

System Leadership in  
Kindergarten to Grade 12  
Public Schools in Manitoba,  
2005 to 2015: An Emergent  
Regenerative Leadership Model

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Manitoba Association of School  
Superintendents

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## Abstract

*Regenerative leadership* is a term used here to characterize leadership that reflects individual commitments to support collective efforts at a system level. Going beyond individual accomplishments to consider regenerative leadership from an organizational perspective, this paper uses a historical interpretive case study approach to present an account of leadership in Kindergarten to Grade 12 public schools in Manitoba from 2005 to 2015. The Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS) supports regenerative leadership through its commitments to collaboration, advocacy, and action. This is an account of the work undertaken by MASS based on a conceptual framework emerging from three distinct yet overlapping themes that guide regenerative leadership at the system level: ethical and moral leadership, equity and quality in public education, and purposeful professional learning.

## Introduction

The purpose of this article is to share some of the significant steps of the journey toward a made-in-Manitoba model of regenerative leadership at the system level that has been evidenced in the work of the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS)—both from my perspective as a participant in this learning journey as a member of MASS and now from an organizational perspective in my role as executive director. This last decade, 2005–2015, has been a rich time of both individual and organizational learning for MASS and its members. While much of this learning has been “on-the-job” as practitioners, much has also come through purposeful and research-based professional learning provided by MASS and its members for its members.

*Regenerative leadership* is the term used to identify and characterize the main elements of this MASS model of leadership. While I have no desire to invent or perhaps borrow a new term or even put too much stock in its use, I have chosen this descriptor for educational leadership as a compelling ideal for which to strive. It is an emergent model influenced by three theory strands: ethical and moral leadership, equity and quality in education, and purposeful, professional learning.

## Background

Fifteen years ago, Hoy and Miskel (2001) noted the “deep pool” of over 5000 articles published on the topic of leadership. At that time, Leithwood and Duke (1999) had attempted to make sense of this growing field for educational leadership with a meta-analysis of over 100 articles from four representative educational administration journals. This study identified 20 different leadership models that were categorized into six distinct perspectives, all of which are still current today. Subsequently, the pool of research and writing on leadership has

deepened with many new perspectives being added and popularized: Shared leadership (Lambert, 1998), change leadership (Fullan, 2001), and sustainable leadership (Hargreaves and Fink, 2006) are some of the more widely known.

MASS has engaged in an alternative approach to educational leadership at the individual and system levels, primarily grounded by participatory, local education research. The centrepiece for this work has been an ethical leadership program loosely based on an action research model pioneered by the Superintendents Association of Iowa (SAI) and discovered at the American Educational Research Association (AERA) annual meeting in New York in 2008. More recently, with the aim of obtaining a baseline from which to evaluate the effect of our continuing work on equity, MASS has worked with the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg (SPCW), the Manitoba School Boards Association (MSBA), the Manitoba Teachers' Society (MTS), and other partners in a more formal research project to determine the scope of equity-based policy and practice in school systems and schools.

In addition to action research and more formal research studies initiated by the organization itself, MASS also serves as a forum or network for pilot projects being undertaken in school divisions across the province. An increasing number of these divisional initiatives are being set up as action research projects and often include collaboration with researchers at one of Manitoba's universities. Such research by members is regularly highlighted in every issue of the *MASS Journal* and in sharing sessions at MASS professional learning and member sessions. The themed issues of the *MASS Journal* bring together academic research with a variety of related projects from the field, on a single emergent or critical topic in education, thus providing some theoretical background with a variety of promising Manitoba initiatives for practitioners to explore in their own practice. Some recent examples of topics are student engagement, mental health and wellness, education for sustainability, learning with technology, and Indigenous education, to name a few.

