment and self-employment opportunities
- contribute to a strong, prosperous economy
- prepare for the future and the new millennium.
- become life long learners
- develop a student's ability to accept and manage change

The Blue Book declared that skill development and acquisition were the means by which all of the above goals were possible. The reforms cited in the Blue Book would enable all students to acquire these skills and participate in economic growth. The government argued that the diversity of backgrounds from

which Manitoba students came was irrelevant to individual success, provided students had the desire to learn (p.20). Collectively, all of society could benefit from the proposed school reform.

Having described the Blue Book's statements about the purpose of schools, I will turn now to examining how the Manitoba government during the 1990's applied its beliefs about the purpose of schools to school reform in addressing the needs of parents, students, teachers and society.

### **3.3 Meeting the Needs of Individuals and Society**

In the Blue Book, the government of Manitoba responded to what it suggested were the changes that parents, students, teachers and society required most from school reform. The Blue Book informed each of these educational partners of the benefits that a new educational policy for the school system would bring once it was aligned more closely with the government's objectives. Throughout the Blue Book's descriptions of the needs of the educational community we are reminded of the government's plan to improve the school system's openness, accountability, effectiveness and competitiveness.

There are several statements in the Blue Book which indicate what parents should expect from teachers and schools, but three school reform actions were clearly the most significant: forming parent advisory councils; initiating a school choice system; and increasing access to information about student achievement and other matters.

The formation of parent advisory councils attended to the needs of parents because the Blue Book suggested that parents and community members were frustrated by the lack of participation in school decision making. The Blue Book noted that parental involvement in schools varied widely and that in some schools parental involvement was "superficial or even discouraged" (p.27). The government observed that parental involvement in a child's education was often critical to school success and thus, argued that parents either wanted to be or should be more involved in schools. To that end, the first action the Blue Book declared on behalf of the needs of parents was to establish Advisory Councils for School Leadership. The responsibilities of these councils included:

- developing school plans
- taking part in setting school budgets and conducting school reviews
- making recommendations to the school board about the appointment of principals
- consulting with the school principal on school matters
- communicating issues of importance to other parents in the community (p.29).

With the introduction of Advisory Councils for School Leadership, parents were provided with a government-sanctioned structure for involvement in school decision making. The formation of these councils had a significant impact on extending the role of parents as educational partners, expanding parental and community responsibilities to include formerly uncharted territories.

The second action, implementation of a school choice system, was intended to meet the needs of parents who were demanding increased flexibility in choosing their child's school. The Blue Book claimed that parents should be able to choose the school that they thought best met the needs of their child. Thus, if a parent was dissatisfied with their local school, he or she could "shop around" for a school that was better suited to the child. This action implied that parents were not getting all to which they were entitled as taxpayers and that parents deserved to have the right to choose their child's school, "within limits" (p.28). Those limits, however, were not defined in the Blue Book.

Lastly, the Blue Book stated that parents needed to have more information about student achievement, both with respect to their child and the collective achievement of students in their child's school. The government stated that parents also required more information pertaining to other matters related to their child's schooling. The Blue Book responded to the perceived need for parents to have more information in two ways. First, as noted earlier, student achievement on standards tests would be made a matter of public record through the publishing of school results in the newspaper. Second, the Blue Book included a description of parental rights regarding their child's schooling. The Blue Book defined for parents their right to receive information about their child, the programs available to them and school codes of conduct. It also indicated that parents would now be entitled to access any records generated by the school about their child and challenge the contents of these records. Finally, parents were to be informed of any steps taken by school authorities that would infringe on the rights and freedoms of their child.

Both public reporting of student achievement on standards tests and the Blue Book's statement of parental rights indicated that schools sometimes withheld information about student achievement and other processes of schooling from parents. The publishing of school results on standards tests demonstrated that ostensibly the government believed that parents were both entitled to compare the performance of students and schools and had the appropriate resources to do so. As for the statement of parental rights, it appeared that this school reform addressed a concern with parents having poor relationships with their child's

schools, thereby making it difficult for parents to get access to the kind of information they needed to make informed decisions about their child's schooling.

As already noted, the Blue Book cited that students needed an education that would give them the "knowledge and skills required to participate in, and contribute to, a vigorous and prosperous society" (p.33). Manitoba school reform would enable students to be prepared for the future by assisting them in competing for a variety of employment opportunities. The knowledge learned in school would be more applicable to real life than it had been in the past. School reform would give students the schooling required to fulfill the demands of employers through changes to the curriculum and by having high expectations of student achievement.

If schools were to be more aligned with a vocational purpose for schooling, then school reform would ready students in several ways. As mentioned earlier, the new curricula would place more of an emphasis on traditional basics and skill development, particularly literacy and numeracy. These two skills were said to be sorely lacking in high school graduates (A Lot to Learn, 1992) by advocates of vocational models of schooling. Students would also learn to compete through the setting of standards and the writing of standards tests. Students would be better prepared for the transition to work because of the integration of technology in all subject areas.

As previously noted, improving student motivation was deemed by the Blue Book to be something students needed. It was implied that some students did not have a sufficient desire to do well. Common rhetoric at the time stated that students were not motivated to succeed in school because "no fail" policies existed, causing students to become disengaged from schooling. School reform would address this issue through creating a system in which a lack of student motivation and unwillingness to work hard would result in failure. It was implied that the fear of failure would prompt students to work harder at their studies and be more motivated to succeed.

School reform in Manitoba would prepare students for the world of work through strengthening their work ethic. Because students would be required to strive for excellence, they would be more likely to reach their potential and have a desire for life long learning. Furthermore, school reform would enable students to be better equipped to accept and manage change. It appeared that the government believed that

all of these qualities were desirable in students, making it more likely that they would be prepared for the future, achieve individual prosperity and contribute to the overall economic performance of the province.

The Blue Book noted that school reform would meet the needs of teachers because it would tell them what and how to teach and provide them with a consistent, reliable measure of student achievement. Furthermore, the Blue Book suggested that teachers required support through government recognition of schooling being a shared responsibility and by giving them increased control over student discipline.

According to the Blue Book, the proposed reforms for teaching and learning held many benefits for teachers. For example, the promise of new curricula was a welcome one. Teachers needed new curricula, as the current guides to teaching and learning were outdated. The curricula that teachers had been using were published during the late 70's and early 80's. The Blue Book indicated that the new curricula would be less prescriptive and would have fewer learning objectives than the curricula teachers were presently using. Yet, given that the Blue Book also stated that teachers would be told what and how to teach, this is contradictory. For some teachers, the idea of a standardized teaching and learning process was undoubtedly reassuring, as they preferred to work within tight parameters such as those set by the province.

Furthermore, we can infer that the Blue Book ostensibly proposed to meet teacher needs by reducing the number of instructional programs that they would have to prepare. The Blue Book indicated that only set a number of adaptations could be made to the curriculum. Thus, very few students would be eligible for programs that required significant changes to the outcomes and standards. Students who did not meet the standards would simply re-take a course or repeat a grade. Following this logic, we would expect that eventually all students would enter a particular grade with a certain basic skill level, and presumably, there would be less diversity in the range of student abilities. Teachers would have fewer programs for which to plan within the same class, making their work less demanding.

The Blue Book stated that teachers needed help with improving the kinds of instruction used in the classroom. Teachers required assistance with applying learning objectives, identifying and using best practices and learning how to integrate technology and distance education. It was indicated in the Blue Book that the government should take a more active role in monitoring teaching practices in order to ensure that best practices were used. Teachers needed to be held accountable for teaching the standards and outcomes set by the province. Moreover, the Blue Book indicated that teachers should be more involved

with updating their skills and training to ensure that instruction practices were current and relevant. A commitment was made by the government to review teacher education and certification.

In addition to meeting the needs of teachers through changes to curriculum and instruction, the Blue Book stated that teachers required a reliable source of information about student achievement that would provide them with a measure of student performance that was consistent across the province. To that end, the government noted that Manitoba Education and Training would develop "evaluation tools, tests, and protocols for standards testing" (p.18) at each of the four grade levels where standards tests would be administered. With the government taking on such a large and costly role in assessment, one could speculate that teacher constructed means of assessment were deemed by the government to be an unreliable measure of student learning and that government-constructed assessments would be more objective evaluations of student performance.

It was noted that teachers would supplement scores on the provincial standards tests with evidence of student learning through the use of "portfolios, demonstrations, exhibitions, and teacher observations" (p.18). In this way, an "accurate, balanced, and well-rounded profile for reporting student growth and achievement" (p.18) would be provided to students and parents.

The Blue Book stated that teaching was a shared responsibility; thus, the government clearly defined the roles of parents, students, teachers, principals, advisory councils, school boards and the Minister. By stating the various duties of the educational partners, the government hoped that each of the partners would honour their respective responsibilities for making schools work better. Parents would become more involved, students work harder, teachers teach better, principals lead better and so on.

In addition, the Blue Book provided teachers with the power to suspend disruptive students. Under the heading of Responsibilities and Rights of Teachers, teachers were given the right to suspend students from the classroom for two to five days. Reasons for suspending the student had to be documented and the principal could direct the teacher to a different course of action. One can assume from this action that the government believed that teachers should have access to more ways to control student behaviour. This action also suggested that teachers may have lacked administrative support in disciplining unruly students.

In summary, the Blue Book suggested that teachers would benefit from the school reforms listed therein because:

- the province would tell teachers what and how to teach
- tools would be provided for teachers to do the job
- standards would be prescribed for student performance
- the standards for student performance would be inclusive
- consistency would be expected
- the division of labour in the education of students was more clearly defined
- teachers would have the power to suspend disruptive students

For all of these reasons, the Blue Book purported to make the work of teachers more focused, manageable and rewarding.

Lastly, I will examine what the Blue Book had to say about the needs of society. With the approach of the twenty-first century, the government warned that changes would need to be made to the school system that would better prepare students for the future and secure the economic well being of the province. The Blue Book claimed that the quality of life for individual citizens and society as a whole on both a global and national level would improve with school reform. Student exposure to "world class" (p.15) curricula, the best practices of teachers and rigorous standards of accountability were essential to ensuring that a student had access to individual economic prosperity. Manitoba students would be better trained and prepared for the transition to work and this preparation would lead to a healthier and more vigorous economy.

The Manitoba government indicated that public confidence in education needed to be restored. To that end, the government planned to approach school reform "prudent(ly)" (p.2). Schools would be made to answer to public accountability and new opportunities would be created for parents and community members to have a more meaningful role in educational decision making. School reforms would change schooling so that it was more uniform and consistent, enabling Manitoba to have the best educational system in Canada, if not the world.

In this last section, I will describe what the Blue Book outlined about the role of government, and individual citizens in bringing about school reform. I will review how the Blue Book described each of these roles and explore how fulfilment of these roles would provide for successful implementation of



have in enacting school reform by looking at the role of government and then at the roles of parents, students, teachers and society.

#### **3.4 The Role of Government, Individuals and Society in School Reform**

With the publication of the Blue Book, government actions were set in motion across the province that would inform educators and parents of the direction school reform was about to take. The Blue Book stated that it was the government's role to ensure that Manitoba had the best education system in the world (p.1) and that in order to meet this goal, the government would have to "set strong directions" (p.3) for Manitoba citizens to follow.

There were three priorities for school reform that stood out prominently in the Blue Book. First, it was stated that education was a shared responsibility and that schools and communities needed to have greater decision making ability. To that end, the government undertaking the task of defining the rights and responsibilities of all the educational partners and would establish this through Advisory Councils for School Leadership. The Blue Book was particularly concerned with ensuring that parents were more involved as educational partners, noting that the government would be communicating to parents ways to "implement meaningful parental programs" (p.28).

Second, the government indicated that its role was to ensure that students had the necessary skills and levels of literacy needed for employment. Curricula were developed, educational standards were set and provincial standards testing was initiated. Expectations were stated regarding instructional delivery, "anticipated levels of student performance" (p.18) and school learning environments. The government also made an offer to assist schools in gathering information such as drop-out and graduation rates, so that a "school profile" (p.22) could be developed.

Third, the Blue Book reiterated the government's commitment to making the school system accountable through school plans and reviews, schools of choice, standards testing and the public reporting of student achievement. Thus, the government decided what constituted an effective learning environment, and it indicated that it would ensure that these learning environments were uniform and consistent.

Finally, the Blue Book indicated that it was the government's role to work with the citizens of Manitoba to provide quality education. The Blue Book stated that it had consulted with Manitobans

regarding school reform and that officials of Manitoba Education and Training of education would continue to make themselves available to parents who wished to discuss schools or schooling .

Given that education was acknowledged to be a shared responsibility, the government determined that it was necessary to prescribe the roles, responsibilities and rights of others when coming together as educational partners. All of the roles, except for the role of students, were written as separate statements in the Blue Book. In this section, I summarize each of these statements and expand on the government's description of roles by adding ideas culled from the body of the Blue Book.

The role of parents as defined by the Blue Book was to meet the government's expectations in getting more involved in schools and schooling. As noted earlier, parents were to work with schools in setting directions and priorities for their child's school. Advisory Councils for School Leadership were established and the responsibilities for these councils were described in the Blue Book. Parents were expected to get more directly involved in their child's educational programming. Parental responsibilities with respect to their child included: building a foundation for life long learning; ensuring that their child attended school; and assuming liability for any damage to the school caused by their child. Lastly, parents were expected to consult with the school regarding their child's program if the school made the request to do so.

Through each of the above statements, the Blue Book clearly delineated parental rights and responsibilities. From the information given to readers of the Blue Book, the government indicated that it perceived both a deficit of parental involvement and a lack of parental authority in schools. The Blue Book was about repairing this situation by calling on parents to assume their responsibilities as they pertained to schools and their children and by giving parents more control over decisions that were made in schools.

Interestingly, the Blue Book did not offer a specific statement of responsibilities for students, whereas it did so for all other educational partners. The role of students can be stated briefly and simply, for there was little mention of the part students would have in school reform. In summary, students were to work hard and be prepared to devote considerable time to the individual pursuit of excellence.

According to the Blue Book, the task of teachers and other instructional leaders in bringing about school reform was to ensure that teaching and learning followed the means and methods prescribed by the

government. Schools were held accountable to parents, the community and the Minister, with the expectation that they would provide responses to any concerns that were raised.

A statement of the responsibilities and rights of teachers was provided in the Blue Book. Many of these responsibilities have already been stated earlier in this chapter. Included in this statement was the following: establish an effective learning environment in the classroom; implement the curricula developed by the province; review with students and report to parents assessments on student achievement and progress; participate in planning educational policies; and upgrade professional competence. The Blue Book also stated that teachers should hold high expectations for student learning and deliver curricula using best practices. Standards tests and teacher-constructed assessment tools were to be used by teachers to provide information about student achievement to both parents and students. Finally, teacher concerns about student performance were to be addressed through teachers contacting parents and working with them on improving student performance.

The statement of teacher responsibilities and rights also declared that teachers would maintain order and discipline in the classroom, school, playgrounds or on school-sponsored activities. Presumably, it was to this end that teachers were given the power to suspend students from school.

Other instructional leaders, such as the principal, had a role in implementing school reform. This role was already largely described in an earlier section of this chapter. As noted, the primary task of the school principal was to establish an effective learning environment and manage the implementation of school reform. The Blue Book declared that effective school environments would be created in part by the principal fulfilling various duties. Some of these duties were:

- taking parental and community feedback into consideration when hiring teachers and assigning them to their positions
- evaluating teaching staff following the model of instructional leadership provided by the province
- developing and implementing school plans
- tracking and communicating school achievement results
- establishing Advisory Councils for School Leadership

School principals would also be expected to participate in school reviews if Manitoba Education and Training deemed that such a review was warranted. The Blue Book cited that the grounds for initiating a school review would be "schools that consistently underachieve (d)" (p.22).

According to the Blue Book, the central function of society was to ensure that present and future generations of Manitobans would have access to an educational system that was working well. The government reminded citizens that successful implementation of the school reforms that were proposed would take time, commitment and a willingness to work together. All of society was deemed responsible for helping students to become life long learners. The Blue Book called on citizens to become more technologically-able and to get more directly involved in educational programming.

In conclusion, the Blue Book provided information to Manitoba citizens about why school reform was needed and the direction that this reform would take. The government's ideas on improving teaching and learning, meeting the needs of individuals and society and the role that citizens and government play in bringing about educational change supported schooling for economic purposes. In Chapter four, I will contest the government's rationale for making changes to schools and show how Manitoba school reform was non-educational, dehumanizing and undemocratic. Once again, I believe it is worth noting that the criticisms presented here are not intended to support maintaining the status quo in schools and schooling. I believe that the school system could benefit from restructuring and in Chapter five, I will demonstrate this by proposing some ideas for the reader's consideration.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### AN ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATION OF THE BLUE BOOK

The Blue Book rhetoric made certain claims about the state of the Manitoba education system in the 1990's and plans for making significant changes to schools were unveiled. In this chapter, I will analyze both the rationale and the proposed actions or "New Directions" in the Blue Book. The chapter begins by revisiting the three reasons that the government gave to garner support for school reform in his letter at the beginning of the Blue Book. To review, the government indicated that Manitoba schools were failing both students and society and that schools needed to be reformed. The government also stated that the majority of citizens in the province agreed with the government's claim that school improvement was necessary. Lastly, the government argued that its vision of school reform was one that had broad support from Manitoba voters. I will show that none of these stated reasons in the Blue Book could be substantiated and that by following a market imperative for school reform, the Manitoba government adopted what was more of a restoration than school improvement project.

The Blue Book was problematic from educational, human and democratic perspectives. By educational standards, the Blue Book did not improve education because teaching and learning revived a behaviourist view of curriculum, instruction and assessment that focused on the acquisition of skills and knowledge at the expense of other capacities for learning. Accountability measures reduced the flexibility with which teachers could respond to student needs and fostered poor pedagogical practices. While proclaiming that school administrators were instructional leaders, the Blue Book implemented school reforms that led to managerial, rather than instructional, responsibilities. Finally, notions of assessment were both punitive and arbitrary. The Blue Book also led to the dehumanization of students, teachers and parents. With a vision of schooling that promoted competition, commodified students, and attributed student achievement to effort and ability, the Manitoba government exacerbated systemic and political inequities. The Blue Book encouraged the withholding and awarding of privileges and thereby contributed to schooling practices that strengthened a sense of entitlement. Lastly, I will argue that both the educational and societal implications of the Blue Book threatened the foundations of democratic society. Following an implementation process that undermined democratic decision making and dialogue, the Manitoba government relied on economic rationality to guide the development of school reform and consequently,

repressed critical thinking, weakened relationships between educational partners and contributed to a loss of our common needs.

#### 4.0 Challenging the Rationale for School Reform

The first claim made by the government in the Blue Book to substantiate its school reform was that schools were failing Manitoba students and the society as a whole. Mr. Manness stated in his July 1994 letter that "Renewing education [was] necessary if our students, in greater numbers, [were] to be prepared for the future" (p.1) and that "Our future well-being and our children's future well-being [was] dependent upon our efforts" (p.1). These emotionally charged words lead one to think that Manitoba schools were in desperate need of reform and that if the changes proposed by the government were not made, we would put our children and our province at risk for the future. Yet, because the statement was a "motherhood" one, the government made it difficult to challenge these assumptions.

In what ways were schools not preparing students for the future, according to the Manitoba government during the 1990's? To provide some insight into this question, I turned to the one source that was quoted in the Blue Book, the Economic Council of Canada's publication, A Lot to Learn (1992). I believe that the government cited the study A Lot to Learn by the Economic Council of Canada to lend credibility to its argument that teachers and schools were not providing students with a satisfactory school experience. If the claims made in A Lot to Learn had merit, then the provincial government's concerns about the school system were certainly warranted.

There were many issues raised by A Lot to Learn that focused largely on the assumption that individual and societal economic prosperity was at risk because of the lack of coherence between Canada's education system and the work force. The report appealed to economic anxieties of the time – anxieties related to globalization, a preoccupation with being competitive on a world stage and a fear of dwindling economic prosperity. The introduction to A Lot to Learn was entitled "Learning to Compete", and I believe that it is worth quoting in its entirety because it provides a good summary of the reasons why the Economic Council of Canada contended that public schools were not meeting the needs of Canadian citizens:

Education affects our lives in many ways. For most of us, it has a profound effect on the kind of jobs we can aspire to, the money we make, and the quality of life we enjoy. Skill development is more important than ever in a global economy in which competitiveness and productivity depend increasingly on brains, not brawn. The choice for Canadians is clear: they must develop their skills or accept low wages. So the education and training systems are under scrutiny: are they up to the task? What can be done to improve their effectiveness?

The Economic Council believes that Canadians have a lot to learn about making primary, secondary, and technical education more effective.

The education and training systems, labour-market performance, and overall economic performance are closely linked. How do we compare with other advanced countries? What can we learn from them? Many are undertaking far-reaching reforms to match their systems to new realities. Should we do the same? (p.1)

A Lot to Learn noted that education played a major role in the economy and questioned "What do we get out of it?" The report answered this question by stating that too many young Canadians were illiterate, that Canadian students performed poorly on comparative tests that measure academic achievement and that Canadian students lacked the skills needed for future employment (p.2).

The Economic Council's report indicated that 28% of Canadians between the ages of 16 and 24 were below the "everyday reading level" (p.3). The report noted that this statistic was "alarming" (p.3) given that those tested would have received at least 10 years of schooling. The Economic Council declared that "this [was] a sign of failure" (p.3). A Lot to Learn also commented on differences in student achievement on comparative tests. Significant differences in inter-provincial student achievement scores were cited (p.6) and in comparison with student achievement in Japan (p.4), Canadian students fared poorly. Moreover, the report stated that graduates from Canadian schools were not finding jobs because of a shortage in the kinds of skilled labour required in the "information age" and because of a poor transition process from schools to the work place. The Economic Council indicted public schools for having one of the worst records of school-to-work transition." School leavers find a job by trial and error, often wasting their own and society's resources in the process" (p.18).

A Lot to Learn concluded with a sense of urgency by stating that without school reform "Canada's prosperity [was] in danger" (p. 34). Immediate action was necessary if the threats to Canadian economic interests were to be assuaged.

For a different interpretation of the Economic Council of Canada's indictment of public schools, I have turned primarily to Maude Barlow and Heather-jane Robertson's well-researched book on business and Canadian schools, Class Warfare (1994). I will examine what these authors state about the arguments in A Lot to Learn, namely, that public schools were responsible for producing illiterate Canadians, that students performed poorly on comparative tests and that graduates of Canadian schools were unprepared for employment in a global economy. In a thorough and thoughtful examination of the findings cited in A Lot to Learn, Barlow and Robertson reveal that the claims presented in this report were based on a 1989

Statistics Canada survey. The authors argue that results from this survey were manipulated to fit the purposes of the Economic Council's report and they accuse the organization of "shoddy research" and "abuse of data". The authors' accusations are supported by a rigorous documentation of how the Statistics Canada findings were twisted.