The professional learning and research undertaken by MASS and its members has indeed led to a shared understanding of educational leadership within the Manitoba context that is identified here as regenerative educational leadership. As practised by MASS, this model of leadership

- bases itself on concepts of moral and ethical leadership
- shares an overarching commitment to equity and quality in public education
- puts moral thought into action through the means of purposeful professional learning, a high level of collaboration with each other and with other educational and community partners, and through advocacy at every level in key focus areas such as early childhood education, Indigenous education, and mental health and wellness
- ultimately strives to initiate and sustain individual and societal regeneration through leadership in public education that is hopeful and focuses on possibility and capacity



## Theme One: Ethical and Moral Leadership

As evidenced by the MASS *Statement of Beliefs in Public Education*, which has grounded the practice of the organization and its members for many years, a strong commitment to ethical leadership in public education was not a new thing:

The challenge for educators is to define what we believe about education in a manner that encompasses the values of a democratic society, respects the inherent uniqueness of the individual student and at the same time provides equity of opportunity and ensures achievement for all.

With this commitment, moreover, came a desire to explore our individual and organizational values and ethics more profoundly and to undertake this learning journey together. The Iowa ethical leadership program had presented itself as a model holding great promise, and after considerable discussion and planning, it was decided in 2008 to launch our own made-in-Manitoba iteration, formulated as an action research project.

An invitation was put out to all superintendents and assistant superintendents to become part of the first Ethical Leadership Cohort of 20, with the aim of meeting in four mini-retreats organized by members in rotation and facilitated by invitees. The invitation to assistant superintendents was a major departure from the Iowa model, reflecting the Manitoba context in which superintendents and assistant superintendents participate freely together in all MASS programs and events. Coralie Bryant, the MASS executive director at the time, committed herself to investigating and reporting on this program, taking notes and collecting qualitative feedback from participants as part of an action research project. Dr. Jon Young, of the University of Manitoba, accepted the role of critical friend and provided invaluable input and feedback to the group along the way.

Robert Starratt personally facilitated at least two of our mini-retreats and his seminal work, *Ethical Leadership* (2004), was a primary resource. Other facilitators included a mix of Canadian and American superintendents such as Chris Kelly, Carole Olsen, and Ben Canada, alternating with powerful educational voices such as Michael Fullan, Penny Milton, David Hansen, Nel Noddings, and Margaret Wheatley. As Bryant (2010) states, the purpose of the cohort was to

provide a forum for participants to engage collectively in an ongoing inquiry into their practice; to provide the opportunity for reflection on the moral imperative of leadership; and to positively affect the culture of leadership in schools and divisions across the province.

Bryant (2010) further states:

If individuals hope to provide the leadership necessary for such change and renewal, and to establish cultures where justice and care are at work, they require clarity around values, the ability to articulate those values to others, and the ability to make judgments based on them as they encounter ethical dilemmas.

The framework for our thinking, individually and as a group, was Starratt's paradigm of the ethics of profession, where the separate ethical lenses of justice, care, and critique are applied to the same issue, while holding the needs of the child at the centre (Wallin, 2005). Authentic career-defining ethical dilemmas from practice were presented to us by current or former superintendents, providing the context for exploring our own similar experiences and our actual and preferred responses as well.

As foundational and helpful as this work was for individual members in defining their own values and commitments and honing their skills for effective and ethical response in difficult situations, it soon became evident that this was only half of the story. A participant in the cohort put it this way: "Ethical leadership gets at the heart of the superintendent's work—not only to provide a moral compass for individual decision-making and relationships but to lead in establishing an ethical culture where children and learning, equity and justice, are central" (Bryant, 2010).

Ethical educational leadership is about much more than being a moral person, avoiding doing the "wrong" thing, or reacting to ethical challenges the "right" way. For Starratt and for the MASS members of the cohort, ethical leadership necessarily leads a superintendent to seeking out and "doing the right thing," actively identifying those in the system whose voices and needs are not being heard, and courageously doing everything personally, professionally, and systemically to advocate on their behalf. Ultimately our ethical duty is to purposefully and persistently provide the leadership that will establish an environment and a system in which all children and each child and adult (everyone and every one) will thrive and flourish, not only educationally, but also humanly in every way.