The Economic Council's declaration that Canadian public schools were failing to provide students with basic levels of literacy was based on a misinterpretation of the Statistics Canada's 1989 survey. A Lot to Learn indicated that 28% of Canadians were illiterate; however, according to Barlow and Robertson (1994), those who were considered less literate by the survey had not spent any significant time in Canadian schools because they were older and educated in a different country. When Barlow and Robertson strip away all the results that shouldn't have been included in the Economic Council's tally of 28% because they had absolutely no bearing on the literacy levels of students who had attended Canadian schools, one finds that the number of students with limited reading skills was more appropriately 3%. Furthermore, it was impossible to determine from the survey how many students in the 3% who were not born in Canada, did not speak English as a first language or had not spent much time in Canadian schools. Those who scored the highest on the literacy portions of the survey were people whose first language was English and who were graduates of Canadian high schools. Analyzed appropriately, the Statistics Canada survey provided evidence of the effectiveness of public schools.

In comparing levels of achievement of Canadian students to students from other countries, once again Barlow and Robertson probed factors that led to a misinterpretation of results. The authors found that contrary to the claim made in A Lot to Learn (1992) that Canadian students did not perform as well on comparative tests, Canadian students either met or exceeded the performance of Japanese students. The discrepancies between Barlow and Robertson's research and the evidence provided by the Economic Council of Canada can be explained by the fact that the Council's report did not attempt to account for variables that might have led to biased results. In comparing the results of Canadian to Japanese students for example, Barlow and Robertson found that Japanese students were streamed academically, that some schools did not participate in the national achievement tests and still other schools did not submit their test results. Furthermore, Japanese teachers and students were told that the results on the tests were a question of national and cultural honour.



Osborne's (1999) research on comparative testing further substantiates Barlow and Robertson's findings. Osborne found that when he looked at the conditions for teaching and test results, Japanese teachers had substantially more time to prepare for the courses that they taught. This important variable could readily account for differences in Canadian and Japanese test results. Osborne suggests that before drawing conclusions about comparative test results, one first needs to ask questions to surface variables that could cause discrepancies in test results. Academic streaming, failure to submit some tests, the amount of preparation time and cultural bias all contribute to making the comparisons between student achievement meaningless.

With respect to the arguments made in A Lot to Learn that the public school system was not preparing students for future employment, Barlow and Robertson (1994) present quite a different picture than the one given in the Economic Council of Canada's report. The authors declared that the skills shortage was a myth. Barlow and Robertson clearly show that Canadian schools were graduating more students with more education than ever before and that many of those graduates had the presumably sought after technological, math and science skills that business had declared were in demand. The problem was not a lack of graduates to fill positions, but a lack of employment positions.

Barlow and Robertson's (1994) research found that there was a surplus of science graduates and that Canadian women were being turned away from overcrowded engineering programs. Graduates who were unable to find work in their various fields were declaring bankruptcy in increasing numbers because students were unable to repay their student loans. The authors noted that what skills mismatch they could find between graduates and the work available did not lie in technology, math or science related fields. Businesses were having difficulty finding low-skilled labour to fill jobs in the trade sectors. In a later work, Robertson (1998) reported that the Fortune 500 companies were laying off high-tech, high-skilled workers and that the Canadian Labour Force Development Board reported in 1997 that no more than 20 per cent of unemployment could be attributed to an inability to find workers with the necessary skills.

Given the shaky logic of the conclusions about Canadian schools and schooling that were presented in A Lot to Learn, our students, teachers and schools were unfairly targeted by the Blue Book. None of the Economic Council's claims about low literacy levels, poor achievement on comparative tests or the notion that schools were to blame for a shortage of skilled workers for high-tech jobs could be

substantiated. This brief examination of the arguments presented in A Lot to Learn clearly points to a lack of credibility of the report's findings. There are striking parallels between The Economic Council of Canada's report and the Blue Book that seem to indicate that A Lot to Learn could have been the Manitoba government's manual for school reform. The beliefs, language and recommendations of this report have all found a place in the Blue Book and they clearly demonstrate support for market interests as I will show in this chapter.

A second assertion contained in Mr. Manness' letter at the front of the Blue Book that I would like to examine more closely was the idea that Manitobans were dissatisfied with the quality of education in the province. He stated that during his tenure as the Minister of Manitoba Education and Training he had listened to many citizens who expressed this concern (p.1). A point of clarification is important to understanding Mr. Manness' claim.

Research shows that at the time of implementation of market reforms for school improvement in Canada there were those who were unhappy with the school system, but most parents were satisfied overall with the particular schools that their children attended (Barlow and Robertson, 1994; Osborne, 1999). The distinction here between being dissatisfied with individual schools and the educational system as a whole is important because claims such as the one Mr. Manness made in his letter could be misleading. Parental confidence in schools was in fact quite high when market reforms were introduced, but one would not know that from reading the Blue Book or listening to the rhetoric espoused in the local media at the time of the Blue Book's implementation. In fact, of all public institutions Canadians have more respect for public education than for any other institution (Robertson, 1994, p.249).

One explanation for why parents rate schools other than the one their child attends as poor lies in the constant banter by media, politicians and business that alleges that schools are not working (Barlow and Robertson, 1994). Saul (1997), on the other hand, attributes the lack of public confidence in public programs to a failure to believe in public interest over self-interest even when many public programs are working. He states:

We find ourselves believing that government fails at everything; that public programs are ineffective and expensive; that a disinterested structure is probably a mess; that only self-interest works; that the public interest is a romantic dream. (p.490)

This loss of a sense of common needs is an important consideration and one that I will return to later in this chapter. It will suffice to say that the Manitoba government used the lack of public confidence in the school system to build support for its implementation of school reforms during the 1990's, even though most parents would have said that they were pleased with the schooling that their child was receiving.

In the letter from Mr. Manness to the citizens of Manitoba, the Education minister made a third claim. Mr. Manness described the school reform notions in the Blue Book as his vision, one that he said was shared by many (p.2). When the government of Manitoba announced this reason for implementing a market-driven model of reform, it was confusing a plebiscitary system with democratic one. Responding to the wishes of a majority does not make a democracy. In a plebiscitary system, the wishes of a majority can rule out less popular views or minority opinions, making plebiscitism more compatible with authoritarian politics (Elshtain, 1993, p.28). Thus, in a democracy, it is not sufficient to argue that an educational policy has been adopted simply because people wanted it. Furthermore, how did the government know that this was what the citizens of Manitoba wanted? The government did not have a mandate for school reform simply because it had been elected by popular vote, particularly when school reform was not an election issue.

A democratic system of government moves beyond a "privatized consumer orientation" (Young, 1996, p.121) and toward deliberation and reasoned consensus. What processes were followed to ensure that alternatives to a market model were considered? Who was consulted? How were they consulted? When concerns were raised about equity and inclusion, how were they addressed? More will be said about how the Manitoba government eroded democratic processes through its implementation of market reform in the last section of this chapter. At this point, I simply make the point that responding to majority opinion, if it was in fact majority opinion, is yet another reason given by the government to support school reform that I find problematic.

In the Blue Book, the Manitoba government cited a school system that was failing society, parents who were dissatisfied and the idea that most people were in favour of school reform as the reasons for the initiation of changes to the school system. However, none of these reasons could be substantiated. I believe that given the huge taxpayer expense of school reform, the government would have wanted to ensure that the public knew that the proposed changes were grounded in solid and credible educational research.

However, only A Lot to Learn was cited and given the unsubstantiated claims that were made in this report, the credibility of this source was highly questionable. At the time the Manitoba version of market-based school reforms were implemented, a rich resource of educational research literature already existed that demonstrated irrefutably that market imperatives for school reform had been ineffective in improving student learning in other countries (Apple, 1999). However, this literature was either ignored or the government was unaware that it existed. Either of these conclusions is problematic. Nonetheless, the government made the decision to implement market notions of school reform and in this next section I will examine the educational consequences of this decision.

#### **4.1 Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment**

The Manitoba government opened itself to charges of failing to conduct a proper study of educational research when it released the Blue Book and one is led to question whether there were reasons other than improving student learning behind the government's school reform agenda. Levin and Wiens (2002) suggest that large-scale school reform efforts of the 1980's and 1990's were organized primarily around purposes other than making improvements to student achievement. These writers observed that school improvement was more about questions of governance, market mechanisms, finance or testing. With the publication of the Blue Book, it became apparent that the Manitoba government was not primarily interested in improving student learning. In fact, rather than improving the school system the Blue Book put school reform measures into place that turned back the clock on schooling in Manitoba by reviving pedagogical practices that had long since been declared by many educators to be ineffective.

The Blue Book's vision of school reform failed to make changes to the school system that positively affected teaching and learning because the changes were based on behaviourist notions of curriculum, instruction and assessment. First, the government defined curricula in narrow, vocational terms that focused on the acquisition of skills and knowledge that could be measured on a standards test. Furthermore, the Blue Book announced that schools would change for the better because the government would clearly define a set of outcomes that could be applied uniformly to all students throughout the province and measured on a standards test. The Manitoba government believed that the common set of standards could be applied to all students, whether they lived in urban or rural areas of the province, in remote northern reserves or in the core area of the city. The application of uniform standards applying to all

students, regardless of where they lived, indicated that the Manitoba government did not seem to place much value on the role of difference in designing curricula -- an idea that will be articulated in more detail when I discuss the Blue Book's view of student achievement in the second section of this chapter. With respect to the improvement of instruction, the Blue Book made several statements that were contradictory. Although at times the Blue Book's descriptions of instruction were progressive, the notions of curricula and commitment to standards testing undermined any advancement that might have been made in the thinking about instruction. These contradictions were ultimately resolved through the various accountability measures that the government instituted; however, the resolution of these contradictions came at the expense of improvements to teaching and learning. Finally, the government's vision of assessment reform reinforced the ideas of motivation, reward, punishment and the value of objective measurement. This resulted in a view of assessment that was both coercive and arbitrary. For all of these reasons, the Blue Book signalled that teaching and learning in Manitoba was about to take a giant step backward.

#### **An Incomplete Definition of a Basic Education**

Market models of schooling call for a return to the basics and the Blue Book was no exception. The reader will recall from the Blue Book the government's concern with the fact that there was no uniformly applied or universally accepted definition of a basic education (p.6); therefore, the government attempted to remedy this situation by giving emphases to literacy, mathematics and technology. The Blue Book led Manitobans to believe that students needed to spend more time in school studying the basics in preparation for employment and to enable Canada to become more competitive in a global market. Thus, as the reader will recall from the narrative, high achieving students at the high school dropped their option courses so that they might take additional core courses. Both students and parents believed that these additional courses in traditional literacies and technology would assist students to become more competitive in seeking university entrance and future employment. Given the highly unpredictable nature of the job market, this funnelling of students into more traditional and technology-based subjects was a risky and irresponsible move on behalf of the government. Saul (1995) calls the alignment of a basic education with the job market a seemingly practical, but illusory approach. He says:

The problem is not to teach skills in a galloping technology but to teach students to think and give them the tools of thought so that they can react to the myriad changes, including technological, that will inevitably face them over the next decades. (p.67)

Barlow and Robertson (1994) offer additional support for this view. They argue the same point but add the perspective that consideration of local context is also important to the discussion of a basic education.

Barlow and Robertson have noted that "millions of young people are being trained for jobs that don't or won't exist where they live" (p.65). More will be said later in this section about the importance of local contexts. At this point it is sufficient to note that it is poor judgement to narrow the definition of a basic education to fit with employment purposes given that we cannot predict where or when jobs will become obsolete or even what skills will be necessary (Levin, 1999).

Even if one accepts the government's market interpretation of the basic skills, attitudes, knowledge and beliefs that all students should have upon completion of schooling, the government's plan for school improvement as proposed in the Blue Book was short sighted. The Blue Book's message to students and parents that literacy and mathematics were more important for employment than studies in languages, history, social studies, music and art did not give much thought to the needs of a globalized job market. Contrary to popular opinion, Canada is not experiencing a "brain drain", a popular political expression to mean the loss of talented young people to other countries, but more of a shuffling of talent worldwide. In the words of a business leader interviewed recently in *Macleans* (May 20, 2002), "there's this great rearrangement going on of where things are done in the world that's resulting in more brains going different places". Thus, young Canadians are moving to other countries, but Canada is also employing more young people from elsewhere.

The "brain shuffle" presents an exciting opportunity for both the young Canadians who find employment in another country and for the Canadian communities that are fortunate enough to receive new immigrants. Even from a market perspective, one should be able to see the benefit of Canadian students having a school experience that values the inclusion of some of the courses that the Blue Book deemed of little value to preparation for employment. For example, if Canadian young people are to act as ambassadors for our country by working in far off places, I would hope that they would have a strong understanding of cross cultural perspectives. This understanding, gained from the study of languages and social science courses, is missing from the Blue Book's definition of a basic education and thus, the government failed to meet even its own purposes satisfactorily.

In addition to calling for a revival of the basics of schooling such as literacy and mathematics skills, market-based school reform, as described in the Blue Book, valued the mastery of information over other capacities for learning. This decision by the government also helped to return schooling in Manitoba to a more traditional approach where students are commonly seen as empty vessels into which knowledge is poured. By focusing on the acquisition of knowledge, certain capacities for learning are excluded from a market agenda. Some of these capacities are:

- critical thinking
- imagination
- empathy
- co-operative learning
- decision making
- problem-solving
- initiative

These capacities are not included in market notions of schooling because they are difficult to measure. Consequently, these skills are excluded or subordinated by less sophisticated kinds of knowledge (Kohn, 1999) that are more test friendly. Maxine Greene (1985) further supports this notion by reminding us that:

A concern for the critical and the imaginative, for the opening of new ways of "looking at things," is wholly at odds with the technician and behaviourist emphases we still find in American schools. (p.126)

Thus, proponents of market-based schooling are more likely to create an inflexible curriculum, one that is "more easily skewed towards the more concrete and easily measured domains of facts and skills, squeezing out the less tangible goals of schooling" (Robertson, 1998, p.54). However, as Robertson (1998) notes, "if our educational goals include valuing effort, engagement, curiosity, the ability to work with others, and creativity, then equating success with performance on one final examination is illogical"(p.64).

Unfortunately, it would seem that logic does not dictate decisions to implement standards testing.

Furthermore, by allowing testing to influence curriculum design, the Manitoba government constricted the debate over what was worth knowing. What was worth knowing was defined by what was on the test and what was tested were those skills that were measurable and useful to a future global economy (Robertson, 1998). However, there is a problem with limiting a discussion of the purpose of schools to fulfillment of vocational goals in that such a discussion does not "touch seriously upon the

matter of our purposes as a society...upon what it means to educate live persons" (Greene, 1985, p.170). Schooling is about more than learning how to make a living. In the section of this chapter that is concerned with the Manitoba government's description of the needs of students, teachers, parents and society, I will examine the difficulties of utilitarian purposes for schooling, and in chapter five, I will suggest alternative purposes around which schooling can be organized.

When the Blue Book elevated the importance of traditional basics and technology, the government contributed to reducing the quality of learning that was taking place in Manitoba public schools. For example, as fewer students chose to take Spanish, French, band, world religion, women's studies and environmental science, Shaftesbury stopped offering these courses because of a lack of enrolment. This was disconcerting for two reasons. First, the narrowing of compulsory classes limited student participation in courses that would develop the kinds of literacies and perspectives that are essential to attending to competing purposes for schools. Second, the funnelling of students into more English, mathematics and technology classes contributed to the perpetuation of inequitable school experiences. When Shaftesbury stopped offering certain courses, many students paid for private music and language classes to supplement their school experience, but some students could not afford to do this. Unfortunately, those who had the means to pay for private classes were in the majority; therefore, the choices of these students dictated what courses would be offered.

### **Uniform Standards**

The Blue Book stated that the province would develop a universal set of standards and hold all students accountable for high achievement on these standards. The reader will recall that the Manitoba government contended that all students would be able to "read, write, think and compute at a high level" (p.17) through the designation and testing of grade level standards. This notion of a common set of objectives that could be applied to all students perpetuated a view of curriculum that negated the role of the learner and contributed to the exclusion and marginalization of some students. At this point, I will address this topic from the perspective of negating the role of the learner. In the next section when I examine the Blue Book's notions of humanity, I will speak to the way in which the Blue Book reinforced the exacerbation of inequitable experiences of school.



Learning and uniformity are not compatible goals. Teaching for learning requires the tailoring of instruction to meet the unique needs, talents and interests of individual students. Uniformity, on the other hand, is based upon an assumption that all students should learn a predetermined set of outcomes. Thus, the starting point for learning and uniformity are different. The former begins with the student in mind and the latter with the grade level outcomes. Planning curriculum based on the needs and interests of the learner ensures that she has a vital role and therefore is more likely to participate in the learning process. However, beginning with curriculum outcomes shuts the learner out of the learning process and decreases the likelihood of improving student learning. The desire for uniformity is reflected in the popular phrase "all children can learn". It is based on an assumption that all students can learn the same thing. Noddings (1992) deconstructs this overused slogan and questions why we would expect that all students be subjected to the same "dose of academic English, social studies, science, and mathematics" (p.xii). Furthermore, she asks: "Why should children learn what we insist they "can learn?" Is this the stuff people need to live intelligently, morally and happily?" (p.xii). Noddings argues that if we are serious about school improvement, then we need to dispense with the notion that schooling needs to look the same for all students.

The reader will recall my experience with the elections unit in chapter two. In this unit, I did not follow a set of learning outcomes and I believe that the learning experience for my students was richer, more dynamic and more educational. These students were excited about elections. Their excitement led them to want to search the internet, write reports, speak with community members, speak in front of their peers and read the newspaper critically. These students also gained an understanding of what their role as future citizens might entail. The students participated in the determinations of their learning activities and in assessing their learning. When I contrast this experience with teaching my Senior I students about elections with other teaching experiences in which I began my planning of instruction with learning outcomes, the results have not been the same. Starting with outcomes does not generate as much excitement or contribute in the same way to student learning. There were many guidelines for teaching that I did not follow in this unit. However, I do not believe that by doing so, I jeopardized the learning of my students. In fact, I believe that they learned more.

The Blue Book's second contention about standards was that all students would be held accountable to the same high expectations. This also proved to be detrimental to school reform. "Harder is better [was] a silly premise" (Kohn, 1999). How does one determine that the standards that have been set were in fact "hard"? Levels of difficulty are always relative and therefore, difficult to define. For some students, the grade level standards that were set by the government were too easy and for other students, more time was needed to meet the standards. Do students learn more from something that is difficult to learn? Students need to be appropriately challenged, but not discouraged. They need to believe that an expectation is within reach; otherwise, it is possible that some students will quit trying. In this way, harder is not "better".

### **Common Curricular Frameworks**

The Blue Book extended the notion that uniform standards could be applied to all students to include students across the region of Western Canada and across all of Canada when the government decided to participate in the development of various common curricular projects. This decision further highlighted the government's inattention to the needs of individual students and to improving student learning in that the Blue Book failed to attend to the role of local contexts, sensitivities, histories and social politics (Dei and Karumanchery, 1999) in deciding curricular outcomes and standards.

The decision by the Manitoba government to participate in the development of common curricular frameworks for schooling was in keeping with other market plans for school reform. It has been suggested that an interest in generating profit is the real reason for implementing a system of schooling that is consistent with systems of schooling elsewhere. Common curricular frameworks enable governments to tender contracts for the development of instructional programs. However, sometimes these contracts are given to U.S. firms (Dei and Karumanchery, 1999), leaving local interests in peril. Furthermore, the development of common curricula lends itself to creating a "huge, homogeneous market for textbooks" (Robertson, 1998).

Market supporters of schooling see that there is a large profit to be made in the creation of instructional programs and materials, and this blinds supporters to the legitimate role that citizens play in instituting educational policy that attends to their regional interests. As Robertson (1998) has observed:

When the same education reform turns up in several provinces, what may look like a coincidence is better understood as a well-orchestrated alignment. Of course every province and territory wants to convey the impression that its education policies are driven by the unique vision of its citizens and so-called stakeholders. In reality, the vision has more to do with APEC and its clones than with our own priorities for children and their schools. (p.28)

This presents a serious concern for both education and democratic society because it signals a loss of autonomy over educational decision-making on an unprecedented scale and makes it harder for a community to create curricula that is responsive to the particular needs and interests of that community. For example, although Westdale is located in a school division that predominantly serves families that are white and affluent, Westdale has a number of students who are neither white nor affluent. The needs of this school are substantially different from other schools in the division where there is less ethnic or economic diversity. Without the ability to tailor instructional programs and materials to the needs and interests of the students in this community, Westdale's capacity to make the necessary connections with students is severely limited and students become disengaged from the process of schooling.

Much is lost in a market-driven curriculum comprised of traditional basics, augmented by technology and designed ostensibly to meet the employability skills of a global economy. In returning to a more traditional approach to schooling that favours the acquisition of employment-related skills and the mastery of knowledge, the school system reduces the potential for teaching students how to live in the world. Complex societal issues such as racism, homelessness, child poverty and structural unemployment demand that students know how to live in the world as active participants. These issues call on capacities for thinking and feeling that are incompatible with a narrow curricula that is defined by outcomes, limited by testing and circumscribed by purpose. Moreover, the Blue Book's notions of curriculum reform failed to acknowledge the role of individual learners and the social and cultural context in which they live for creating meaningful school reform.

Instructional improvement was yet another area that the Blue Book failed to improve. In fact, I believe Manitoba school reform reinforced negative teacher beliefs and practices that were ultimately to the detriment of improved student learning.

### **Contradictory Notions of Instruction**

I have difficulty reconciling several contradictions regarding instruction in the Blue Book. The Blue Book advocated some progressive notions of instruction in order to provide students with satisfactory

learning experiences such as the teaching of critical thinking skills. However, the implementation of standards testing forced teachers to resort to the use of poor pedagogical practices in order to get students to demonstrate achievement. Consequently, progressive notions of instruction were largely put aside. The Manitoba government's accountability measures had additional implications for instruction. Outcome based schooling led to constrained collegiality and a loss of teacher autonomy, both of which ultimately affect a student's experience of school. Principals were designated by the Blue Book as instructional leaders who were responsible for creating supportive learning environments. Yet, the government failed to provide schools with the supports that were needed in order to foster improved student learning. Furthermore, the Blue Book assigned roles and responsibilities to the school principal that had more to do with management than instruction. Eventually, all of these contradictions were resolved in ways that failed to improve student learning because of the heavy-handed approach that the government used to implement school reform.

When the Blue Book encouraged teachers to use approaches to learning that facilitated profound levels of understanding such as active learning, transfer and application, assimilation, construction and reconstruction, I found that I did not have enough time to implement these approaches and teach to the outcomes. Rather than centring my teaching on student interests and the kinds of big questions and themes that support the use of more progressive pedagogical approaches, I worried about covering all of the outcomes before the standards test. This test, along with the fear of public embarrassment when the grades for each of the school divisions were published, the possible loss of students through schools of choice and the government interventions that were threatened if schools failed to demonstrate continuous student achievement overshadowed any benefits to teaching and learning that the Blue Book might have had. Furthermore, novel approaches to solving problems were de-valued by the standards test and thus, teachers encouraged students to use the "approved" methods in order to ensure that marks were not lost for using non-standard techniques. In other words, conformity was rewarded in standards testing and creativity was discouraged.

Standards testing was a powerful instrument to get teachers and students to be responsible for the outcomes set by the province. The communication of divisional standards test results to teachers, whether published in the local newspaper or through school and individual class results being shared by school administrators, had the same effect on teachers. Teachers believed that the results were either a

condemnation or vindication of their teaching and were determined to prove that they could get their students to demonstrate achievement. How the public viewed a teacher's school was important, but what mattered even more was whose class would rank first when the results were finally known. Testing caused teachers to resort to using whatever means necessary to get students to demonstrate their achievements and often this resulted in the use of poor pedagogical practices. Apple's (1999) work supports the idea that my experience with the ways in which standards testing changed instruction was not unusual. He observed that market-driven school reform has led to schools becoming more similar, with a greater commitment to standard, traditional teaching methods such as whole class methods of teaching.

The reader will recall from the narrative my observations on how standards testing changed instruction in the schools where I worked. As the date for the provincial standards test neared, teachers took desperate measures to squeeze more time out of the school day in preparation for the test. Poor pedagogical practices included: assigning students units of work for self-study without sufficient prior instruction, dropping the teaching of one course for a month so that more time could be given to the teaching of a course that was going to be tested and the compacting of instruction to the extent that students claimed that they were confused. Memorization and test taking skills also became more prominent. While these skills certainly have their place in curricula, when significant amounts of time within a school day are used to teach these skills at the expense of others, this creates a problem. The Blue Book indicated that low level thinking skills such as knowing, recalling and comprehending were instructional methods that needed to change, yet the implementation of standards testing restored those very practices. Similar findings (Apple, 1999; Kohn, 1999; and Noddings, 1992) indicate that my observations were again not unique. Teachers were put into an untenable position. As Osborne (1999) has noted:

To hold teachers responsible for their students' success on exams, while at the same time denying them the freedom to adapt the curriculum and locking them into the existing grade structure of schooling, might be to have the worst of both worlds. (p.118)

Student complaints about the lack of teaching largely went unheard because teachers were determined to be accountable to the province and school administrations for teaching all of the outcomes. Both Noddings (1992) and Kohn (1999) have noted that getting students to perform on a standards test is not the same as learning. Students can memorize enough facts and skills to demonstrate achievement on a test, but when asked to explain their understanding later students have difficulty. Thus, any school reform that forces

teachers to cover all of the curricular outcomes results in a skewed notion of accountability. What students are learning is not what I believe we would ideally want them to learn. Standards testing reduces the capacity for students to make sense of the world around them in meaningful ways. When juxtaposed with an ability to memorize a formula or set of definitions that are forgotten in a few weeks, it seems to me that the government's notions of accountability need to be re-examined.

### **Intensification of Teacher Work and Constrained Collegiality**

The Blue Book overwhelmed teachers and schools with changes to the school system. Both the numbers of changes and the rate at which the changes were to be implemented placed an enormous amount of stress on the school community. Apple's (1999) term for this new kind of stress facing teachers and administrators working in a market-driven system is "intensification" and it is characterized by heavier work loads, increasing demands of accountability, hectic schedules and a scarcity of resources. Intensification of a teacher's work, according to Apple, is partly brought about as a result of standards testing, as teachers and schools struggle to prove that both they and their students can perform in accordance with prescribed curricula over which they have little control.

The intensification of teacher work in Manitoba led to constrained and reduced teacher collegiality as teachers became divided over and preoccupied with school reform. It was my experience that Manitoba school reform created a school climate that was distinguished by competition, fear, stress and suspicion and this impaired collaboration among teachers and the ability to think critically about the changes that were occurring. For example, when our school division made the decision to assign mandatory weightings for each provincial outcome in several subject areas some teachers responded by covertly refusing to follow the school division's directive. This caused at least one school team at the school where I am vice principal to become fragmented, resulting in teachers retreating to their classrooms. Teachers expressed fear in expressing disagreement with divisional directives and this made it difficult to have an open and honest discussion of conflicting values. With its emphasis on accountability the Blue Book legitimized the perspectives of teachers who were reluctant to get involved in teaming or who believed that it was dangerous to speak out against the government or school division's directives.

### **Loss of Professional Autonomy**

The Blue Book's introduction of tighter controls such as standards testing, the publication of test results, parent advisory councils and schools of choice had implications for undermining the professionalism of teachers. Giving teachers the latitude to use their professional judgement to interpret and implement the curricula according to the needs of their students implies a sense of trust in teachers as professionals. To reduce a teacher's flexibility is to de-value their professionalism because the loss of autonomy implies that teachers can't be trusted to make appropriate decisions about the learning of individual students. Darling-Hammond (1997) observed that the introduction of tighter controls is reminiscent of the bureaucratic school. This system was organized so that there was greater routinization of teaching and less reliance on professional judgement.

Good teaching requires that teachers be given a certain degree of flexibility to diversify curricula and make it relevant and appropriate for individual students. Sometimes, compromises in standards need to be made (Gutmann, 1987; Noddings, 1992). Robertson (1998) has observed that "who the teacher is, who the students are, what they are trying to accomplish separately and together all matter in designing instruction" (p.8). Teachers who employ diverse strategies in teaching and learning enable students to demonstrate their achievement through their distinct strengths.

The Manitoba government's desire for control has been to the detriment of improved student learning and instruction. Standards test preparation led some teachers to demonstrate a lack of support for student participation in school activities that enrich student learning such as music tutorials, class excursions and involvement in community projects. Standards test administration instructions forbade teachers from answering student questions on tests even though it was a strategy otherwise recommended by Manitoba Education and Training in curricular support materials. Students were thus prevented from truly understanding what was being asked of them on the test. Finally, the tight guidelines that the government used to control the extent to which teachers could adapt or modify an instructional program to meet the needs of students caused some students, like Sam, to be dismissed by the school system. This was a student who, in large part because of the Blue Book's support for uniform standards in learning, was marginalized in his school experience.

### **An Absence of Leadership**

The reader will recall that the Manitoba government's efforts to improve instruction also included designating school principals as instructional leaders who would create learning environments that would enable students to meet the standards set by the province. As noted in the previous chapter, schools were instructed by the Blue Book to provide students with an environment that would connect "powerful and meaningful educational content with a range of sound teaching practices, and caring, supportive relationships among school staff, students, parents, and the community" (p.20). Furthermore, an effective learning environment was expected to "nurture, empower, challenge, and connect students to the past and present as well as prepare them for the future" (p.20). Taken in isolation, this description of an effective learning environment indicated that the Manitoba government might have also had in mind purposes for schooling that extended beyond the market imperative. I wish the Blue Book had been more about enacting this vision of schooling! Unfortunately, other contradictory measures and statements in the Blue Book undermined the creation of supportive learning environments and directed the attention of school administrators to more managerial concerns.

The Blue Book stated repeatedly that students would be able to meet the outcomes and standards set by the province if students were provided with a "supportive schooling context" (p.6). While sounding reasonable, this was a very difficult task for several reasons. First, a universal set of standards and outcomes does not take into account the needs of individual students and schools; thus, the ability to tailor instruction to the needs of students was significantly impaired. Second, a supportive schooling context requires sufficient funding support to adequately provide students with low student-teacher ratios, assistance with learning and emotional challenges, current and relevant curriculum support materials and well-maintained buildings. The Manitoba government did not continue with the previously established funding levels and therefore, reduced the quality of support that schools could provide students. While funding alone cannot improve student learning, the lack of sufficient funding makes the improvement of student learning more challenging. For these reasons, the government's expectations that provincial standards would be met by creating supportive school environments were unrealistic. If schools performed poorly on provincial standards tests, it should not have come as a surprise. The fact that some students would have had trouble with the standards tests was a foregone conclusion.



In addition to creating effective learning environments, school principals had other duties as described by the Blue Book that caused principals to assume more managerial responsibilities. Even though the Blue Book described the role of the principal as that of instructional leader, the role description did not support the notion of someone who would be involved in pedagogical matters. To review, the description of the principal's role included: developing school plans; writing proposals to attract business and industry partnerships; and supervision of teachers to ensure that they were following the Blue Book's directions. Principals were also expected to monitor student achievement on the standards test, and as noted in chapter three, if schools were believed to be "consistently underachieve(ing)" (p.22), the government indicated that principals would be expected to correct the situation. Apple (1999) has claimed that the external supervision of schools through standards testing was imperative so that student performance could be evaluated and to ensure that schools would continue to be enterprising. Yet, rather than becoming more enterprising, competition between schools led our school administrators to tour other schools to find programs that we could adopt so that we would be able to offer what other schools were offering. Apple has noted that this has been a common outcome of school choice plans. Advocates of schools of choice argue that competition makes schools more innovative and presents parents with a wider range of options, but in actual practice, school choice plans cause schools to become more similar.

The reader will also recall that the focus of our meetings for administrators shifted from matters of teaching and learning to looking at ways to attract students to our schools. Gifted programming was given a bigger priority than it had previously. It was believed that other school divisions' gifted programs had greater visibility and as a result, we were losing gifted students to these other divisions. I was deeply bothered by the fact that so much time was spent focusing on how to become more competitive when we should have been using the time to focus on curricular and pedagogical issues. Instead, our time together as administrators was consumed by what seemed to me to be trivial and insignificant tasks such as the creation of school brochures. Even though I recognized that the number of students and dollars our school division lost because of schools of choice legislation was an important consideration, I believed that our time was better spent supporting the needs of the students who were choosing to stay in our school communities. These observations are supported by what Apple has noted in other places where market reforms similar to those announced in the Blue Book have been implemented. Apple commented that the role of the school

principal changed so that more power was consolidated within the administrative structure, more time and energy was spent on enhancing public image and less time was spent on pedagogy and curriculum.

Apple argues that with commercial issues taking precedence over educational principles, there has been a shift in the allocation of resources and designing of curriculum. He calls this shift in emphasis from pedagogy to advertising both profound and disturbing. Schools have moved from meeting student needs to evaluating student performance. Apple states that the question is no longer what can we do to meet the needs of the student, but what can the student do to help enhance the school's competitiveness? He cites an example that illustrates that resources that were once allocated for students with special needs or learning difficulties have been shifted to support marketing and public relations campaigns. Programming for special needs students is expensive and their test scores tend to deflate a school's overall standing in the market.

In addition to the reinforcement of ideas on the improvement of curriculum and instruction that seemed to have little to do with improving student learning, the Blue Book's perspective on assessment was rooted in behaviourist theory of motivation, reward and punishment. As such, this perspective on assessment contributed to the development of assessment practices that were both punitive and arbitrary.

#### **Punitive and Arbitrary Notions of Assessment**

If students failed to achieve the results that teachers expected on the standards test, the Blue Book offered an alternative interpretation to why students might have achieved poor results. It was suggested by the Blue Book that students lacked the necessary motivation to succeed or a willingness to work hard. Thus, the Blue Book announced that high expectations would be introduced for all students in order to motivate them to work harder and if students failed to meet the outcomes that were set by the province, students would be held accountable in a variety of ways.

The Manitoba government assumed that by having high expectations for student learning, students would be motivated to learn and want to succeed. It was believed that once students knew that they were expected to work hard to achieve the standards, or repeat a grade, that most students would do so. However, as Kohn (1999) illustrated students cannot be motivated to learn, nor can the lack of achievement be explained as an absence of motivation. Motivation is something that is both intrinsic and natural. Using meaningful and relevant curricula and interesting instructional methods, teachers can stir a student's

enthusiasm for learning. Students, however, like anyone else, cannot be made to learn anything in which they are not interested. Just because teachers indicate that certain objectives are important does not mean that students share this opinion (Noddings, 1992).

The Blue Book's focus for assessment reform was to improve the consistency of expectations of student achievement across the province, and the government sought to enforce this consistency through standards tests that were weighted substantially in the final evaluation of student performance. It is important to note that standards testing in Manitoba was not a new approach for trying to improve student outcomes for learning. It had been tried in the 1950's to alleviate concerns about the quality of education and did little to change things then (Osborne, 1999). The 1990's marked the second round of testing in Manitoba and a few veteran teachers on school staffs remembered the ineffectiveness of the first round of testing in improving student learning and viewed this second round with disbelief. For whatever reason, it seems that both society and education are prone to repeating lessons learned from the past.

This current round of testing, a hallmark of market reform, advocates that the more assessments that are made of student work the better. "In other words, weighing a pig more often makes it fatter" (Robertson, 1998). This preposterous notion is made even more so when one considers the unreliability of the information that tests provide. It is beyond the scope of this study to examine the difficulties with test construction and the reliability issues that result. However, a substantial body of well-documented educational research (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Kohn, 1999; Robertson, 1998) illustrates the need for caution in making too much of what tests tell us about student achievement. This study is more concerned with how notions of assessment in the Blue Book were primarily about exercising control over students and teachers to ensure that they were accountable for the outcomes set by the province. Assessment became a tool to fulfil a political agenda and was not about making improvements to student learning. Furthermore, the Blue Book's position on the importance of grades and public accountability reinforced behaviourist notions of reward and punishment, creating an "anti-learning" (Kohn, 1999, p.124) environment. Finally, the arbitrariness of the Blue Book's notion of assessment was meaningless in the pursuit of improved student learning.

The Blue Book explained that consistently held high expectations for student learning were essential to motivating students to demonstrate better achievement. As has already been noted, this view

was problematic for several reasons. Consistent expectations of student performance do not take into consideration the unique differences of students and how demonstration of their skills and strengths may require differentiated approaches and not standard ones. Furthermore, teachers cannot instill or control a motivation for learning. Student enthusiasm for learning can be awakened when teachers diversify instruction and use student interests to plan curricular experiences, but neither the reward of good grades, nor the threat of failure will motivate students to learn. This "stick and carrot" approach to reforming schools is doomed to fail.

The Blue Book's "punishments" for the inability of students to meet the provincially-set outcomes were the following:

- spend more time in school
- receive lower grades
- fail a course
- repeat grades

The government wanted to be very clear about its' support for retention, so clear in fact that the idea of retention was stated in three different ways in the same list of possible consequences for not meeting the standards. Furthermore, the Blue Book stated ominously that "it will be possible for students to fail a grade at early or middle years or a grade or course at senior years" (p.18). One could speculate that the Blue Book's heavy emphasis on the possibility of retention was in response to public concerns that are sometimes raised about school divisions having "no fail" policies or practices. This popular rhetoric mistakenly assumes that students who are struggling with their learning are placed into the next grade without attending to the learning issues with which the student was having difficulty. My experience contradicts this notion. The teachers, resource staff, parents and administrators with whom I have worked always gave substantial time, thought and effort to planning school experiences to enable students who struggled to build on their past successes. Decisions to place students into the next grade level were never made thoughtlessly or without careful consideration of a multitude of factors.

The Blue Book's proposed position on transcripts was also punitive. The reader will recall that the Blue Book stated that all marks would now be recorded on Senior Years transcripts, even if a student had re-taken a course and received a better mark. In addition, all attempts to take a course would be recorded, even though a student may have made a decision to withdraw. The Blue Book argued that student

achievement needed to be assessed and recorded effectively and accurately. It stated that this position was for reasons of accountability. However, what difference did this policy on transcripts make to employers or to post secondary institutions? The Blue Book indicated that some students might need more time to meet grade level expectations, yet if this were the case, the student would be penalized for not learning as quickly as his peers by having all of his grades and attempts to take a course recorded on the transcript. The Blue Book also noted that schools should support a student's desire to succeed or, in other words, schools should reward effort. Yet, if a student demonstrated effort through taking a course twice in order to better a mark, an exercise that demands more effort than taking a course once, this student would be punished by having the lower mark recorded on her transcript. Thus, transcripts were yet another threat that the government wanted to use in order to force students into demonstrating achievement.

The Blue Book's behaviourist notion of the role of punishment for not meeting the standards set by the province was detrimental to student learning. Kohn (1999) describes the dangers of using punishments in this way:

The use of punishments, even if referred to euphemistically as negative incentives, sanctions, or consequences, creates a climate of fear, and fear generates anger and resentment. It also leads people to switch into damage-control mode and act more cautiously. Human beings simply do not think creatively and reach for excellence when they perceive to be threatened. (p.97)

Teachers and other school leaders were also threatened by the Blue Book for not being accountable to teaching of standards and this further contributed to the Blue Book's failure to improve student learning. The Blue Book announced that divisional results on the standards tests would be made public and that if a school division did not demonstrate good results, school leaders were served notice that the principal would have to answer to the Minister. Although it is not unreasonable for the government to get involved with schools that were experiencing difficulty, the tone of the Blue Book was such that teachers and schools had "to shape up or else"! Rather than being partners working together to address the challenges of schools, the Blue Book put school staffs on the defensive and intimidated them with consequences for not demonstrating improved achievement scores.

Kohn (1999) argues that rewards work in much the same way as punishments and perhaps it was this belief in the value of rewards that led the Blue Book to insist that all schools would have to assign grades to student work. However, in declaring that all schools would be required to recognize student

achievement through the assignment of grades, the government revealed an ignorance about how the use of rewards to motivate students can also be detrimental to student learning. Kohn has noted that there are three essential consequences of grading: "less interest in learning, less proficiency at learning, and less desire to challenge oneself" (p.126). Once again, with the Blue Book's declaration that student achievement would have to be recognized by grades the government demonstrated that its interest in school system accountability was of fundamental concern—more important it seemed than improving student learning for all students. While there are some students who might thrive within such a system given that they are accustomed to experiencing success in school, there are others for whom this view of student learning will only exclude them further from school and the experience of academic success.

In addition to using assessment to ensure that teachers had taught the provincially set outcomes and that students could demonstrate their achievement, the Blue Book revealed the government's commitment to objective evaluations. However, the arbitrary nature of standards tests and their evaluation also contributed to a failure to improve student learning. The reader will recall from the narrative that during the first few years of standards testing, student's papers were submitted to a provincial-marking depot that was staffed by teachers from across the province. In later years, this responsibility was passed to school divisions where all teachers were given the option of attending the marking sessions after having been trained in how to evaluate according to provincial expectations. Although the second situation was far better than the first because all teachers were able to participate rather than just a select few, the whole process of making arbitrary judgements was troubling.

Standards testing separates the processes of teaching and learning, isolating one experience from the other in order to obtain objective data about student achievement. However, who benefits from this practice? Teachers serve as government functionaries in that they administer a test designed by someone else according to someone else's instructions. Thus, the ability of both teachers and students to make sense of the test is impaired. First, as already noted, the strict guidelines for administering the test prohibited the re-framing of questions. Second, after the test had been returned to the student the extent to which a teacher was able to help the student understand the evaluations that had been made was limited by how well the teacher understood the rubrics that the government had created for evaluating the test questions. These rubrics were often so detailed that they were confusing. Third, students had to submit, sometimes at the

students' own expense, to a complicated process for a re-evaluation of test papers and this discouraged challenges to evaluations that had been made of student responses. All of these limitations to helping students make sense of standards tests illustrate how the process of testing is disconnected from the process of teaching; therefore, the information that was collected about student achievement was limited in improving student learning.

The reader will recall from the narrative the story of David, our talented English student who scored more poorly on his standards test than his teachers thought possible, given his consistent demonstration of excellent achievement over the course of the year. I believe this story clearly highlights how teaching and testing can become so disconnected. The standards test lacked any real meaning for either David or his teachers because none of us could understand or agree with how his responses had been evaluated. Furthermore, to my knowledge, opportunities for dialogue with Manitoba Education and Training about why David had achieved these results were not available. The only recourse was to have his standards test re-marked.

The nature of standards testing in general is such that opportunities for dialogue about the questions and the results are non-existent; thus, opportunities for improving student learning are negated. When one combines this information with what is known about the unreliability of the information that is provided about student achievement one is led to wonder how the government justifies the enormous taxpayer expense of testing.

In summary, this section of chapter three examined several concerns with school reform as proposed by the Blue Book. First, the government's definition of a basic education was both narrow and limiting in that it ignored competing agendas for the purposes of schools. This narrow purpose resulted in traditional and measurable literacies being valued over others. Second, school reform caused teachers to focus on demonstrating student achievement and this reinforced the use of poor pedagogical practices in order to get students to perform on the standards tests. Authentic notions of student learning, such as constructivism and diversifying instruction, were set aside while teachers sought to meet government expectations. Moreover the focus on accountability led to an intensification of the work of teachers, constrained collegiality and a loss of professional autonomy. While proclaiming that school principals should act as instructional leaders and create learning environments that were supportive of student

learning, the government cut funding to schools and created reform measures that made it difficult for school principals to do as the Blue Book instructed. Furthermore, the Blue Book cited roles and responsibilities of the school principal that had more to do with school management than instruction. Notions of accountability and competition turned the attention of school principals away from meeting the needs of students and toward the demonstration of student achievement and marketing and promotional concerns. Lastly, student learning in Manitoba was not improved through assessment reform. The Blue Book clearly indicated that assessment was more about exercising control over students and teachers and the arbitrariness of the provincial testing process reduced the opportunities for assessment to play a meaningful role in improving student learning.

I will turn now to the second section of this chapter and examine the Blue Book's treatment of alternative agendas for schooling. Did purposes for schooling other than the market imperative find a place within the Blue Book?

#### **4.2 Competing Purposes for Schools Ignored and Re-aligned**

Many of the Blue Book's problems stem from its limited vision of the purpose of schools. The predominantly vocational and utilitarian goals of the Blue Book proposed to meet individual needs for prosperity and sustain economic viability through building a societal allegiance to the economy. It would be foolish to argue that helping students learn how to make a living and maintaining the economic well being of our province were not worthy goals. Furthermore, it has been noted that preparation for work is one of the reasons students can most relate to when asked about why schooling is important (Levin, 1999). However, to circumscribe schooling and the purpose of education to be predominantly vocational is to have a circumscribed view of what it means to be human. Moreover, advocates of a utilitarian purpose for schools have created school reforms that demonstrate a lack of caring, compassion and respect for the people who are involved. The Blue Book was no exception.

In this section, I will outline the Manitoba government's lack of commitment to alternative purposes and review the implications. From there, chapter four will move to an examination of the government's treatment of students, parents, teachers and citizens. The Blue Book's definition of both the needs and roles of each of these educational partners contributed to the government's implementation of reforms that were dehumanizing to everyone that was involved. My analysis of the Blue Book's effects on



individuals and society will focus on three central ideas: the commodification of students; the exacerbation of inequities; and the polarization of individuals and the collective.

Earlier, I reviewed the many statements throughout the Blue Book that supported the Manitoba government's vision of school reform as preparation for work and the means by which both the provincial and Canadian economy could improve. There is little mention of any other purpose for schooling in the Blue Book. A few words are devoted to a discussion of human relations that essentially amounts to a poor attempt to extend relationships formed in a work context to all other interactions with others. Citizenship, life long learning and diversity also receive some recognition; however, the explanation of these terms is problematic. Either the description of the terms was from a market perspective, as was the case with the concept of human relations and citizenship, or the explanation was weak. Both life long learning and diversity are described so inadequately that a critical reading leads one to wonder what the government intended by including these terms at all.

For example, when the Blue Book described students needing to understand themselves and their relationships with others, a business term was used -- human relations. The foundation skill of human relations was defined as the development of work habits, including responsibility, adaptability, entrepreneurship, management of change and accountability. This skill was also intended to promote tolerance, teamwork, leadership and a sense of global connectedness. Also included under this heading was the goal of developing an understanding of and appreciation for the self (p.10). While knowing how to function in a work environment is important, this explanation of what students need to know for getting along with others is hugely inappropriate. One cannot equate all of the various roles that we have as family members and members of a community with how we interact with others at work. There are principles that apply within a work environment that cannot be applied to the relationships we have with others in different contexts. Companies expect both conformity and loyalty, yet these traits can be the undoing of a democratic society that relies on its citizens to voice their concerns.

Two other purposes for schooling that are mentioned in the Blue Book are citizenship and life long learning. No definition is given for citizenship; however, there are explanations of a citizen's responsibilities that clearly indicate that citizenship is defined in economic terms. These responsibilities included: building a secure future for children; ensuring that they are able to compete for employment; and

working with the government to bring about school reform so that the economic well-being of the province is protected. Life long learning, on the other hand, was described in the Blue Book as "instilling the desire to learn" (p.6). As already noted earlier in this chapter in the discussion of motivation, teachers cannot instill a desire for learning. No reasons were given as to why life long learning was important and in the absence of any explanation and the pervasive employment context one is led to question whether the goal of life long learning was intended to meet the needs of employers. It would be of considerable financial benefit to businesses if workers entered the labour force ready to assume the costs for professional development.

The last purpose for schooling that received some attention in the Blue Book was the idea that teachers should teach students to develop an "understanding of and appreciation for our society's diverse population" (p.10). However, this description of diversity indicated that the government did not give much thought to the reasons why we teach students about difference. There was no recognition of the need for teaching a diverse population of students how to live and work together. This description suggests that it was sufficient to teach students about other cultures and failed to consider the inclusion of anti-racist and other multicultural agendas for schools. In addition, the Blue Book did not mention the importance of teaching students about the role of gender, culture or linguistic privilege.

A few pages further along in the Blue Book, embedded in a single line, the government made a second recognition of the importance of diversity. In a discussion of the curricula review process, the Blue Book stated that the process would "ensure that aspects such as print and non-print resources, aboriginal content, and technology are integrated into curricula" (p.15). By burying attention to aboriginal content within this one line about the curricula review process, the government demonstrated a blatant disregard for aboriginal people and reasserted the prominence of a monocultural perspective. Once again, the Blue Book followed the example of market reforms that had been adopted elsewhere. Apple (1999) has noted that market imperatives for school reform have demonstrated a monocultural perspective and have shut out the views of minorities.

In the final analysis, the Manitoba government did not give sufficient thought to any other consideration of the purpose of schools other than for utilitarian purposes. The Blue Book noted that getting along with others was determined by how we are with our co-workers and that citizenship was defined by one's loyalty to the economy. Life long learning, in the absence of any other explanation, was about

preparing students to assume financial responsibility for professional development. Lastly, the Blue Book dismissed pluralist notions of living in a democratic society and reasserted the dominance of the white, middle class majority. This failure to attend to alternative agendas for schooling is also reflected in the following examination of the notions of humanity that are included in the Blue Book.

#### **4.3 An Exacerbation of Equity Issues**

The Blue Book's limited vision of the purpose of schools guided the implementation of Manitoba school reform and what followed was a series of school reform measures that subjected the entire educational community to dehumanizing and demoralizing conditions. Set within a competitive context, outcome-based schooling, the publication of standards test results, schools of choice and the formation of parent advisory councils, fostered inequities within the school system. Students were treated as commodities and systems of entitlement were reinforced. Students who were deemed valuable and useful because of their high achievement were given privileges not extended to others. Lastly, schools of choice, while couched in democratic language and equity considerations, also had implications for creating unequal experiences of schools.

In a competitive context, students, parents and schools learn quickly that the ethos is "every man for himself". Competition fosters a lack of social responsibility and people come to view one another with "all the suspicion, envy, self-doubt, and hostility that rivalry entails" (p.79). Kohn (1999) observed that: "Winners and losers alike are made to think they're competent and valuable only to the extent that they've defeated others...the central lesson of all competition is that other people are obstacles to their own success" (p. 38). As Robertson (1998) has noted, "in such an environment a student learns that when the boy seated next to her drops out of school he solely responsible for his decision" (p. 82). Thus begins the kind of thinking that discredits the effects of the varying conditions of students' lives on their school experience and sustains the treatment of students as commodities.

#### **The Commodification of Students**

Proponents of school reform do not see students for who they are; their essential humanity is not considered when funding is withdrawn and school reforms are implemented. To paraphrase Maxine Green (1988), market reformers see things big as opposed to small because they resist viewing the "other". Seeing things big means overlooking the integrity and particularity of human beings and seeing them as objects

instead. This creates a distance between individuals or what Freire (1970) identified as the distance between subject and object or those who know and act and those who are known and acted upon. Such a distance may make it easier for policymakers to withdraw funding, but inevitably it also leads to the dehumanization of the people involved.

According to Osborne (1999), there are two ways to look at students. One view is to see students as end products to be processed and the other sees students as individuals needing help to make the most of their lives. By using language that typically belongs to the domain of corporations and not to education, the Blue Book illustrated the Manitoba government's support for the first view. The government sought to achieve uniformity, consistency and accountability within the school system through a continuous improvement model that set performance levels, conducted reviews and managed resources prudently. This kind of business language runs throughout the Blue Book, firmly establishing the Manitoba government's position on the application of such language and the values embedded within it to schooling and children. Outcome-based schooling sets performance standards for student achievement in the same way that businesses set quality control standards. However, to equate student achievement with the production of objects is to reduce people to methods (Noddings, 1992). Robertson (1998) is also concerned about the inappropriateness of such a position. "The assembly line, which created the metaphor of standards, offers only an obscenely inappropriate language to apply to human beings – one that obliges us to refer to students who don't succeed as "substandard" (Robertson, 1998, p.33).

Taylor (1991) refers to this economic rationality as "instrumental reason" (p.5). He states that it is "the kind of rationality we draw on when we calculate the most economical application of means to a given end. Maximum efficiency, the best cost-output ratio, is its measure of success" (p.5). When the Blue Book cited instrumental reason as an important and necessary goal of school reform, the government was responding to public demands for reduced educational spending. However, by communicating this to the public as a desirable and worthy objective, instead of a regrettable and difficult choice, the government contributed to a social justification of the callous treatment of some students, teachers and parents. Taylor explains:

When instrumental reason becomes the measurement of happiness and well-being the consequences are such that the creatures that surround us lose the significance that accrued to their place in the chain of being, they are open to being treated as raw materials or instruments for our projects. (p.5)

Thus, instrumental reason sustains societal selfishness and greed and blinds us to the inhumanity that is endemic to the commodification of students.

The setting of standards, the publication of standards test results and schools of choice are reductive school reforms that degrade students because a measurement of their achievement is translated into a measurement of student worth. As Noddings (1992) has noted, outcome based schooling and standards testing have led to students becoming resources valued only for their achievement. Apple's (1999) discussion of the publication of performance indicators in England contributes to this discussion. He observed that a school's ability to graduate students who are able to be enterprising and entrepreneurial determines their worth to society. Robertson (1998) adds that not every child is worth the same dollar value. Those students who are able to make an enterprise of themselves are valued for their ability to enhance a school's effectiveness. It is thus that students become valued for their achievements and devalued as human beings.

The reader will recall from the narrative the story of the student in our school who scored 100 per cent on a standards test. The staff asked the school administration to insist that the school division place an advertisement in the local paper to announce this achievement. Teachers explained that they were eager to have their school be seen as a school that could provide quality instruction and wanted to use this student's accomplishment to give the school a better profile within the community. The score of 100 per cent became a means for the staff to vindicate itself from earlier criticism that had been directed toward the school for not producing high achieving students. Comments were made that this student's score would perhaps attract other students who were high achievers and dispel community perceptions of the school as a failing school.

A stark dichotomy exists between school reforms that result from seeing schooling as results-based and achievement-oriented and a vision of schooling that sees the value of students just as they are. Kozol (2000) argues that "we can rob a child's life of its meaning if we deny her the essential dignity of being seen and celebrated for the person that she actually is" (p.139). Kozol (2000) captures this dichotomy beautifully as he contrasts that which makes us human and standards testing:

In age of drills and skill and endless lists of reinvented standards and a multitude of new and sometimes useful but too often frankly punitive exams, it's nice to find a place where there is still room for things of no cash value—oddball humour, silliness and whim, a child's love, a grown-up's gratitude and joy—that never in a hundred years would show up on one of those all important state exams. (p.141)

Kozol (2000) speaks to our humanity and demonstrates how market reform agendas for schooling fail to include humanist notions in their plans for school reform.

Market-based school reforms further reduce students to commodities by giving emphasis to the need for efficiency and cost-effectiveness in school systems. Calls for efficiency appeal to common sense but they also mask the effects that financial cutbacks have on students. As Heilbroner (1992) argued, "Smith anticipated Marx when he pointed out that "efficiency" appears to be socially useful because we are blinded to its cost in the degradation of the worker" (p.91). Kozol's (2000) descriptions of the effects of market reforms are situated in some of the poorest regions of the United States, and his writings demonstrate in profound and startling ways the impropriety of applying cost effectiveness arguments to children. He asks "what if society determines that it's not worth it?" (p.136). We are a wealthy country that can well afford to give all students a good education, with the proper resources and supports, in well-maintained buildings. The fact that we believe in the importance of universal education is reason enough to adequately fund schools; it should not need justification from a cost effectiveness argument.

The Manitoba government relied on the cost effectiveness argument in its decision to withdraw funding from schools and students suffered. School buildings deteriorated, student-teacher ratios increased, class sizes expanded and students did not have access to teaching assistants, school counsellors, psychologists and social workers. The reader will recall from the narrative that funding issues led to our school division's action to hold back a group of Senior 1 students from moving on into high school with their peers. They were sequestered in a self-contained classroom, unable to access school and divisional personnel who could have assisted them in their learning. In the narrative, I referred to these students as "pawns in a financial cut back game". Hopelessly caught in system restructuring, the government betrayed these students in that it did not adequately fund schools to support changes to the system.

Finally, the Blue Book reduced students to commodities when it claimed that the purpose of schools was to train students for their role in sustaining the economy. This view calculates how students may or may not serve the economic interests of others in the future and thus become divested of their inherent and present worth. Kozol (2000) states that children are:

complete and good in what they are already; and their small but mystical and interesting beings ought to count for something in our estimation without any calculation as to how they someday may, or may not, serve the economic interests of somebody else or something else when they are 25 or 30. (p.139)

Kozol reminds us that investing in the future of children should be an unselfish act without any calculation of what the economic return will be on our investment.

When the government reiterated several times throughout the Blue Book that changes to the school system were necessary to secure the province's economic future, it was clear that Manitoba students were to become a means by which the government hoped to provide financial security for the province. This notion placed a lot of faith in the school system to graduate students who could meet the weighty obligations that had been entrusted to them by the government; however, one would not know this from the dollar investments that were made. Students, as commodities, seemed to be worth little to the government and yet, ironically, much was expected of them as the government thrust the responsibility of securing the financial prosperity of the province on their shoulders.

#### **Effort, Ability and Entitlement**

In addition to the commodification of students, market models of schooling aggravate systemic inequities because students as commodities come to have relative and varied worth. The next section of this chapter will build the second argument to sustain my claims that the implications of Manitoba school reform were such that they contributed to the maintenance of differentiated school experiences.

Market reform fosters inequitable experiences of schooling by strengthening the competitive context within which students are schooled. Outcome based schooling supports the idea of teachers comparing student accomplishments and extending privileges to those students who conform to both behavioural and academic expectations. Furthermore, the publication of standards test results and schools of choice legislation enables a school community to compare student achievement and judge schools for their effectiveness in graduating students who are high achievers. However, market based school reform is based upon fundamentally flawed beliefs about the nature and causes of poor student achievement and thus, heightens injustices within the school system.

The Blue Book explained poor student achievement as a result of differing abilities, a lack of motivation or the absence of a supportive learning environment. Each of these explanations for poor

student achievement was flawed. Poor student achievement has more to do with the kinds of abilities that are measured on standards tests, motivation is something which students have in abundance if we are able to generate student enthusiasm for learning and it is difficult for schools to create supportive learning environments with inadequate funding and restrictive educational policy directives that reduce the flexibility with which teachers can respond to student needs.

There are several causes for poor student achievement that the Blue Book neglected to mention. Race, poverty, unemployment and the predominance of one language and one culture embedded within the curricula and standards tests all limit student achievement. The differential effects of market mechanisms for schooling have been documented since the mid-1990's and have shown that these raced and classed educational policies reproduce traditional hierarchies rather than improve educational opportunities and the overall quality of schooling (Apple, 1999). Outcome based schooling assumes that all students are on a level playing field. The Blue Book dismissed difference by indicating that in spite of "diverse cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic backgrounds [and] numerous and complex needs, increasingly, schools must recognize these students' desire to succeed and achieve their highest potential" (p.20). In other words, the Blue Book encouraged teachers to set aside difference and focus on student motivation. This position on the role of difference served to exacerbate the school system's tendency to produce "winners and losers" because the government neglected to acknowledge that the conditions of student's lives are different (Kozol, 2000); thus, not all students bring the same resources to access the educational system.

Some students may demonstrate poor student achievement because the standards test is limited in what it can measure. Outcome-based schooling tends to favour the measurement of concrete skills and knowledge, and this leads to the exclusion of capacities for learning. Noddings (1992) has stated that notions of equality in schooling have to do with equally valuing different kinds of knowledge, not just literacy, numeracy and traditional disciplines. Her analysis of the slogan "all children can learn" reveals how outcome based schooling, while couched in equity considerations, causes some students to be excluded from the benefits of a school experience. Noddings argues that:

The primary aim of every teacher must be to promote the growth of students as competent, caring, loving people. Teachers with this aim will work flexibly... To have uniformly high expectations for all students... is morally wrong and pedagogically disastrous. It is part of a sloganized attempt to make our schools look democratic and egalitarian when in fact they are systems continually struggling for tighter control. (p.154)



Thus, any model for school reform that is concerned with equity issues must recognize the various capacities that students have for learning.

This is what happened to the students who were in Senior 1 who were retained in that grade until they had completed the requisite number of credits to be able to move into high school. Because I kept in touch with many of these students, I was able to learn that several eventually dropped out of school. This is also what has happened for a number of students that I have been tracking in my role as vice principal, who have either stopped attending school or classes or who sit passively in class refusing to engage in classroom activities. Ethnicity, class and the varying conditions of students' lives caused some of these students to have a school experience in which they had been marginalized or excluded. Many students were isolated from the school community. They were unable to demonstrate their unique talents in ways that counted for something in the school system. Some of these students were possible future inventors, comedians, mechanics, dancers and cartoonists. However, none of these demonstrations of intelligence received recognition in an outcome-based model of schooling. Moreover, the Blue Book's encouragement of retention practices only served to compound this isolation and cause students to become further disengaged from school.

#### **Awarding and Withholding Privileges**

The Blue Book fostered teaching practices that led to the stratification of students within the school system, further perpetuating inequitable school experiences. Notions of entitlement were encouraged by attributing student achievement solely to differing abilities among students and to a strong desire to succeed. Through the Blue Book's system of rewards and punishments explained earlier in this chapter, teacher beliefs about rewarding ability and effort were normalized and teacher demands for traditional practices that would stratify students were strengthened. In the schools where I worked, sometimes these demands were implemented, and at other times, the Blue Book's position on student achievement increased the pressure on teachers and school administrators who had more progressive ideas about improving student learning. These educators contended that schooling practices that conferred privilege on selected students was destructive to the building of community.

The reader will recall from the narrative that in my work as a vice-principal, I observed that some teachers were more insistent that we create classrooms of students with homogeneous abilities after the

release of the Blue Book. Concerned about the government's demands for applying the same set of standards to all students and the threat to make school results on provincial tests public, teachers who might not have supported homogeneous groupings in the past were drawn into re-evaluating this practice. Teachers argued that homogeneous groupings would enable teachers to better focus on improving achievement. It was also noted that heterogeneous groupings were unfair to students who demonstrated achievement and that these students should be rewarded by placement in a class with students who were equally adept at meeting grade level standards.

Demands to retain students have gained strength with the publication of the Blue Book. Some teachers insisted that if students did not repeat a grade, they would be unable to meet grade level standards. Discussions around student retention often turned to considerations of student effort and while the word "punishment" was not used, it was certainly implied. It was believed that a student might be coerced into demonstrating improved student achievement if he or she were forced to repeat a year. The Blue Book stated that the parents of children who were candidates for retention would need to be included in the decision making process (p.18). However, as was the case in any of these discussions in which I took part, social status had a prominent role in determining which students were retained. Financially-able parents refused to consider retention as a possibility for their child and parents with less economic means were more likely to insist upon it. Some parents would use their role as one of the decision-makers as leverage to force their child into complying with meeting the grade level standards. However, not once did these threats or bribes compel students to demonstrate achievement.

Other elitist notions that arose after the publication of the Blue Book were:

- our school division's renewed interest in gifted education and lack of attention to inclusivity
- teacher interpretations of "outstanding" on the new report card as attainable by only a select few students
- teachers rewarding students who demonstrated achievement and effort with participation in co-curricular activities while students who struggled were threatened with non-participation

These elitist notions are not unusual implications of market reform. Kozol (2000 ) has found that market notions of schooling have fostered the justification of differentiations in pedagogies and social policies that only add to a discriminating stance toward those who are different. Kozol warns that both standards testing and resulting pedagogical strategies can cause schools to treat students in ways that would be unacceptable

to white, middle class parents. Apple (1999) supports this notion in his observation that market-driven school reform led to the reintroduction of tracking and that more emphasis was given to gifted and fast track classes. This differentiation in the kinds of pedagogies that are used to teach students was supported further by schools of choice. If schools did not comply with a parent's desire to have their child schooled differently because of his ability or work ethic, the parent could take the child to a different school. Thus parental demands for differentiated schooling have more weight than in a system where schools of choice do not exist.

### **Schools of Choice and Strengthening Private Interest**

To illustrate further the exacerbation of inequities in market-based school reform, I will examine one of the market mechanisms that the Blue Book implemented to promote competition – schools of choice. Like outcome based schooling which couched inequity within such democratic-sounding slogans as "All children can learn", proponents of schools of choice legislation and its offspring, charter schools, have appropriated democratic terms to mask the promotion of self-interest at the expense of others. Bossetti (2000) claims that charter schools build a sense of community and purpose and that the word choice connotes freedom and democracy and stirs a sense of personal responsibility by raising dreams of fairness. Such powerful descriptions of schools of choice and charter schools hide the fact that advocates of this kind of school reform are self-serving and have no interest in creating school systems that foster equitable school experiences. In fact, as Barlow and Robertson (1994) have observed, "parents who have historically expected and received the greatest benefit from education are encouraged to believe that equity and excellence are in competition" (p.9).

Schools of choice advocates may laud personal responsibility, but their definition of it does not extend to social responsibility. Once again, in turning to Bossetti (2000) one is able to identify her position more clearly with this quote: "It seems unreasonable to hold parents who advocate on behalf of their children through selecting schools of choice responsible for the education system's failure to address issues of equity and diversity". Bossetti fails to identify the role that parents and other members of the educational community have in creating school systems that are more equitable and diverse. She blames the school system for not confronting equity issues, but does not say who will change this – just that it is unreasonable to expect parents to do so.

Other schools of choice advocates assume that competition between schools will ensure that they are efficient and responsive to the educational needs of all, including the disenfranchised. However, Apple (1999) has noted that schools seeking to maintain market position have demonstrated more interest in students with particular characteristics. For example, girls and Asian students are considered to be more desirable than students of Afro-Caribbean origin. Robertson (1998) has observed that schools of choice foster a greater interest in students who are well-behaved, co-operative, high achievers, demand little and raise school averages. She argues that schools of choice lead to the notion that some students are more trouble than they are worth because they draw on resources such as special education, ESL instruction or counselling. This, in turn, reinforces the subtle exclusion of students who are not wanted.

This research supports the experience I have had as a vice-principal. The calls that I received from school officials of other schools who wanted information about one of our former students were intended to calculate the value of the student who was applying. Would the student be an asset or was he likely to "cost" the school in terms of the resources that might be needed to support his learning? My answers to the school official's questions would often influence whether a student was accepted into that school.

Robertson (1998) contends that once a school is allowed to select students, the rules change. She states that the cruel irony of schools of choice is that:

Vendors are obliged neither to sell you something because you want it, nor to sell anything at a loss. If landlords can protect their interests by asking prospective renters whether they are on welfare or how much they earn, why could deregulated schools not ask the equivalent of prospective students? (p. 262)

Apple (1999) cites the work of Whitty (1997) to illustrate that while schools of choice appear to give everyone equal opportunities, they in fact limit the opportunities for collective action for addressing social and cultural inequalities. Moving educational decision-making from the public to private sphere makes it harder to ensure that the educational needs of disadvantaged children are met. Apple also makes reference to the work of Ball, Bowe and Gewirtz (1994) to show that middle class parents are best able to decode the educational systems based on market values of choice and recruitment. Middle class parents are able to move their children around the system with greater ease because they have the "habitus" to use market systems to their benefit and they have the resources needed to do so. Kozol (2000) supports this idea by noting that poor parents are often cut off from information that more knowledgeable parents have at their

disposal. He states that there is an informal loop of inside information that middle class parents are able to access and the effects of this are that there is more choice for some families than there is for others.

Apple extends his analysis by describing how economic and social capital can be converted into cultural capital, which better enables middle class parents to gain access to a marketized choice system. Middle class parents can often provide transportation for their children to attend better schools some distance away. Moreover, these parents often have greater flexibility in their work to research schools of their choice. Additionally, more affluent parents are often more able to encourage their child's participation in activities such as dance, music or computer classes, building on the cultural capital that is already part of the child's assets, making these students even more attractive to potential schools. Apple is careful to say that the differential access to education that is created by a market-driven system does not mean that working class, poor and/or immigrant parents negotiate the system without skill. Exploitative conditions require the development of resources and abilities in order to survive. However, the middle class advantages are such that, when paired with a marketized educational system, raced and classed educational policy results.

Thus, even though advocates of schools of choice have appropriated democratic notions such as the common good, freedom, community and the honouring of diversity, schools of choice exacerbate inequity because within a competitive context of school choice, not all students have the same worth. Schools have the real power to choose and often make their selections based on which students are most likely to boost achievement scores and which are least likely to draw on resources. Furthermore, middle class resources enable these parents to access schools of choice systems in ways that the working class, poor and immigrant parents cannot. As Barlow and Robertson (1994) contend: "Freedom to choose must be constrained by its consequences to others and thus, monitored in the public interest" (p.188).

In conclusion, the Blue Book implemented school reforms that exacerbated a context of social darwinism where a competitive ethos commodified and stratified students within the school system leading to both exclusion and marginalization. However benevolent the intention, Manitoba school reform signalled the erosion of democratic principles. Attributing student learning to ability and motivation increased the likelihood of students being unable to meet provincial standards because it blinded the government to other legitimate reasons for why students may have difficulty demonstrating their

achievement in school and reinforced teacher demands for homogeneous groupings and retention. Add to this notion the government's withdrawal of funding support and tightening of guidelines for adapting programs for students and one is able to see how the Blue Book failed to improve student achievement. In essence, the government set standards and then failed to set the conditions for meeting the standards (Osborne, 1999). Sizer (1997) supports this notion as well. He states:

There are no standards to the system; just running it is apparently enough. Political leaders thunder about standards for the children and their schools, but their silence on standards for themselves is virtually universal. Leaders far from the schools can demand that high-quality work be done by teachers and the students without taking the care that the conditions for that work are available. (p.38)

For all of these reasons, Manitoba school reform created a situation where some students became superfluous to the school system and were excluded from opportunities for learning.

When changes are made to schooling that reduce the quality of learning and exacerbate inequities within the school system, there are implications for democratic life. In the last section of chapter four, I will examine these implications more closely.

#### **4.4 Hazards for a Democratic Society**

Amy Gutmann (1987) states that there are three preconditions for an undemocratic society: an inability to engage in conscious social reproduction; the restriction of rational deliberation; and the exclusion of some educable citizens from an adequate education. The Blue Book was a school reform project that met all three of these preconditions. First rational deliberation or discussion was restricted by the Manitoba government's misuse of two democratic processes: polling and public consultations. The government then continued to undermine democratic discussion during the implementation of the Blue Book by mishandling citizens' views that were in disagreement with the Blue Book and by shifting blame to students, teachers and parents if school reform failed to meet its objectives for school improvement. Second, the Blue Book's emphasis on a common set of curriculum standards and mechanisms to control what happened in classrooms across the province were school reform measures that inhibited conscious social reproduction. The changes that were made to curriculum, instruction and assessment did not adequately prepare students for participation in a democracy because the narrowly defined curricula that was organized around economic purposes restricted the development of critical thinking. A curricula defined in the way the Blue Book defined curricula makes it difficult to develop the kind of reflective and

critical thinking that is needed to counter the lack of social consciousness that Saul (1995) describes. Third, the Blue Book instituted bureaucratic structures and policies that exacerbated inequitable experiences of schooling and further reduced the capacities of schools to ready students for their involvement in democratic dialogue and decision making by both marginalizing and excluding some students from schooling. Lastly, Manitoba school reform re-aligned notions of citizenship with the building of economic allegiance and patriotism (Wiens, 2000) and undermined the will for collective social action. This section of chapter four will examine each of these preconditions for an undemocratic society in more detail as I reflect on points that have been made throughout the chapter.

### **Undermining Democratic Decision Making and Dialogue**

Beginning with a lack of substantiated data and a poor consultation of the research, the Manitoba government embarked upon a school reform venture that used democratic processes to undermine democracy. As Gutmann (1987) explains, government representatives can "undermine the intellectual foundations of future democratic deliberation by implementing educational policies that...repress unpopular (but rational) ways of thinking..." (p. 14-15). Both of the government's claims about the Blue Book responding to majority opinion and the government's use of public consultations to determine the direction of school reform were problematic because instead of giving legitimacy to democratic society in Manitoba, these processes were used to suppress conflicting perspectives on school reform. The misuse of these democratic processes threatened to cause an imbalance of power in public discussions about the Blue Book and undermined the democratic purposes of polling majority opinion and public consultation.

At the beginning of this chapter, I challenged the Manitoba government's rationale that the Blue Book was a response to the wishes of a majority of Manitoba citizens. I claimed that majority opinion could be used to rule out less popular views or minority opinions and was more representative of a plebiscite than a democracy. As Gutmann (1987) has argued, "education is not democratic if citizens do not collectively influence the purposes of [primary] schooling" (p.75). By claiming that the majority "rules", the Manitoba government restricted the conception of a plan to reform public schools that was truly representative of the diverse needs and wishes of all citizens.

In my opinion, the consulting process that the Manitoba government used was also unrepresentative of the citizenry. Although the Blue Book made statements about consulting with various

educational partners, my experience with the government's consultations contradicted these statements. Teachers, school trustees, superintendents and parents were the various educational partners that were listed in the Blue Book as the people with whom the government consulted prior to the release of the plans for school reform (p.3). While listening to the viewpoints of a variety of educational stakeholders is important, it is more important to know how the government handled the imbalance of power endemic to democratic discussions and the conflict that was likely to ensue. How were educational decisions about school reform in Manitoba made? Was the Blue Book a result of privatized consumer orientation leading to an aggregate of private preferences? When democratic discussions occurred within the province, how did the government attend to social difference? Young (1996) states that the primary virtue of deliberative democracy is reason over power in politics; however, she argues that even deliberative models that bracket political and economic power are insufficient to make people equal speakers. She contends that social power derived from economic dependence, political domination, an internalized sense of the right one has to speak or not to speak and the devaluation and elevation of some people's style of speech can prevent people from being equal speakers. Mouffe (1996) supports this argument and states that "the main question of democratic politics, then becomes not how to eliminate power but how to constitute forms of power that are compatible with democratic values" (p.248).

I believe that two of the experiences that were described in chapter two can provide some insight on how the Manitoba government approached public consultations on the development and implementation of school reform. For example, in my work on the Western Protocol Framework for language arts, I found that it was misleading for the government to claim in the Blue Book that it had consulted with teachers. We were told an inter-provincial committee that had been selected by provincial governments had already made the major decisions about the curricula. Robertson (1998) has made a similar finding. She noted that the development of curriculum frameworks ignored the process of curriculum consensus-building. Teachers were provided with limited opportunities for consultation within tight time lines. Furthermore, teachers were told that they could not question the benefits of national curricula or the desirability of curriculum outcomes. Given the limitations that the government placed on consultations with teachers about new curricula, one is led to question who held the power for educational decision-making?



The reader will also recall from the narrative the highly secretive dinner with the minister that was hosted by one of our teachers on staff. In my opinion, this consulting process was highly biased with individuals attending who either supported the directions of the Manitoba government's school reform or who were unlikely to voice concerns that they might have had with the Blue Book. While initially I was somewhat insulted by not being able to attend, I am now relieved. It troubles me that such clandestine meetings may influence the development of social policy in far greater ways than public forums for decision making because such a means for gathering public opinion restricts the diversity of opinions that are presented to the government.

Saul (1995) argues that "serious important decisions are not made through democratic discussion or participation, but through negotiation between the relevant groups based upon expertise, interest and the ability to exercise power" (p.34). Whether these interest groups represent the private interests of a select gathering of educators or those of large corporations, democracy is undermined when its internal structures are co-opted by interest groups (Saul, 1997). Saul (1997) says this "endemic corruption" (p. 494) is something that citizens will have to confront if they intend to reassert their fundamental role as the source of political legitimacy.

In a democracy, we trust our elected representatives to act responsibly. Part of that responsibility is to preserve the integrity of democratic processes that enable the interests and concerns of a diverse group of citizens to be shared with government representatives on the mutual understanding that these varying viewpoints will be democratically debated in a public forum and that decisions will be made through a process of reasoned consensus. However, the senselessness of my experience with the development of the Western Protocol for language arts and the exclusive dinner party with the minister were two events which suggested how democratic processes may be distorted to meet private over public interests. Moreover, it is this kind of political activity that leads to teacher apathy, a reluctance to get involved in democratic processes, and the repression of critical thinking in educational decision making.

### **The Development of Antagonistic and Adversarial Relationships**

Competing notions about the purpose of schools and dialogue about these different perspectives is critical to a democracy. Unfortunately, there were few opportunities for substantive discussions of reasonable alternatives to what the government proposed in the Blue Book. It was my experience that the

government shut down and shut out those who might have challenged the largely economic and vocational ideology on which the reforms were founded. The debate was over before it got started. Whatever reasons may have been guiding the implementation of the Blue Book, one thing is clear. The nature of the Manitoba school reforms, the description of the various needs and roles of students, teachers and parents and the implementation process itself conjoined to help create a situation where the educational partners blamed each other for the school system's failings, causing the whole community to become polarized.

Conflicting opinions about the purposes and goals of schooling are unavoidable in any discussion about education; however, political disagreement is not something that should be evaded or suppressed. Gutmann (1987) contends that "political controversies over our educational problems are a particularly important source of social progress because they have the potential for educating so many citizens" (p.5). Saul (1997) adds to this notion by suggesting that governments that choose not to avoid conflict demonstrate political responsibility. He argues that "society's greatest need is not for agreement but for responsibility and in a democracy, responsibility is based on the inevitability of disagreement" (p.447). However, during the implementation of the Blue Book, the Manitoba government chose to not view conflict or disagreement as a resource for the improvement of its' school reform plans. For example, the government chose to see teachers who opposed the Blue Book as obstacles to the implementation of school reform. In a Winnipeg Free Press article, Linda McIntosh, then Minister of Education, made reference to teacher protests against school reform and stated: "The good teachers were the ones who were teaching in their classrooms yesterday". Later, in the same article, Ms. McIntosh sarcastically said, "What a wonderful example they're setting for the children of Manitoba" (May 24, 1996).

This view of teachers impeding the process of school reform was not unusual. It has been noted in the school reform literature that one of the reasons that school reform fails to meet expectations has to do with teachers. Researchers have suggested that school reformers have often attributed the ineffectiveness of school reform to teachers, believing that they were resistant and incompetent. Moreover, they lack the expertise that is necessary to implement the school changes (Cuban and Shipps, 2000; Osborne, 1999). However, these same researchers also state that perhaps the problem lies with non-educators and policymakers imposing changes within the system without giving much attention to how teachers make sense of the reforms. This latter view suggests that teachers can offer insight into how school reform is

mediated throughout the school system. If the goal were truly about improving student learning, then the government would have benefited from expanding genuine opportunities for all of the educational partners to participate in democratic dialogue.

Democratic governments need to accept the important and useful role of conflict in helping us communicate across multiple perspectives and reach provisional agreements about what is good and just. Mouffe (1996) maintains that the modern democratic state acknowledges the role of conflict in democratic deliberations as a characteristic of pluralist notions of civic virtue, public spirit and political community. She states that:

The democratic society cannot be conceived any more as a society that would have realized the dream of perfect harmony in social relations. Its democratic character can be given only by the fact that no limited social actor can attribute to herself the representation of the totality. (p.248)

I will return to this notion of conflict arising from difference in the next section as I examine further the Manitoba government's lack of attention to pluralism both in the school reforms that it adopted and during the implementation process. However, for now I draw the reader's attention to a concern that I had regarding the Manitoba government's treatment of conflicting perspectives about the Blue Book because I believe that the government revealed a lack of faith in the political legitimacy that citizens bring to the public forum. It was not evident from the Blue Book or from my experience with Manitoba school reform that public opinion polls or consultations were used to generate ideas about the purpose of schools that were different from that of the government.

Democratic dialogue and decision making was also undermined by the government creating a false crisis in education and setting up the various educational partners to be blamed for the inadequacies of the school system and this too contributed to the development of antagonistic and adversarial relationships. Rather than assuming responsibility for the inadequacies of the school system, market proponents of school reform blame students, teachers and parents for the school system's inability to redress social and economic disparities and this too leads to a repression of critical perspectives. It has been speculated that big business has created a false crisis regarding unemployment and poorly trained youth and that this has led to the inadequate solution of blaming education for economic woes (Barlow and Robertson, 1994). By assigning responsibility for the inadequacies of the school system to various

members of the school community, governments are able to generate the will for privatization and reduce social and economic expectations of the state (Robertson 1998).

### **Blaming Students, Teachers and Parents**

The Blue Book's description of students leads one to believe that the government thought that Manitoba students were unmotivated and unprepared for employment. This reductive view of students is a possible explanation for the school reforms and the manner in which they were implemented. From a distance, perhaps it was easier to make decisions that essentially amounted to a betrayal of trust and destruction of will. The Blue Book's explanation that, irrespective of social class or ethnicity all students could meet the high expectations for learning set by the government if they worked hard enough was a morally reprehensible position. Essentially, the Blue Book implied that teachers could blame students for not meeting provincial standards because they did not have a strong enough desire to succeed. As Noddings (1992) has observed, students who do not try to meet standards are made to "feel like traitors, even though they might work very hard at tasks over which they have some control and choice" (p.13). While it might be true that some students could work harder in school, the Blue Book's disregard for social difference, withdrawal of school funding, testing of standards and reduction of teacher autonomy also contributed to poor student achievement. Thus, the government's decision to shift blame toward students for their differential experiences of schools demonstrated a callous disregard for the welfare of all students, and in particular, those students who were marginalized and excluded from schooling.

As Kozol (2000) has argued, "there are a number of ways to break the will of those who have a fleeting notion of escaping from the destinies a social order seems to have in store for them" (p.217).

Kozol (2000) further reminds us that:

Most of the children come to all of this, initially at least, with a degree of trust that they are going to be treated fairly. The way the social order kills that sense of trust is cumulative, quiet, sometimes subtle, sometimes not so subtle, usually a little complicated, so it seems that it could be an oversight, not something consciously intended. Intentional or not, however, all these processes have powerful effects. (p.218)

The Blue Book's treatment of students contributed to the development of oppositional relationships of students and their teachers, parents and school. For those students who were marginalized and excluded by the bureaucratic structures and policies that were implemented as a result of the Blue Book, it comes as no surprise that my unofficial tracking of the students who have become disengaged from school has

increased. What is more surprising is that some students continue to come to school given their exclusion and differential treatment.

The Blue Book's shifting of blame to students was quite simply unethical. Students should not have to compete for recognition of their unique talents and interests nor prove that they are entitled to an education. School is a "fixed" game that favours those with more social resources. I believe that at some level most students who are excluded from school know this, and yet, many still come to school hoping to find a place where they will be welcomed and feel as if they belong. The Blue Book not only contributed to the destruction of this hope by strengthening exclusivity in schools, it justified notions of entitlement on the grounds that students who were excluded brought this on themselves.

The Blue Book also suggested that teachers could be held responsible and positioned parents and other community members to do so by calling on them to act as public watchdogs of the school system. The Blue Book noted that teaching was "difficult and complex work...educators require a wealth of knowledge and skills to meet the diverse learning requirements of today's classrooms and schools" (p.33). While this appeared to be supportive of teachers, it contradicted the government's public vituperation of their work while the Blue Book was being implemented. Other comments made throughout the Blue Book on the needs of teachers tend to make the government's position clearer, reinforcing the notion that teachers and schools were failing Manitoba society. The Blue Book ostensibly claimed that many teachers didn't have the expertise, the tools or the support from administrators and parents to teach effectively. Furthermore, the Blue Book served notice that guidelines for teaching would be tightened to reduce inconsistencies and that teachers would be supervised more closely in their work both by principals and through public reporting of student achievement. While implemented in the name of support, the Blue Book and its implementation undermined the quality of relationships that teachers had with students, colleagues, parents, administrators and the provincial government.

Apple (1999) has argued that during the implementation of market reforms in England, there was an active campaign to shift blame for the school system's inadequacy for addressing inequities and that this led to a public mistrust of teachers. In Manitoba, when it appeared that the public wasn't supporting the need for school reforms as Clayton Manness, and later, Linda McIntosh, had hoped, these education ministers sought to undermine public confidence in the school system. The battle between teachers and the

government became uglier as time progressed, with individuals on both sides of school reform losing civility and engaging in vicious public insults. Headlines from the Winnipeg Free Press throughout this decade read: "Manness demands school shake-up by next spring" (December 2, 1993); "Manness scoffs at teachers' poll" (September 14, 1993); "Manness, delegates collide: educators think minister has mind set in advance" (December 3, 1993); "Teachers shout down vindictive Tory: keep away from convention, teachers tell minister" ( May 24, 1996). This public attack on teachers and schools demoralized teachers and our relationships with other members of the educational community suffered.

In addition to shifting blame onto students and teachers, the Blue Book also enabled criticism to be levied toward parents for a lack of involvement in schools. Although contending on one hand that parents were excluded from the process of schooling, treated unfairly by some schools and lacked schooling choices, the Blue Book found fault with parents who were uninvolved with their child's schooling. Furthermore, the government's agenda for increasing public accountability through Advisory Councils for School Leadership, schools of choice and public announcements of standards tests results put mechanisms into place that could ultimately be used to deflect parental concerns back onto the parents themselves.

I believe that this shifting of blame in the Blue Book created a situation where the educational community became divided and fragmented. This reduced the quality of public dialogue about Manitoba school reform and undermined democratic decision making. Having outlined the processes of implementation that repressed rational deliberation, I will now turn to a second criteria that Gutmann (1987) states threatens democratic society—the inhibiting of conscious social reproduction through the use of an economic rationality to guide school improvement.

### **Economic Rationality and the Repression of Critical Thinking**

In making changes to curriculum, instruction and assessment, Manitoba school reform neglected to consider fully the role of schools in preparing students for participation in a democracy. The Blue Book's narrow focus on schooling as a means of sustaining economic and individual prosperity was a limited vision of the purpose of schools that reinforced both passivity and compliance, strengthening the idea of schools as gatekeepers of the status quo.

Darling-Hammond (1997) has compared current school reform efforts that are aligned with the needs of the market to the creation of bureaucratic schools at the turn of the century. Darling-Hammond observed that bureaucratic schools were not organized to meet the intellectual, social or personal development needs of students. Governments did not intend for bureaucratic schools to educate all students well, but to process a large number of students efficiently. Standardized processes were incorporated to reduce schooling expenditures, and in turn, there was a greater routinization of teaching and less reliance on professional judgement.

Bureaucratic schools, like those that are evolving from market notions of school reform, lead to both passivity and conformity. Darling-Hammond (1997) explains that the economic rationality that created bureaucratic schools and market-driven school reform contradict the goals of educating for participation in a democracy. She states:

At times economic objectives for schools conflict directly with a productive and inclusive social education. For example, efforts to prepare workers for a factory economy led to forms of schooling that reinforced passivity and compliance rather than independent thinking and that created stratification among classes of people. These efforts left many citizens without the tools needed for collective discourse and action in a healthy democracy. (p.44)

Saul's (1997) description of a clinical state of unconsciousness supports this argument with his claim that economic rationality or corporatism creates the overall effect of passivity and conformity. Both Saul and Robertson's (1998) arguments support the elimination of forms of schooling that contribute to a lack of critical engagement with the dominant political, social and economic institutions that shape our lives.

Carr (1991) invites his readers to look at how institutions work to preserve the status quo and inhibit the development of critical thinking. He argues that market forms of schooling marginalize civic education and foster factual knowledge over social awareness or critical reflection. In addition, Carr states that market reformers of schools give social studies, economics, history and literature a low priority.

Darling-Hammond's (1997) research adds that market-driven schools model and reinforce social stratification rather than inclusiveness. Passivity and disengagement are valued over active participation, and unthinking acceptance of the knowledge accepted by others is prized over the development of critical thought.

Government reform efforts that restrict critical thinking skills through accountability measures such as a highly prescriptive curricula or standards testing weakens democratic society because such school reform measures can lead to the repression of reasonable challenges to dominant political perspectives Gutmann (1987). As Noddings (1992) has observed:

as soon as we impose our values on a new generation we risk losing those values that are most needed in a dynamic society – those that encourage reflective criticism, revision, creation and renewal. (p.165)

The teaching of critical thinking and reflection skills in school ensures that we are able to counter the indoctrinating influences of schools and other societal institutions with the ability to question underlying assumptions. The insights that students gain from this kind of engagement with prevailing social norms, values and expectations lead to the rejection of normative thinking, participation in social progress and the renewal of democratic society. School reform efforts that seek to impose a predetermined set of curricular standards risk indoctrination by perpetuating the belief that our current social norms and values are reflective of some indisputable truth.

The Manitoba government's plan for reforming curriculum, instruction and assessment restricted the development of critical thinking in several ways. Limited by a market imperative for school improvement, the Blue Book emphasized forms of knowledge and skills that were aligned with a vocational purpose. Thus, the capacities for learning that were needed for participation in a democracy were largely put aside. The government's demands for accountability through testing standards, publishing test results and instituting parent advisory councils tightly controlled the teaching and learning process, ensuring that teachers taught to the provincial outcomes. Consequently, this inhibited the use of constructivist and participatory pedagogies – the kinds of pedagogies that are needed for fostering critical thinking and the renewal of democratic society. Lastly, critical thinking skills were undermined by the prominent role of "punishments" in the Blue Book. The Blue Book's description of the many consequences that would befall students, teachers and schools for not attending to provincial outcomes intimidated many school communities and repressed the kinds of teaching and learning experiences that were more likely to foster critical thought and the remaking of democratic society.



I will now re-examine the Manitoba government's lack of attention to equity issues from a democratic perspective to determine the implications of introducing school reforms that lead to entitlement and exclusion for a democratic society.

### **Equity Issues Unaddressed**

As I noted earlier in chapter four, Gutmann (1987) argues that one of the preconditions for a democratic society is that no educable citizens can be excluded from an adequate education. The Blue Book neglected to address bureaucratic structures and policies that contributed to unequal experiences of schools and in effect, Manitoba school reform aggravated inequity. Through the commodification of students within a context of competition, outcome based schooling, curricula that disregarded democratic pluralism and schools of choice, the Manitoba government failed to attend to the role of difference. This created a more stratified school system.

While emphasizing the importance of uniformity throughout the Blue Book, the government adopted a "factory" model for school reform that led to students being treated as commodities within the school system. As commodities, students were evaluated for the value that they would add to, or detract from, schools competing for dollars and students. They were prized for their achievements and punished for an inability to meet provincial standards. Again in turning to Darling-Hammond's (1997) analysis of bureaucratic schools, one can compare the strong similarities between these turn of the century schools and the kind of schools that have emerged from market reform plans for school systems. In the bureaucratic school, students were selected and sorted as they moved through the bureaucratic school system and only a privileged few were chosen for what was called "thinking work". The creators of the bureaucratic school system developed strategies for sorting and tracking students in order to ration the scarce resources of talented teachers and rich curriculum and to justify the standardization of the teaching and learning process. Bureaucratic schools maintained inequalities in access to knowledge, heightened divisions among groups and failed to prepare most young people to become active social participants (Darling-Hammond, 1997).

The Blue Book's description of student achievement revealed assumptions about the nature and causes of failure that were raced and classed. This bias, and the government's employment of market mechanisms to make schools more competitive, reinforced differential school experiences and reduced the capacity of schools to reduce exclusion. School practices such as retention, homogeneous ability groupings

and gifted programs supported ideas of privilege and entitlement, thereby controlling differential access to knowledge. Thus, the Blue Book contributed to strengthening the social darwinism that Apple (1999) has described, further exposing the undemocratic character of school reform.

A public school system that promotes elitist notions leads to a weakened democracy. Carr (1991) contends that citizens can only participate positively in collective social action if they are not economically or socially deprived to the extent that their civil and political rights cannot be adequately exercised or enjoyed. However, market driven school reform, like the Blue Book, creates public school systems that increase the unequal distribution of economic and social rewards widening the gap between those who have economic and social power and those who do not. In the 1998 UNESCO report, Learning: The Treasure Within, Delors describes how inequities within school systems contribute to the deterioration and destabilization of democracies around the world. He noted that a failure to address equity issues within school systems world-wide perpetuates injustices and places democratic societies at risk.

The Blue Book added further to inequitable schooling by not attending to difference. The Manitoba government introduced a common set of standards and committed to the development of common curricular frameworks. Pluralist notions were either omitted completely or given such scant recognition that the end result was an affront to people of different race, gender or ethnicity. In effect, Manitoba school reform negated the role of pluralism in a democratic society as the government sought to bring uniformity and consistency to the school system.

According to Noddings (1992) the idea of a democracy being dependent upon its citizens sharing a common language, set of concepts, knowledge of their past and understanding of the best products of their culture originated with Adler. Noddings contends that this notion is based on arrogance. Governments make assumptions that society's best is something that everyone would want to replicate and therefore need. Noddings contrasts this view with Dewey's description of democracy where he indicates that democracy is not a given. In summarizing Dewey's position on a common curriculum Noddings argues: "Democracy is not the outcome of a common set of words and customs. Rather, it is an achievement— one that depends on the desire to communicate and the goodwill to persist in collaborative inquiry" (p.165). Thus, while education reflects a society's views, the reflections are not impervious to change. They are

shaped and reshaped as definitions, meanings and purposes change through democratic contestation (Elshtain, p.82).

Rather than strengthening the common foundations and shared assumptions on which civilization rests, homogenous school experiences can lead to cultural imperialism (Robertson, 1998). For example, as Robertson has argued, techno-enthusiasts boast that because technology homogenizes experience and information it strengthens common bonds. However, the distinct character of the homogenized experience is American or what she calls "McWorld" (p.230). Therefore, rather than fostering a sense of our common needs, technology could be used to strip away Canadian identity. This may seem to be an outrageous possibility, particularly for baby boomers like myself who grew up on curricula rich with Canadian literature and a sense of national pride. However, both the development of common curricular frameworks and recent trends for governments to contract out curriculum development to American firms (Robertson, 1998; Dei and Karumanchery 1999) have put mechanisms into place for making this possibility a reality. The propagation of American ideals and values within our school systems is much more likely when Americans are producing our school curricula.

Governments that fail to attend to difference and allow room for the sharing of conflicting perspectives about a common good threaten the freedom of individuals because the objective of homogeneity and unanimity is always revealed as fictitious and based on acts of exclusion (Mouffe, 1996). If we commit to the purpose of education as the renewal of democracy then democracy, as an achievement that is reached through discussions with others, is both a process and a political ideal that moves toward a common standard or common good, but this standard must be compatible with diversity (Gutmann, 1987).

In addition to showing disregard for difference through the standardization of schooling, the Manitoba government's implementation of schools of choice legislation also had implications for the renewal of democratic society. Apple (1999) has noted that schools of choice legislation is based upon the appearance of equal opportunity when, in fact, it is simply another systemic means of aggravating social stratification. Saul (1997) added to this discussion of schools of choice when he observed that society's current obsession with corporatism and the right of the individual to assert her choices apart from the broader interests of society has led to the idea of individualism being based on the equality of opportunity. This, in turn, results in inequality. Saul states that "when individualism is based only on opportunity, no

one asks what happens to those who have neither the skill nor the political clout to exercise their tiny portion of that opportunity" (p.507). Schools of choice exclude the movement of citizens with less financial and social resources within the school system and, as Apple (1999) has noted, limit collective social action. Giving the appearance of equal opportunity schools of choice mask social and economic inequalities and detract attention away from the injustices that prevail within the school system.

Standardized schooling procedures and schools of choice legislation like those advocated by the Blue Book ostensibly communicate disdain for difference and are intolerant of minority perspectives. However, when difference is ignored or dismissed in educational policy, access to a participatory political life is restricted and the quality of democratic discussion is undermined. Furthermore, curricular reforms such as those advocated by the Blue Book threaten to colonize ideas that will in all likelihood, if educational decision making continues to follow a market imperative, pertain to an American view of the world. Renewal of Canadian democratic society necessitates rejecting school reform objectives that seek to standardize the process of schooling and perpetuate predetermined outcomes that neglect to acknowledge the role of difference. Within difference lies the possibility of transforming our various perspectives into something that is far richer in meaning than what is gained from perpetuating the views of dominant majorities; thus, school reform needs to confront equity issues and work to eliminate unequal experiences of schools.

The Blue Book failed to adequately attend to any of Gutmann's three preconditions for living in a democratic society. Moreover, the Manitoba government implemented school reform that re-defined notions of citizenship, strengthened notions of individualism and undermined conscious collective efforts to work toward a common good.

#### **Citizenship, Individualism and the Common Good**

The Blue Book signalled, like many other market imperatives for schools, a re-definition of citizenship. The Manitoba government's plan for school reform promoted notions of individualism and self-fulfillment within the school system, forsaking a vision of schools as fostering an understanding of our common needs as a democratic society. Individually and collectively, the role of Manitoba citizens was to support the government's endeavours to remain competitive in a global economy and its use of the school system to build economic allegiance (Wiens, 2000).

As I noted in the last section of this chapter, Saul (1995) has claimed that we are a society "addicted to corporatism" (p.2). Our fascination with corporatism has led to corporatist beliefs and values becoming embedded within both social and economic infrastructures and citizenship has been redefined following a market imperative. According to Carr (1991) citizenship and democracy are essentially contested concepts; thus, it is not unusual that our societal fascination with corporatism would lead to the market appropriating these terms, at least for now. Carr's notion of a market democracy is one that:

- does not claim to be moral
- proposes a method of selecting between competing elites for the right to exercise power
- assumes that democratic societies do not have the knowledge or expertise for positive participation in political decision making
- is concerned with national loyalty
- elevates certain civil rights over others such as individual liberty and property ownership

Moreover, notions of citizenship within this market democracy place an emphasis on consumerism and efficient production (Jofre and Henley, 2000).

I believe that these descriptions of a market democracy and the role of citizens strongly support the Blue Book's interpretation of both the needs and roles of individuals and society. For example, the Blue Book promoted a market definition of a democracy with the implementation of school reforms that led to the commodification of students as they moved through the school system. Such treatment of students could not be believed as serving a moral purpose, and to wit, the Blue Book made no such claims about being moral. Yet another example to support Carr's (1991) contention that the market has appropriated notions of democracy includes the way in which the Manitoba government used the democratic processes of majority polls and public consultations. The evidence suggests that the government used these processes in the way that it did because it believed that Manitoba citizens lacked the necessary expertise to make decisions about educational policy.

One problem with a market definition of democracy and citizenship is that they represent a negative view of freedom to pursue private interests with minimal state control (Carr, 1991). Saul (1995) argues that this causes us to deny the legitimacy of the individual as a citizen in a democracy because self-interest is advanced ahead and at the expense of the common good. Elshtain (1993) contrasts the view of rights from both a democratic and market perspective and notes that, in what Carr (1991) would call a

moral democracy -- the opposite of a market democracy, rights are determined within a context of social life and responsibility. This is what constitutes our sense of civility. On the other hand, from a market perspective, rights are aligned with the individual and deemed to be representative of personal "wants". Thus, in a free market society, the common good is redefined as an aggregate of private goods as individual consumer choices are believed to result in the greatest benefit to society. Elshtain (1993) notes that this notion of a common good is derived from preference theory in economics and that the presumption behind this theory is that each one of us is a "preference maximizer" (p.29). However, as previously noted in this chapter, the competitiveness of the marketplace and the power of competing elites cause preferences or choices to be exercised unequally.

Society's focus on the pursuit of self-interests creates a significant barrier to our individual need to find a sense of purpose and the renewal of democratic society. Taylor (1991) best describes how individualism leads to the loss of aspiring to a higher purpose. He states:

The agent seeking significance in life, trying to define him-or herself meaningfully, has to exist in a horizon of important questions. That is what is self-defeating in modes of contemporary culture that concentrate on self-fulfillment in opposition to the demands of society, or nature which shut out history and the bonds of solidarity. (p. 40)

Saul (1995) contends that society cannot function happily if it allows selfishness and greed to run rampant and we do not adopt some measure of "disinterest" or a common good to guide our development as a society. Moreover, he says that ultimately, if our actions are based primarily on self-fulfillment or individualism that they will be self-destructive. In the long term, our survival as a society will be dependent upon how we attend to the common good.

At the present time, however, our fascination with the market has led us to this "dark side of individualism" (Taylor, 1991, p.4) which centres on the self and reduces the quality of our lives. We have relinquished our personal authority as citizens by allowing governments to use individualism to structure our social and economic affairs. This poses a significant hazard for the renewal of democratic society because it makes us less concerned with the welfare of others in our society. This separation of the self from the common good has led to a form of social atomism (Taylor, 1991) which causes individuals to devalue societal demands that come from beyond the self. Elshtain (1993) argues that:

Over time the stripping down of the individual to a hard core of an isolated or suspended self, the celebration of a version of radical autonomy, casts suspicion on any and all ties of reciprocal obligation and mutual interdependence. What counts in this scheme of things is only the individual and her choices. If choice is made absolute in this way, important and troubling questions that arise as one evaluates the distinction between individual right and social obligation are blanked out of existence. (p.11)

Thus, the fulfillment of private interests and individualism has led to a redefinition of a common good and caused both governments and citizens to reduce their commitment to equality and universality. Carr (1991) states that in a market democracy the egalitarian thrust of social citizenship is rejected on the grounds that it creates precisely the kind of state-dependency and second class citizenship it originally promised to eliminate. In support of Carr, Barlow and Robertson (1994) contend that at times this shift in expectations of government responsibility for social needs is happening reluctantly and at other times, enthusiastically. Nonetheless, as Barlow and Robertson (1994) observe, both governments and international organizations are "acquiescing to a class system born of deep economic disparities" (p.166).

The Manitoba government clearly indicated that it was following the global social and economic trend of embracing corporatism with its release of the Blue Book as a plan for reforming schools. Citizenship was realigned with the goal of sustaining economic viability within the province and the country, and school reforms were introduced that promoted notions of self-fulfillment and individualism. Within this "culture of narcissism and self-interest" (Fenstermacher, 1997), the rights of individuals were ostensibly deemed to be in conflict with obligations of the state; thus, the public good of education was rendered invisible (Heilbroner, 1992).

## CHAPTER FIVE

### EDUCATION FOR CITIZENSHIP AND POLITICAL INCLUSION

In the preceding chapters I have attempted to identify what has caused me to be apprehensive about the Manitoba government's implementation of market-driven school reform. Chapter two began with a selection of stories that described the effects of school reform on our school community. Chapter three examined the Blue Book for the Manitoba government's explanation of why it believed school reform was necessary and under what authority the government made the changes. Chapter three also identified the key actions that were proposed in the Blue Book and explained the government's position on the benefits of school reform for improving learning and for meeting the needs of individuals and society. Finally, chapter three summarized the Blue Book's description of the roles that the various educational partners would have in bringing about school change. Chapter four then explored alternative explanations to the Manitoba government's arguments for school change. In writing this chapter, I found that there were good reasons for my initial intuitive concerns with the Blue Book. The seeming fascination of governments with the "false gods" of economic utility, consumerism and technology (Postman, 1995) has alarming implications for education, humanity and democratic society, and we need to be wary of the corporate "moral monsters" (Chomsky, 2000) that are currently demonstrating such interest in public education.

The Blue Book was an untenable plan for Manitoba school reform because it was based on market reforms that undermine the purpose of schools as the renewal of democratic society. Each of the school reforms in the Blue Book contributed to the exacerbation of a stratified society and strengthened notions of entitlement and individualism. Reforms such as the implementation of outcome based schooling, schools of choice and the formation of Advisory Councils for School Leadership reduced the capacity for schools to develop caring, responsible citizens who would be both willing and able to engage in democratic dialogue and participate in collective social action. Consequently, chapter five will propose an alternative to the Blue Book.

This chapter begins with a proposed set of guidelines, or a framework, for the development and implementation of new educational policy that supports schooling as preparation for living in a democracy or, in other words, as a pre-political activity. I will develop these guidelines based in part on what I believe were the missteps that the Manitoba government made with the Blue Book. From there, I will explore



notions of curriculum, instruction and assessment that ready students for their future role as democratic citizens through the vehicle of citizenship education and describe the role of the educational leader. This will not be a comprehensive proposal for reforming the school system. Rather, it is a starting point for democratic dialogue about an alternative agenda for schools. As I explore these new ideas to help guide the thinking about education as preparation for democratic life, I will demonstrate how different these ideas are from the Blue Book and call attention to the importance of finding more educational, humane and democratic approaches to school reform.

## **5.0 The Development and Implementation of Educational Policy**

### **Consulting the Literature on School Change and School Reform**

A school reform alternative to the Blue Book would be based on solid and credible educational research. There was no evidence in the Blue Book that the Manitoba government had thoroughly studied the educational literature on school reform. A Lot to Learn (1992) was the only study cited in the Blue Book and, as I have shown, the claims made in this report could not be substantiated. While I do not doubt that it was the government's intention to act in the best interests of students, as claimed in the Blue Book, I do question the fact that school reform was initiated without citing reliable educational authorities on school change.

In the mid 1990's, about the same time that the Blue Book was released, critical reviews of market education (Ball, S., Bowe, R., and Gewirtz, S., 1994; O'Hear, P., 1994; Power, S., Halpin, D., and Fitz, J., 1994) were beginning to appear. These reviews were based on studies conducted in England, one of the first countries to embrace market notions of schooling. The research clearly showed that concerns about efficiency and effectiveness in education were not being addressed through school reforms such as standardized testing, publishing school results on the national tests and schools of choice legislation. In the words of yet another researcher, "the high hopes that had been pinned on market responses to problems in education were not now being realized and [were] unlikely to be realized" (Whitty, 1997). Furthermore, in this same study, Whitty noted that the market plans that featured choice and competition did nothing to challenge social or cultural inequities. Given the fact that the British studies were available to the Manitoba government at the time of the writing of the Blue Book, I would have hoped that the government would

have been more open to listening and incorporating the concerns of citizens who were opposed to market reform.

### **Respecting Democratic Processes**

In addition to ensuring that school improvement efforts have a strong theoretical framework from which to draw ideas, a new plan for school reform would also need to be the subject of public dialogue that respected the integrity of democratic processes. The Manitoba government claimed that it had a mandate because the majority of voters had supported the Conservative Party's bid for power and therefore, the government had the democratic authority for making changes to schools. However, school reform was not made an election issue and democracy is based on more than the rule of the majority. As Guttman (1987) has noted, democracy is not a political process that enables the wishes of majorities to make decisions about social and economic policy. Both democracy and democratic education are political ideals which seek to enable democratic societies open dialogue, engage critical inquiry and increase political access.

Elected government officials do not have the right to shut down the debate about the purpose of schools or shut people out of the process of deliberating the value of school reform. By restricting the consulting process on the Western Protocol Framework for Language Arts, the Manitoba government repressed the opportunity to think critically about school reform and develop a plan that was more representative of our common needs. I can only speculate about the reasons why the Manitoba government did not respect democratic processes. However, I believe that there is sufficient evidence, some of which I have presented in this thesis, to suggest that corporations and the ruling elites are influencing the direction of school reform in unprecedented ways. There is a very real danger that public schooling is becoming a commodity of the market place that is controlled by private rather than public interest. This represents a serious threat to democratic society because private interest is at odds with a common good.

### **Creating the Conditions for Democratic Dialogue**

The Manitoba government demonstrated a lack of commitment to the common good by causing the educational community to become divided and fragmented. Media attacks on the professionalism of teachers, the condemning tone of the Blue Book and unsubstantiated claims about teachers and schools failing students and society led to a social climate that fractured the school community. School reform such as standards testing, the publication of test results, schools of choice and Advisory Councils for School

Leadership reinforced the idea of citizens as public watchdogs and, in effect, fostered suspicion and distrust among all of the educational partners. Moreover, the Blue Book's descriptions of the various roles of students, parents, teachers and schools enabled blame to be directed toward each of these educational partners should student achievement not improve. Each of these actions tainted public dialogue about school reform and, along with the government's misuse of democratic processes, the Manitoba government restricted the opportunity for citizens to democratically express their disagreement and reach consensus about what divided them on education issues.

Human nature implies a degree of freedom and creativity that is reflected in a citizen's right to challenge existing social structures and the ideology of those in power (Chomsky, 2000). We cannot eliminate antagonism, nor hide behind a universal, rational consensus that we claim to be morally neutral because this leads to exclusion and violence (Mouffe, 1996). Thus, in our work to create an alternative to the Blue Book, a conscious effort must be made not to suppress those ideas that differed from the ones that we try to implement. We must keep an open mind and work to understand the perspectives of others. Young (1996) and Greene (1988) propose that difference within democratic dialogue be used as a point of transformation where members of a polity communicate their various positions and, in the process, transform each other's preferences. Disagreements about the purpose of schooling must be discussed and citizens must work to transcend what divides them.

Reaching a consensus about conflicting views of school reform, however, would require an understanding of how this can be accomplished. Young's (1996) model of communicative democracy is one that acknowledges the role of disagreement in democratic dialogue and attends to social difference and, I believe, describes a fair process for the reconciliation of disagreement. Young states that:

Different social positions encounter one another with the awareness of their difference. This does not mean that we believe that we have no similarities; difference is not total otherness. But it means that each position is aware that it does not comprehend the perspective of the others differently located, in the sense that it cannot be assimilated into one's own. (p.127)

Difference nurtures the building of a democratic society that is more equitable and just and enriches the collective experience. In Young's model of communicative democracy, citizens learn to speak across differences of culture, social position and need. These differences are preserved in the process. With Young, I suggest that we "understand differences of culture, social perspective, or particularist commitment

as resources to draw on for reaching understanding in democratic discussion rather than as divisions that must be overcome" (p.120 ). Public concerns need to move beyond the recognition of difference to an understanding of difference that acknowledges that we are citizens in the world together (Elshtain, 1993).

Having said this, I am also aware that it is impossible to completely eliminate the various ways in which power enters into democratic dialogue. Instead, we need to establish institutions and processes that set limits on how this power is exercised. As Gutmann (1987) states:

There is no morally acceptable way to achieve social agreement on a moral ideal of education, at least in our lifetime. We can do better instead to find the fairest ways for reconciling our disagreements, and for enriching our collective life by democratically debating them. (p.12)

The process of opening public spaces for the inclusion of more people in our democratic dialogue about a common good ultimately results in richer, fuller thinking about our life together in a democratic society and therefore we need to make conscious collective efforts to limit the effects of social power and to expand participation.

Creating the conditions for democratic dialogue would also require that students, teachers and parents be given meaningful roles in school reform so that the authority for educational decision-making is inclusive (Gutmann, 1987). The Blue Book's descriptions of the roles of various educational partners in the Blue Book revealed that the government misread the value of the contributions that each of these educational partners can make to improving schools and to creating a more democratic society.

I do not intend to place students in a position that forces them into an adult role. Unlike the Blue Book that attributed adult responsibilities to students when they were viewed as the means by which the economy would be sustained, I believe that the role of schools is to protect childhood by not thrusting students into roles for which they are not yet ready. That being said, I believe that students can contribute to our thinking about school improvement. The Manitoba government did not give consideration to the possibility that students may have something significant to say about school reform; therefore, students did not have a role in its development.

The same could also be said for the Manitoba government's treatment of the role of teachers. The Blue Book suggested that teachers needed to be told what and how to teach. This loss of teacher autonomy and the attacks by the government in the media undermined the professionalism of teachers and closed the spaces for democratic dialogue. An alternative plan for school reform would find ways to collaborate more

effectively with teachers on school reform and make room for their legitimate, uncoerced claims about schools to be voiced. Given that teachers are charged with the responsibility of caring for students, this is the least that can be done to meaningfully involve teachers in school reform.

Lastly, with respect to parents, the Blue Book led its readers to believe that parents, as stakeholders, were only interested in the pursuit of private interest. Schools of choice and Advisory Councils for School Leadership placed some parents in the position of self-serving adversaries of the school. This was unfair to both parents and schools. Parents are also concerned about the interests of all children and we need to find ways to bring parents into the discussion about schools that reflect their interest in a common good.

Our ability to build a collective life or work toward a common good as a society is based upon a reordering of our priorities. Market notions of individualism and the primacy of private interest over our common needs are two ideas that weaken efforts to determine a common good. Like Saul (1995), I believe that we need to reassert what he calls "real individualism" or our responsibility to act as a citizen, as we re-discover notions of disinterest and participation. In other words, as Elshtain (1993) has observed:

The best principles of action in public are not reducible to a merely private matter. In public we learn to work with people with whom we disagree sharply and with whom we would not care to live in a situation of intimacy. But we can be citizens in together, we can come to know a good in common we cannot know alone. (p.59)

Engaging in public dialogue that is respectful of democratic processes would create a new vision of school reform for Manitoba and the people involved. This would be accomplished through mutually agreed ideas of how to proceed, recognition of our dependence on disagreement and social difference to enrich our perspectives. We would value the contributions of all educational partners. In this way, we would develop an understanding of what we hold in common about the purpose of public schooling and how those purposes can best be met. I understand that this vision is idealistic, however, this should not deter us from attempting to enact such a model of democratic discussion about the common good. Currently, it is the lack of idealism about education that sets limits on our thinking about the purpose of schools.

#### **Starting With a Moral Purpose**

An alternative to the Blue Book would also attend to notions of humanity and morality. The Blue Book prescribed a narrow, vocational purpose for schools and consequently, circumscribed what it means to be human. Limited by its vision of economic utility, the Blue Book was an inadequate plan for school

reform because it failed to consider the varied needs of individuals and society. "Any education that is mainly *about* economic utility is far too limited to be useful, and, in any case, so diminishes the world that it mocks one's humanity"(Postman, p.31). This view is supported by Robertson (1998) who claims that "the new purpose of education -- producing and measuring the skills to live in utility -- is the antithesis of education for personal development and participation in democratic life" (p.34). Put a different way, as (McMannon, 1997 ) has said, "education... allows a person to perceive meaning in musical tones, in visual stimuli, and in the spoken and written word. In short, education enables one to participate more fully in the human conversation of which all of these are elements" (p.5). The Blue Book was decidedly not grounded in a moral purpose because of its emphasis on an economic imperative, and therein lies the problem for educators who believe that the purpose of education is about the renewal of democratic society.

What is our moral purpose? Postman (1995) argues that public schools are not about serving the public, but about creating a public. He asks: "What kind of public does public schooling create? A conglomerate of self-indulgent consumers? Angry, soulless, directionless masses? Indifferent, confused citizens? Or a public imbued with confidence, a sense of purpose, a respect for learning and tolerance?" (p.18). This question of the kind of public we want our public schools to create is critical to our valuing of democratic life and a belief in a common good, and any new ideas for school reform would be responses to this question.

Believing in a common good calls for school reforms that would enable students to develop shared meanings about the world. Through our constant striving to connect students to school, we open the spaces that were formerly closed because of institutional structures and policies and a lack of caring. Maxine Greene (1988) has suggested that education for a democracy involves enabling students to reflect as individuals and collectively about their actions so that students can develop shared meanings about the world in which they live. It is a manner by which students come to know themselves and others. Greene says:

It is through and by means of education that [individuals] may become empowered to think about what they are doing, to become mindful, to share meanings, to conceptualize, to make varied sense of their lived worlds It is through education that preferences may be released, languages learned, intelligences developed, perspectives opened, possibilities disclosed. (p.12)

Thus, it is through a broad-based, humanist approach to education that we enable students to develop these shared meanings.

The effectiveness of social action and the quality of what we create together are founded on our ability to communicate across our differences. Therefore, education for a democracy is also concerned with giving students the tools to equip them to understand multiple perspectives, work through disagreements and reach consensus about the common good. Darling-Hammond (1997) contends that "democratic life requires access to forms of knowledge that enable creative life and thought as well as access to a social dialogue that enables democratic communication and participation" (p.44).

In addition, as Postman (1995) suggests, public schooling is largely about freedom. He explores how we define the limits of freedom and what it means to be a citizen in a democracy? Although Postman refers to the great American experiment of living in a democracy in the following quote, his aims are equally valid for the great Canadian experiment of building a democratic society. He says the purpose of schooling is:

to provide our youth with the knowledge and will to participate in the great experiment; to teach them how to argue, and to help them discover what questions are worth arguing about; and, of course, to make sure that they know what happens when arguments cease. (p.74)

Postman argues convincingly that the purpose of schools is to enable students to sustain the arguments that renew society and prevent the violence that occurs when governments reduce our access to public spaces. Greene (1988) addresses this same idea more profoundly. She observes that in addition to giving students the skills to fulfil their roles as citizens, we also need to change how school systems, and in particular, market reforms for schools, exclude marginalized and minority students from the kind of education that is needed for their participation in democratic life. Greene says:

Given the dangers of small-mindedness and privatism, however, I do not think it sufficient to develop even the most variegated, most critical, most imaginative, most "liberal" approach to the education of the young. If we are seriously interested in education for freedom as well as for the opening of cognitive perspectives, it is also important to find a way of developing a praxis of educational consequence that opens the spaces necessary for the remaking of a democratic community. (p.126)

By upholding market reforms for schools, as the Blue Book does, we communicate to minority students and to those who are marginalized the message that they are superfluous and unwanted. School reformers that aim to renew democratic life recognize this as a tragic loss for our ability to work together to initiate

social actions that are aimed at making our world a more caring, just and equitable place. We need to believe in "the existence of a shared narrative and the capacity of shared narratives to provided an inspired reason for schooling" (Postman, 1995, p.18). This is our moral purpose in renewing education for democratic life.

### **Attending to Contradictory Aims of Schooling**

The Blue Book was also problematic from a school reform perspective because it was full of contradictions. The reader will recall my frustrations as a teacher with the emphasis that was placed on progressive instructional strategies that were undermined by a predetermined, uniform set of standards. Also, as a school administrator, I was instructed by the Blue Book to provide a supportive learning environment for students, and yet the government reduced the flexibility with which teachers could respond to the needs of students. Egan (1997) explains that contradictions such as these are the result of an incompatibility of educational aims. Historically, schools have served three purposes. The first purpose to which schools traditionally attended was the goal of socialization, the second was cultivation of the intellect and the third was the individual development of the child. Each of these purposes can be traced back to the works of Durkheim, Plato and Rousseau respectively. Egan contends that each of these three distinctive aims for the purpose of schools is incompatible with the other two and claims that these contradictions prevent school reformers from accomplishing meaningful school improvement.

In a later work, Egan (2000) gives an example of how two conflicting educational aims surface in the struggle of the modern school, and I believe this further underscores the importance of needing to find a way to reconcile these contradictions. He notes that:

If one of our aims for an educational institution is the pursuit of academic knowledge, we will interfere with that if we then impose a social sorting role on the institution, and use academically inappropriate testing to do that social sorting. Also the social sorting role would be confused because academic prowess; which we are only marginally testing for any way; is hardly the most important determiner of social value. That is, this kind of undermining of separate and conflicting aims is precisely what we get if we try to make the school an institution that tries both to socialize and implement the academic ideal at the same time. The result is that neither is adequately or sensibly achieved. (p.33)

Over time, it has not been uncommon for one educational aim to dominate school reform. In the case of current market reform agendas schools are preparing students for their role as workers, but alternative agendas such as personal growth and preparation for life in a democracy have been neglected.



It has been observed that alternatives to the market agenda for schools have disappeared from educational policy (Osborne, 1999) and others argue that these agendas have not so much disappeared as they have been realigned with an economic imperative (Jofre and Henley, 2000). While the appropriation and disappearance of competing purposes for schools may resolve the contradictory aims of public schools that Egan has described, such a move toward narrowing the purpose of schools is indefensible in democratic terms. Schools are concerned with educating the whole person. Thus, any plan for school reform would need to ensure that the multiple aims of schooling are addressed.

It will be essential to find a way to contend with the various conflicting aims of education. Egan (1997) proposes that the key to working through the contradictory aims of schools can be found in re-examining the work of Herbert Spencer (1820 - 1903) and his cultural recapitulation theory of education and Vygotsky's idea that we make sense of the world through the use of "mediating intellectual tools" (p.29). Recapitulation theories of education offer a way of structuring curriculum that corresponds with the way that knowledge has logically been developed or the way that we have acquired the various tools for understanding over the history of human development. As Egan (1997) suggests:

The mind is not an isolable thing like the brain inside its skull; it extends into and is constituted of its sociocultural surroundings, and its kinds of understanding are products of the intellectual tools forged and used in those surroundings. (p.30)

For Egan, in order to become educated, we should teach students how to use the tools that human beings have acquired during the major epochs of cultural history. Egan recommends that the stages of schooling incorporate myth making and the tradition of passing on our cultural heritage, romanticism and the nurturing of individual imagination and finally, philosophy and the building of connections between the self and the external world.

Integral to Egan's (2000) research into the application of recapitulation theory to education was the notion that schools should be designed primarily to produce citizens and not scholars. His theory provides a good starting point for dialogue about the purpose of schools. Egan contends that while the focus on the development of language and literacy in human intellectual culture has benefited society, because we have been able to access the knowledge and experience representative of the history of the human experience, society is still debating what knowledge is most worth knowing. He states that the problem is not so much being able to answer this question, but that we don't know how to go about reaching an agreed upon answer

(p.31). Thus, the tools that students most need to learn are those that will be needed for democratic dialogue about competing visions of a common good.

### **Attending to the Language that Describes Our Purposes**

The work of rejoining education and democracy in an alternative plan for school reform also depends on paying attention to the language and the institutional structures of school reform. School reform that is concerned with the revitalization of democratic society does not implement school improvement strategies that use the language of the factory to describe the processes of schooling or the language of business to describe the aims of school reform. These are not appropriate metaphors to use to describe students or the process of schooling. As I have illustrated, this kind of language commodifies students and leads to exclusion. Educators concerned with renewing democracy implement school reform measures that create the potential for future democratic dialogue. Students should be free to participate in social progress and one of the ways that we achieve this is through social equality. The economic unit, as applied to schools, excludes some people from participation in democratic dialogue and thereby narrows the public space required for democratic work.

Furthermore, educators need to recognize that language is not neutral (Jofre and Henley, 2000). Through a critical reading of education policy, we can identify the values and beliefs that underpin school reform and make decisions about whether the definition of these concepts fit with our own moral view of the world. The Blue Book did not make notions of citizenship, life long learning or diversity explicit. A citizen's role was defined as sustaining the provincial and national economy; thus, we can speculate that the Manitoba government's definition of citizenship supported a market imperative for schools. However, for both lifelong learning and diversity, the explanations in the Blue Book were so weak that they were virtually invisible. For educators who contend that schooling should be about preparing students for their role in a democratic society, market agendas for schools give cause for concern.

As an example, I will examine more closely the notion of citizenship as this will connect with what follows in my discussion of citizenship education. Citizenship, defined within a market context, will not strengthen and renew democratic society. Following a market imperative, citizenship education in schools is about teaching students that their role is to help sustain the economy. In such a definition of schooling, students are to value individual achievement over what is accomplished co-operatively and at

the exclusion of others. Students compete against each other in the race for good grades and entrance into post secondary institutions, and eventually, these young people will compete for high paying jobs and the accumulation of material possessions. Self-interest and consumerism are lauded over a common good, and notions of social stratification and entitlement are reinforced. A good citizen is one who acts in accordance with the above expectations and values and thereby makes his or her contribution to the wealth of the province and the country.

Market values such as those mentioned above undermine a moral conception of schooling. A moral notion of schooling for a democracy is viewed as a pre-political activity. It is accepted that students are not yet ready for adult responsibilities. As teachers and citizens, it is our role to protect childhood from the intrusion of those who would have students take on adult roles. From a moral perspective we strive to make schools safe, caring, places that respect the uniqueness of each child. Like Carr (1991), I believe that citizenship in a moral democracy is about self-fulfillment, self-determination and equality – values that enable students to freely and equally work together to define a common good.

Therefore, if we are truly concerned with renewing democratic virtues then we need to reassert the role of a morally defined notion of citizenship and democracy and make these terms explicit. With language, we construct our view of the world and communicate to others what we believe is important. As Postman (1995) has observed, "...world making through language is a narrative of power, durability and inspiration. It is the story of how we make the world known to ourselves and how we make ourselves known to the world" (p.175).

#### **Clarifying Differences Between System and Human Accountability**

School reform, through the vehicle of citizenship education, would distinguish between the accountability that is required by systems and that which is required by human beings (Cuban, 1988). Market reformers of the school system claim that their school improvement measures will ensure system accountability and efficiency. However, my experience has shown that the need for increased control over achievement outcomes and concern with financial bottom lines contributed to school experiences that were non-educational and inhumane.

Standards testing results in arbitrary judgements that have little significance for students beyond having passed into the next grade or being able to access a more advanced level of study. As such,

standards testing performs a sorting function that is presumed to be both objective and efficient, but which is neither. The objectivity of standards testing is undermined by the fact that standards tests favour students who are white and middle class. Standards tests are a form of structural discrimination that strengthens notions of entitlement and social stratification. Moreover, for the educators who must work through the effects of standards testing on students, parents and teachers, the process is fraught with emotion rather than being efficient. For those students who fail a standards test or who are recommended for retention because of an inability to meet provincial standards, the situation is even less efficient.

While it may be accountable and efficient by some measures to promote the retention of students, what of the costs that are transferred to students? Chomsky (2000) asserts that concepts like efficiency are not objective notions; they are ideological constructs. Consequently, Chomsky claims that there are measures of efficiency by which it is efficient to increase costs. Is the measure of efficiency in retaining students through outcome based schooling the ability for society to limit access to post secondary institutions and high paying positions of employment and thereby secure positions for the elites? Human beings, as a group, do not need more measurement of achievement -- systems do. Students are mystical and unique -- complete and good just as they are. They should not have to compete on a standards test to demonstrate that they are worthy of the best education that we can provide. Students should also not be used by government to demonstrate to the public that their teachers are, or are not, teaching to prescribed standards of achievement.

In the Blue Book, the Manitoba government declared that for reasons of system accountability it would be intolerant of schools that were deemed to be failing. Both the language that was used to describe proposed government actions and the school reforms that were introduced to subject schools to closer scrutiny by the public ostensibly communicated a lack of trust and support in and for public schools. Both students and teachers were afraid to make mistakes. It was for this reason that they exhibited signs of stress during the administration of standards tests. This was also the reason why teachers worried about impending law suits due to an inability to demonstrate that students had met provincial standards. As human beings, we are imperfect. We make mistakes; however, within our mistakes are opportunities for learning. Instead of creating a climate where people are afraid to err, school reformers should be taking actions that build trust and support for students and teachers and make room for the possibility of error in

judgement or action. Using this approach, as opposed to the uncaring actions that were used by the Manitoba government to implement the Blue Book, would allow for people to learn from their mistakes. There are other ways to promote quality in education and one of those ways is to set the conditions for continuous dialogue about schools and schooling.

In summary, an alternative vision to the Blue Book that sought to rejoin education and democracy would use the following guidelines as a framework for the development and implementation of school reform:

- conduct a thorough investigation of related educational research literature
- demonstrate respect for democratic processes
- be open to the possibility of other perspectives transforming the original plan
- outline clearly the agreed procedures for reaching shared understandings
- begin with a moral purpose
- attend to contradictory aims of schooling
- be explicit about the concepts that are used to define the purposes of schooling
- differentiate between system and human accountability

Describing education for a democracy is not something that can be laid out in a blueprint like the Manitoba government sought to do with the Blue Book. As Elshain (1993) reminds us:

Democracy ... is not simply a set of procedures, a constitution, but an ethos, a spirit, a way of responding, a way of conducting oneself every day. Not being simple, democracy does not afford us a straightforward answer to the question of what education is, and for, democracy might be (p. 81).

Thus, the reader must keep in mind that this is not a map for school improvement, but a description of a possible framework for the development and implementation of school reform that is the product of democratic dialogue and a collective vision for the purpose of schools.

### **5.1 The Alternative: Education for a Democracy**

In examining a notion of citizenship education, I will consider an alternative to the market reform agenda for teaching and learning. As already noted, the Blue Book's ideas of citizenship did not support moral democratic purposes; thus, we need to explore notions of citizenship education that are more compatible with democratic aims. Rejoining the purpose of schools with renewing democratic society

would require a school reform plan that supports the democratic ideals of developing shared meanings, communicating across differences, transformation, freedom and social action.

Although the following model for citizenship education to which I subscribe is primarily based on the work of Ken Osborne (1999), I support and extend his ideas with the help of other writers. A citizenship education curricula, as defined by Osborne and the other writers I cited here, is just one of the many possible paths that lead to the renewal of democratic society. There is no blue print for this journey to renew democracy through public schooling. Instead, this is a starting point for future dialogue about curricular reform that moves beyond the narrow vision of curricula that was presented in the Blue Book. It is important that these ideas are voiced so that in the future we can collectively deliberate on their usefulness in achieving a common understanding of the aims of public schooling.

Education for citizenship in a democracy teaches students how to reach agreements about what is worth knowing and contemplate other urgent human questions that exist within this rapidly changing global society. Osborne shares my desire for an educational agenda that reasserts a moral notion of citizenship. Osborne describes citizenship as raising questions of identity, loyalty, tradition, heritage and community and he argues that these notions run counter to corporate forces that are interested in re-shaping the global marketplace. His concerns are more than rhetorical and have implications for how we think about government, health care, social services, cultural policies, taxation policy and economic development. Osborne contends that citizenship education, which once played an important and vital role in public schooling in Canada, needs to regain its rightful place in educational policy as we struggle as citizens to renew our democratic vision of Canada. He maintains that dialogue and discussion are the essence of democracy and that Canada's historical record is better than most in this regard. If, then, we are serious about educating citizens, we must prepare students to engage in this dialogue.

Osborne's view of citizenship education is one that serves the purpose of orienting students to an understanding of Canadian values and identity, but it is also political in nature in that it teaches students to prepare for their participation in opening public spaces for debating competing conceptions of Canadian identity. Osborne states that citizenship education has the dual purpose of teaching both conformity and critical thinking. Thus, Osborne's notion of citizenship education should satisfy critics of citizenship education on both the right and the left. While citizenship education is conservative because of its tendency

to preserve social order, it also leaves room for the possibility of challenging existing social norms. This notion is supported by Gutmann's (1987) criteria for a democracy that included respecting the principle of non-repression. She claims that it is a teacher's professional responsibility to "uphold the principle of non-repression by cultivating the capacity for democratic deliberation" (p.76); thus, understanding and teaching citizenship education.

### **A Set of Concepts for Understanding Citizenship**

Citizenship education would not be defined as a predetermined set of standards that all students would be expected to learn and then demonstrate their mastery of these concepts on a standards test. There are no absolute truths but rather a variety of meanings that we attach to certain concepts, all of which are encoded in the signs and symbols of language. Postman (1995) argues that we need to confront the fundamental uncertainty of human knowledge that is part of our human condition. With both humour and seriousness, he asks us to envision the purpose of school as a "cure for the itch for absolute knowledge" (Postman, p.70).

However, rejecting the notion of a uniform set of standards which apply to all students regardless of gender, ethnicity, linguistic proficiency and social class does not imply that a curriculum for citizenship education will be without academic rigour. It simply means that we recognize the role that difference plays in the setting of educational standards. Postman (1995) states:

Diversity does not mean the disintegration of standards, is not an argument against standards, does not lead to a chaotic, irresponsible relativism. It is an argument for the growth and malleability of standards, a growth that takes place across time and space and that is given form by differences of gender, religion, and all the other categories of humanity. (p.80)

Like Postman, I believe that uniformity destroys creativity and vitality. An alternative reform agenda to the Blue Book would find ways to include diversity so that we enrich our understanding of the world by the contributions that diversity makes to education.

Osborne further develops his concept by describing seven elements that he believes should guide the development of curricula for citizenship education. Each of these elements of citizenship education is contestable and open for debate. They include:

- a sense of identity
- an awareness of one's rights and respect for the rights of others
- the fulfillment of duties

- a critical acceptance of social values
- political literacy
- a broad general knowledge and command of the basic academic skills
- the capacity to reflect on the implications of all these components and to act appropriately

He then provides examples of how each of the above elements of citizenship education can be contested, and reasserting the importance of reflecting critically on what citizenship education would entail, Osborne then stresses the importance of a broad based humanist education. He argues for the teaching of history, social studies, literature and other courses as the vehicle through which notions of citizenship are taught. He also suggests a list of concepts around which he believes citizenship education could be organized. Osborne refers to these concepts as the "twelve C's". His list includes: Canadian; cosmopolitan; communication; coherence or content; critical; creativity; curiosity; civilization; community; concern; character; and competence. These concepts, like the elements of a citizenship education that Osborne described above, would also be introduced to students as contested ideas. Both time and cultural context influence our understanding of these concepts and students benefit from having an understanding of the various ways we think about these terms.

In summary, I believe that the notions of curricula that are recommended in this chapter for the implementation of an alternative to the Blue Book attend to the idea of a moral purpose for schools that seeks to prepare students for their role as future democratic citizens. Students need to have both a strong sense of identity as Canadians, but they will also need to think critically about our society so that they can participate in making their world a better place. Citizenship preparation will help students to think critically and understand that there are no universal truths. The language that we use defines our reality and, as such, our understanding of the world will be subject to continual re-evaluation and redefinition. Thus, there is no place for a uniformly defined set of curricular standards in citizenship education that demonstrate a disregard for the role of difference in developing a shared sense of what it means to be a Canadian citizen living in a democracy. Having said this I will turn my attention to what instruction and leadership assessment would look like if the goal was to prepare students for their role in a democracy.



### **Notions of Instruction and Leadership**

Citizenship education requires an examination of the kinds of teaching strategies that best prepare students for their roles as future citizens. Osborne (1999) advocates for instructional methods that all too often have been reserved for gifted students -- the kind of teaching that is inquiry-based and participatory. However, he also states that teachers must rely on more than just process. Gutmann (1987) would agree. She observes that democratic schools require both participatory and disciplinary approaches and that teachers should seek to instil both participatory and disciplinary virtues (p.90-91). Osborne and Gutmann (1987) strike a balance between valuing process and realizing that students are not yet ready for participation in fully democratic classrooms and schools. As Gutmann (1987) says, we have to ask ourselves how much democracy within schools is democratically desirable (p.90 – 91).

The preparation of students for their role as citizens should endeavour to give students the tools to explore the concepts that define both the past and the present. Postman (1995) suggests that teachers teach students about the various ways that we use definitions, metaphors and questions as entry points for deepening and expanding our understanding of reality. For example, in the case of definitions, Postman encourages teachers to free students' minds from the "tyranny of definitions" (p.183) by exposing the fact that there are alternative ways in which to define important concepts. Definitions, he claims, are instruments designed to achieve certain purposes and that the important question in teaching is not which definition is the correct one, but what purpose the definition serves and who created the definition. Metaphors, on the other hand, shape perception and Postman believed that a student cannot understand a subject without some understanding of the metaphors that are its foundation (p.174). Metaphors control how we perceive the world and make sense of it. As with definitions, by making metaphors explicit, we demonstrate for students the relationship between language and reality.

Finally, both Postman (1995) and Osborne consider the role of questions in instructional strategies that prepare students for their work as future citizens who will be able to think reflectively and critically about the world around them. Osborne suggests using questions that are important to Canadian identity and society in the teaching of concepts related to citizenship. Among the questions that Osborne suggests are: "What kind of country are we and do we want to be? Is government too big or too small? What should be the balance of the private and the public sector? What level of taxation is desirable? What should we do

about medicare and the social services more generally? What should be done to correct the historical injustices inflicted upon the First Nations?" (p.8). Osborne says these questions and others confront Canadian citizens and that the way we come to understandings and resolutions defines Canada as a country. It is through these questions that students learn how to take an active role as citizens and learn to define themselves as Canadians.

Thus, a teacher helps students to develop the tools they need for making sense of the world through the use of such things as definitions, metaphors and questions in the manner that has been described above. It is in this way that we work to allay the kinds of concerns expressed by Fenstermacher (1997). He believes that schools do not sufficiently prepare students for their future roles as citizens. He argues that schools need to be more conscientious about teaching students how to reach common understandings and find resolutions to those things that frustrate, anger, sadden and perplex us. In Fenstermacher's view we do not yet have the necessary skills for sustaining a culture.

Lastly, in the quest for ways to enable students to create shared meanings, teachers need to ensure that teaching and learning is guided by an ethic of care. Noddings' (1992) work is fundamental to understanding this notion of care. She believes that "classrooms should be places in which students and teachers live together and grow...produce people who would live non-violently with each other, sensitively and in harmony with the natural environment, reflectively and serenely with themselves..." (p.12). With Noddings, I share a concern that teachers and students are drifting further apart.

In Chapter four, I discussed Noddings' belief that market reforms do not enable teachers and students to complete caring relations because as much as teachers may care for their students, if students do not believe that teachers care for them, the caring relationship is incomplete. Outcome based schooling and the publication of standards test results force students and teachers into demonstrating academic achievement for reasons of system accountability and from my experience, this results in a fragmentation in the teaching and learning process. The ends justify the means. For example, some teachers resorted to poor pedagogical practices just to ensure that they had taught all of the prescribed standards. Students correctly observed that whether they learned anything was unimportant as long as the provincial outcomes were covered. Moreover, teachers were unable to show students that they cared for them as individuals with unique talents, needs and interests because of the lack of flexibility that the government gave to teachers to

diversify instructional programs. Outcome-based schooling fosters the development of antagonistic relationships between teachers and students, making the completion of caring relationships unlikely. Consequently, the result of outcome-based schooling is a reduction in the quality of learning that occurs.

An alternative plan to the Blue Book for school reform would acknowledge that, in most cases, "relation precedes any engagement with subject matter" (Noddings, 1992, p. 36). Thus, citizenship education would seek to preserve the caring relations between teachers and students. Efforts would be made to strengthen student and school connections and care would be taken not to betray the trust that students place in their teachers to be more concerned with meeting student needs over system ones. At the same time, teachers would need to know when to push a little and when to pull back (Noddings, 1992).

A vision of an alternative plan to the Blue Book for school reform that supports education for a democracy would require some consideration for the role that educational leaders would have in ensuring that democratic aims were met. Educational leaders would first be concerned with ensuring that schools meet their primary obligation of attending to the growth and development of students as caring, responsible citizens who are able to live and work together in a pluralist democracy and care for their natural environment. Accordingly, educational leaders would seek to protect students from societal influences that threaten to weaken role of schools as a pre-political activity. In implementing this model of citizenship education, school leaders would be concerned with preparing students to open public spaces for democratic dialogue and this would entail school administrators engaging in political actions that were aimed at reducing the exclusion and marginalization of students. Efforts would also be made to continually broaden the discussion about the purpose of schools and build caring relations between teachers and students. Educational leaders would call on government officials to act responsibly and ensure that any new educational policy was genuinely about improving student learning.

The kinds of instructional methods, caring relations and leadership style that I advocate for here are not compatible with a form of outcome-based schooling that prescribes a uniform set of standards in knowledge that is predetermined by a government. The technical and behaviourist approaches of market-driven school reform will not sufficiently prepare students for the work that lies ahead in the renewal of democratic society because market reformers have defined the problem of school improvement incorrectly. The problem is metaphysical and not technical (Postman, 1995). Thus, even though Manitoba school

reform resulted in the production of such helpful, instructional resources such as Success for All Learners (1997), the fact that the purpose of this guide was to improve how teachers taught the prescribed curriculum standards limited the potential of this school reform action. It was all about the how and nothing about the why of teaching and learning. As Postman (1995) has said, "there was a time when educators became famous for inventing a reason for learning; now they become famous for inventing a method (p.26). Thus, the instructional methods or means that are suggested for teaching citizenship are strongly connected to their ends – or the renewal of democratic society. By giving students the tools they need to think about their world and communicate with others across difference in caring and responsible ways, we enable them to fulfil their future role as citizens in a democracy.

### **Reflection and Self-Understanding**

An alternative to the Blue Book for school reform would advocate a model of assessment that attended to human notions of accountability -- reflection and self-understanding rather than finding arbitrary ways to measure student learning and using assessment as means of coercing student compliance in the demonstration of student achievement on standards tests.

On an education level, standards testing and the various accountability measures that the Blue Book invoked to force teachers to stick to the prescribed curricula promoted academic mediocrity. Rather than using instructional time to develop deep, rich understandings of concepts that students could use to make sense of their world, teachers were compelled to teach to the test and use textbooks that were closely aligned with what would be tested. The space within which teachers were able to mediate the effects of school reform was made infinitely smaller with standards testing and more progressive instructional methods were replaced by traditional pedagogical practices that reduced the opportunity for students to think critically and reflectively. Thus, standards testing diminished the capacity of schools to prepare students for their role in a democracy because teachers were preoccupied with attending to system notions of accountability.

On a human level, standards testing forced students to compete against one another, as the Manitoba government needed student achievement results to advance their economic objectives for schools. This was both unethical and inhumane. The treatment of students as commodities leads to the exacerbation of entitlement and to some students being superfluous to the educational goals of schooling.

One of the potential consequences for performing poorly on a standards test, strongly suggested by the Manitoba government, was the retention of students. School reform that promotes retention ostensibly communicates to students that their teachers are cold, uncaring and punitive people who care more for attending to system needs than they do for students. Typically, the students who are most likely to be involved in discussions about retention are those students who are marginalized and belong to a minority group because the students whose parents have more economic and social means will often use their resources to ensure that their child is not retained.

Measurement has more to do with how students demonstrate their achievement rather than their learning. As Postman (1995) explains:

The people I know sometimes do smart things (as far as I can judge) and sometimes do dumb things—depending on what circumstances they are in, how much they know about a situation, and how interested they are. Smartness, so it seems to me, is a specific performance, done in particular set of circumstances. It is not something you are or have in measurable quantities. (p.177)

The action of setting uniformly held and universally applied provincial standards makes assumptions about the ability to know absolute truths, that there are "right" answers to the questions that we pose to our students and that adults alone are the bearers of this knowledge. Decisions about the retention of students and other more subtle means of stratifying and excluding students from schools, such as homogeneous class groupings, are based on a presumption that as educators we have the corner on truth and that in our assessments of student work we have never erred. I don't believe this is the case. Thus, an agenda for citizenship education would not support either outcome based schooling or retention.

With Cuban (1988), I propose that the notion of accountability that will guide the implementation of citizenship education will be more concerned with giving an account of what students and teachers have done through the sharing of stories for the purpose of reflection and self understanding. We would invite people into the debate about what we should be accomplishing in school and together decisions will be made that meet our mutual needs. Students would be encouraged to think reflectively about their learning activities and on the progress that they have made and provide evidence of this learning through examples of their work and through conversations that we have with students about their work. Recognition would also be given to the fact that learning is not linear and that it is highly unusual for learning to be consistent. Lastly, citizenship education will acknowledge that the means and ends of education are inextricably bound

(Egan, 1997). We cannot disconnect the methods that we use to assess student work from what we hope to accomplish in attending to democratic aims.

## 5.2 Concluding Comments

In conclusion, the Blue Book was not about preparing students for democratic life. It was a plan for school reform that had a limited vision of what it means to be human and for the purpose of schools. Bound to the purpose of economic utility, the Blue Book undermined democratic purposes for schools though its emphasis on a narrow definition of schooling that focused on economic utility through the acquisition of measurable skills and knowledge. Education, as vocational training, was intended to respond to the anticipated, yet unpredictable market demands of the twenty first century and as such, the Blue Book gave priority to the teaching of traditional basics and technology. Undaunted by the uncertainty of the needs of the global market, the Blue Book threatened students, teachers and schools with accountability measures and coerced compliance to the teaching of provincial standards. This led some teachers to resort to poor pedagogical practices that lauded achievement over learning, as the ends in Manitoba school reform were more important than the means. Critical thinking, reflection, creativity and the flexibility to meet the needs and interests of students were compromised by the Blue Book as it threatened the foundations of education for a democracy by fostering passivity and conformity.

By stressing the importance of uniformly held and universally applied academic standards and reducing the flexibility with which teachers would adapt and modify instruction, the Manitoba government inadvertently communicated to students who were unable to meet provincial expectations for achievement that they were superfluous to the goals of public schooling. For students who struggle in school, the implications of the Blue Book were compounded by the government's reduction in school funding as their access to programs, school counsellors and resource teachers was limited by the absence of adequate funding. However, the Blue Book claimed that school success could be attributed to differing student abilities and hard work and that all students regardless of social difference would be expected to compete within an outcome based schooling context. The Blue Book disregarded the fact that the playing field was not level and supported the practice of retention thereby reinforcing the ideas of privilege and entitlement. School reform that strengthens differentiated schooling betrays the trust that students place in their

teachers. As the connections between differentiated schooling and social stratification are made explicit, this betrayal of trust is profound.

Lastly, both the implementation process and the nature of school reform did not support democratic aims. The Manitoba government made claims that could not be supported about the use of democratic processes. The Blue Book was introduced, in part, because the government maintained that it had a mandate for school change. As I have shown, a mandate does not give governments the democratic authority to implement school change. Also, from my experience with the consultation process that the government used to develop new curricula, I believe that the government was reluctant to consider competing purposes for schools. Rather than inviting more people into the discussion about school reform, it was my experience that the government excluded people from democratic dialogue about the Blue Book. Both the implementation process and the market values of competition and choice that are at the root of market-driven school reform caused our school community and the province to become divided and fragmented. Relationships between each of the various educational partners suffered, and this hindered efforts to improve schools.

Living in a democracy requires that governments attend to creating the conditions that are needed for democratic dialogue and to opening the spaces needed for expanded participation in that dialogue. A market imperative for schools fails to give attention to either of these needs. Students are forced prematurely into an adult world as participants in the economy -- an unconscionable act that causes students to be viewed as commodities in service to the needs of the economy. Moreover, in the case of the Blue Book, Manitoba citizens were called upon by the government to support school reform and meet what the government ostensibly believed to be a citizen's obligation as guardian of the province's financial well-being. In this way, citizenship was re-defined along a market imperative. Allowing market imperatives to dictate education and health policy undermines a fundamental Canadian belief in the universality of these public entitlements because implicit to market notions of citizenship and the school reforms that serve to support these notions are economic concerns with the primacy of individualism and private interest over a sense of our common needs. Accordingly, conscious collective efforts to define a common good are undermined and the future of democratic society is threatened.

Market reforms for schools have not delivered on the promise to make the Canadian economy more competitive on a global stage. Yet many of the Blue Book's reform measures that were introduced in the 1990's are still being implemented, and this is happening in spite of mounting evidence that market reform does not improve education. While a recent change of government in Manitoba has led to standards testing being eliminated at the Grade three level and school divisions having a choice about participation in standards testing, some market reform ideas are still supported by the current government.

The Grade three standards tests in our school division have been replaced with a diagnostic test that is administered at the beginning of the school year, demonstrating a continued focus on assessment. Schools of choice continues to provide new challenges as parents are learning that their "choice" can be dependent on the available space in a school. The new government has addressed their concerns by suggesting that perhaps more space can be made available at a school that is lacking space for schools of choice applicants through fundraising. Schools of choice has also led to the recruiting of school athletes by competing schools. Moreover, the promoters of school system efficiency have amalgamated school divisions and reduced the number of school trustees. As yet, this move has not proven to be very efficient. For example, for the 2002-2003 school year all of the Fort Gary and Assiniboine South central office personnel have kept their positions so that we now have one school division and two people to fill each role.

Market reform for schools is a non-partisan idea that continues to dominate dialogue about school improvement. It is difficult for some to let go of this idea in spite of its inefficacy. However, this is beginning to change. The time has come to discard what isn't working and to resist the temptation to repeat what has failed in the past. What we need are new ideas about schooling that can renew our commitment to living in a democratic society and align schooling with the preparation of future citizens.

Although my experience of the Manitoba government's implementation of the Blue Book was such that teachers were shut down and shut out of the process of school reform, I am not discouraged. I have not relinquished the hope that future governments will act responsibly on behalf of citizens to open public spaces for political dialogue of competing purposes for schools. As Robertson (1998) has observed:

in abandoning hope that governments can make a pertinent and positive contribution to our struggle, we have abandoned our best and most powerful collective force. By refusing to see the potential of governments to act for our interests, we guarantee that they will not (p.300 – 301).



Most importantly, however, I believe that as a citizen living in a democratic society, I have a responsibility to overcome the mental and emotional inertia that sometimes plagues me and prevents me from examining the assumptions that guide social change. Democratic life obliges me to challenge those beliefs and practices that undermine democratic goals and participate in conscious collective efforts that seek to build a common good. While I believe that the influence of the market will continue to dominate dialogue of school reform in the years to come, I am hopeful that the voices of educators and others committed to the revitalization of democratic society will be heard. As Taylor (1991) reminds us the mechanisms of inevitability are strengthened by those situations that cause society to become divided and fragmented and yet the situation changes when we can develop a common consciousness

## REFERENCES

- Apple, M.N. (1999). Rhetorical reforms: Markets, standards and inequality. Current Issues in Comparative Education, 1, 2.
- Ball, S., Bowe, R., and Gewirtz, S. (1994). Market forces and parental choice. In S.Tomlinson (ed.) Educational reform and its consequences. London: IPPR/Rivers Oram Press.
- BBC News. (2002, March 13). New test targets for eleven year olds. [On-line],  
wysiwyg://4/http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/English/education/newsid\_1869000/1869559.stm
- Barlow, M., & Robertson, H.J. (1994). Class warfare: The assault on Canada's schools. Toronto: Key Porter Books Limited.
- Benhabib, S. (1990). Hannah Arendt and the redemptive power of narrative. In. Hinchman, L.P., & Hinchman, S.K. (Eds.). Hannah Arendt: Critical Essays.(pp. 111-137). New York: State University of New York Press.
- Bossetti, L. (2000). Alberta charter schools: Paradox and promises. Alberta Journal Of Educational Research, V46 – 2, 179-190.
- Bruno-Jofre, R., & Henley, D. (2000). Public schooling in English Canada: Addressing difference in the context of globalization. Canadian Ethnic Studies, VXXXII – 1, 38-53.
- Carneiro, R. (1996). Revitalizing the community spirit: A glimpse of the socializing role of the school in the next century. In Delors, J. Learning: The treasure within. Paris: (pp. 201 –204). United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.
- Carr, W. (1991). Becoming a citizen: Civic education in a democratic society. Presented at the International Symposium on Human Development and Education. University Complutense, Madrid, October, 28-30.
- Chubb, J. & Moe, T. (1990). Politics, markets, and America's schools. Washington: Brookings Institution.
- Clifton, R. (2000). Don't scrap standard tests in public schools. [On-line], Frontier Center for Public Policy.
- Clifton, R. (2001). Modified voucher would improve public education: School board would fund vouchers for deficient students.[On-line], Frontier Center for Public Policy.
- Clifton, R. (2001). School based merit pay. [On-line],Frontier Center for Public Policy.
- Cuban, L. (1988). The managerial imperative and the practice of leadership in schools. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Cuban, L., & Shipps, D (Eds.). (2000). Reconstructing the common good in education: Coping with intractable dilemmas. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (1997). Education, equity and the right to learn. In Goodlad, J.L. and McMannon, T.J. (Eds.). The public purpose of education and schooling. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

- Dei, G.J., & Karumanchery, L.L. (1999, Summer). School reforms in Ontario: The marketization of education and the resulting silence on equity. Alberta Journal of Educational Research, V45 – 2, 111-131.
- Delors, J. (1996). Learning: the treasure within. Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.
- Dewey, J. (1964). Democracy and education. New York: The MacMillan Company.
- Dobbin, Murray. (1998). The myth of the good corporate citizen. Toronto: Stoddard Publishing Co.
- Economic Council of Canada. (1992). A lot to learn. (EC22-182/1992E). Canada Communication Group.
- Egan, K. (1997). The educated mind: How cognitive tools shape our understanding. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Egan, K. (2000). Getting it wrong from the beginning: Challenging assumptions of public schooling. The CAP Journal: Resources for school-based leadership, V9-2, 25- 33.
- Elshtain, J.B. (1993). Democracy on trial. Concord: House of Anansi Press Limited.
- Fenstermacher, G. (1994). What's missing from education reform? Ed Press Conference.
- Fenstermacher, G. (1997). Restoring public and private life. In J. Goodlad & T.J. McMannon (Eds.), The public purpose of education and schooling. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Freire, P. (1970). Pedagogy of the oppressed. New York: The Continuum Publishing Company.
- Fullan, M. (1998). Three stories of educational reform: Inside; Inside/out; Outside/in. Kappan.
- Gerson, M. (2000). The right choice for schools. The Public Interest, 139, 121-126.
- Goodlad, J.L., & McMannon, T.J. (Eds.). (1997). The public purpose of education and schooling. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Greene, M. (1978). Landscapes of learning. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Greene, M. (1985). Releasing the imagination: Essays on education, the arts and social change. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Greene, M. (1988). The dialectic of freedom. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Gutmann, A. (1987). Democratic education. Princeton: Princeton University.
- Hargreaves, A. (1997). Rethinking educational change with heart and mind: 1997 ASCD Yearbook. United States of America: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Heilbroner, R. (1992). Twenty-first century capitalism. Concord: House Of Anansi Press Limited.
- Hill, P.G. (2000). Public education and moral monsters: A conversation with Noam Chomsky. [On-line], Centre for Policy Alternatives.
- Holmes, Mark. (1998). The reformation of canada's schools: Breaking the barriers to parent choice. Montreal, PQ: McGill-Queen's University Press.

- International commission on education for the twenty-first century. (1996). Learning: the treasure within. (ISBN 0-92-3-103274-7). Paris: UNESCO.
- Kohn, A. (1999). The schools our children deserve: Moving beyond traditional classrooms and tougher standards. New York: Houghton-Mifflin Company.
- Kozol, J. (1991). Savage inequalities. New York: Crown Publishers.
- Kozol, J. (2000). Ordinary resurrections: Children in the years of hope. New York: Crown Publishers.
- Levin, B. (1999). Schools and work: Towards a research agenda.
- Levin, B., & Wiens, J. (Unpublished). There is another way: A different approach to education reform.
- Macleans. (2002, May 20). The hollowing out: Four experts analyze Canada's competitiveness. *Business*, V115-2, 37-38.
- Manitoba Education and Training. (1994). Renewing education: New directions: A blue print for action. (ISBN 0-7711-1235-1). Crown in Right of Manitoba.
- Manitoba Education and Training. (1995). The action plan. (ISBN 0-7711- 1363-3. Crown in Right of Manitoba.
- Manitoba Education and Training. (1995). A foundation for excellence. (ISBN 0-7711-1358-7). Crown in Right of Manitoba.
- Manitoba Education and Training. (1996). Success for all learners. A handbook on differentiating instruction – A resource for kindergarten to senior 4 schools. (ISBN 0-7711-1276-9). Crown in Right of Manitoba.
- Manitoba Education and Training. (1998). Western Canadian protocol for collaboration in basic education. (ISBN 0-7711-2100-8). Crown in Right of Manitoba.
- Manitoba Education and Training. (1998). Individual education planning: A handbook for developing and implementing IEPs, Early to Senior Years. (ISBN 0-7711-2163-6). Crown in Right of Manitoba.
- McLaren, P. (1999). Contesting capital: Critical pedagogy and globalism, A response to Michael Apple, VI – 2.
- McMurty, J. (1991). Education and the market model. *Journal Of Philosophy Of Education*, V25 – 2, 209-217.
- McShane, O. (2000). Why young people are important. [On-line], Frontier Centre for Public Policy.
- Mouffe, C. (1996). Democracy, power and the political. In Benhabib (ed.), Democracy and difference.
- Nikoforuk, A. (1994). If learning is so natural, why am I going to school? Toronto: Penguin Books.
- Noddings, N. (1992). The challenge to care in schools: An alternative approach to education. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Noddings, N. (1993). For all its children. *Educational Theory*, V43 – 1, 15-22.
- Noddings, N. (1996). On community. *Educational Theory*, V46 – 3, 245-267.

- O'Hear, P. (1994). An alternative national curriculum. In S. Tomlinson (ed.) Educational reform and its consequences. London: IPPR/Rivers Oram Press
- O'Neil, J. (2000). Fads and fireflies: difficulties in sustaining change. [On-line], Educational Educational Leadership. V57 – 7.
- Osborne, K. (1999). Education: A guide to the canadian school debate – Or, Who wants what and why?, Toronto: Penguin Books.
- Osborne, K. (1999, July). Fostering educated and active citizens. Plenary presentation to the CSBA/CEA/BCSTA Congress on Educating Active Citizens, Victoria, BC.
- Postman, N. (1995). The End of education: Redefining the value of school, Toronto: Random House
- Power, S., Halpin, D., and Fitz, J. (1994). Underpinning choice and diversity? In S. Tomlinson (ed.) Educational reform and its consequences. London: IPPR/Rivers Oram Press.
- Rebick, Judy. (2000). Imagine democracy. Toronto: Stoddart Publishing Co.
- Robertson, H.J. (1998). No more teachers, No more books: The commercialization of canada's schools. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Inc.
- Saul, J.R. (1995). The unconscious civilization. Concord: House of Anansi Press Limited.
- Saul, J.R. (1997). Reflections of a siamese twin: Canada at the end of the twentieth century. Toronto: Penguin Books.
- Schon, D. (1983). The reflective practioner: How professionals think in action. New York: Basic Books.
- Seddon, T. (1997). "Markets and the english," British Journal of Sociology of Education 18: 165 – 185.
- Smyth, J. (1991). Teachers as collaborative learners. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Taylor, A. (1996). Education for 'post-industrial' purposes: Understanding the contest of change in alberta schools. Thesis; Doctor of Education, University of Toronto.
- Taylor, C. (1991). The malaise of modernity. Concord: House of Anansi Press Limited.
- Trend, D. (1996). Radical democracy. New York: Routledge Inc.
- Wiens, J.R. (2000). Hannah arendt and education: Educational leadership and civic humanism. Burnaby: Simon Fraser University.
- Young, L.M. (1996). Communication and the other: Beyond deliberative democracy. In Behabib (Ed.), Democracy and difference.
- Whitty, G. (1997). "Creating quasi-markets in education." In M.W. Apple (ed.) Review of research in education volume 22. Washington: American Educational Research Association.
- Witty, G. Power, S., and Halpin, D. (1998) Devolution and choice in education. Bristol, PA: Open University Press.