Ethical educational leaders are responsible for creating a rich, stimulating learning environment, supportive of all students, that is "flexible, responsive, encouraging and diversified" (Starratt, 2004, p. 60). This environment fosters authentic learning that is interesting to the student, connected to something meaningful in the community, and important in the life of the student and the community. This statement may at first blush seem inadequate as a compelling manifesto for ethical leadership—however, in practice, I have many times been supremely challenged by each phrase or word. It is a tall order and a high calling for a superintendent to move an entire system from lip service to reality in policy and practice in ways that would truly and honestly meet such criteria as rich, stimulating, supportive, flexible, responsive, encouraging, and diversified.

## Theme Two: Equity and Quality in Education

The Spring 2015 issue of the *MASS Journal* was simply entitled “Equity” and featured a lead article on equity and inclusion by our facilitator for the 2015 MASS Summer Institute, Dr. Özlem Sensoy, a preliminary report by Dr. John Wiens on the partners’ equity study soon to be released, and a conversation between Coralie Bryant and myself on the development of equity as a guiding theme in MASS. This issue also highlighted a variety of equity practices in Manitoba school divisions, covering all three MASS focus areas of Indigenous education, mental health and wellness, and early childhood education. For the first time in the history of the *MASS Journal*, there will be a double issue on the same topic, as the Fall 2015 issue will again focus on equity and will feature promising projects and action research from eight different Manitoba school divisions.

It should be obvious from the above that equity is very much on the minds of MASS and its members. In fact, as part of the annual planning process two years ago, equity and quality were chosen as twin overarching parameters for our *MASS Priorities 2014–2015* document, along with our call for a “high quality universal public education system.” Our statement reads as follows:

MASS believes:

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

It should be noted that there was considerable discussion about which word should be stated first, *equity* or *quality*. After all, it is widely agreed that the quality of instruction is the single greatest factor in improved student achievement to the point that Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) call for this to be our primary investment. Improvement in academic achievement is also more easily measured and often serves as an indicator of the effectiveness of the educational system as a whole. This has recently become even more evident in Manitoba in the light of disappointing PISA and PCAP results, showing Manitoba students as dead last in the country, with only 86% of our students performing adequately according to these assessments. The Manitoba response has been to establish a Student Achievement Support Unit and to strengthen requirements for school divisions to have robust literacy and numeracy plans in place. Consistent with its commitment to quality teaching, MASS is playing an active role as a partner in this initiative.

After much discussion, however, and with the input of two of our recent summer institute facilitators, MASS continues to speak of equity as a necessary prerequisite for quality. MASS concurs with Pasi Sahlberg (2012) that it would be very difficult to realize a truly quality education within an environment or system hampered by inequity. Sahlberg states the following:

The highest performing education systems across OECD nations are those that combine quality with equity. Other research demonstrates that investing as early as possible in high-quality education for all students and directing additional resources toward the most disadvantaged students as early as possible produces the greatest positive effect on overall academic performance. (p. 29)

Sahlberg facilitated the 2013 MASS Summer Institute on the theme of “Equity and Quality in Education” and illustrated graphically the relationship between these two factors as evidenced by recent PISA results. Finland and Canada both ranked in the upper right-hand quadrant, indicating high quality and comparatively higher equity. Other nations with lower quality also had lower equity scores, including the US and some European nations. Sahlberg then indicated that Finland had not always enjoyed its high quality ranking, and for years saw little movement upwards. However, after many years of working hard at equity in schools but also in the broader Finnish society, their PISA scores rose quickly in a relatively short period of time (2013). The large and wide-ranging negative effects of systemic inequality on all of society is illustrated by Wilkinson and Pickett (2009) in their book *The Spirit Level: Why Equality Is Better for Everyone*, which convincingly argues that equality and equity are better for everyone, not just for those we identify as disadvantaged.

MASS continues to believe that it is important to address both equity and quality together in order to see the rise in student achievement we all wish for. Short-term fixes may temporarily increase quality as measured by PISA or PCAP but may not address the 14% of our students who are not being successful according to this measure. A focus on literacy and numeracy is critically important in terms of assuring that all students have the skills they need to choose and make successful lives for themselves. However, this does not necessarily indicate that more time spent in basic literacy or numeracy instruction for students or for that matter, for teachers, will necessarily lead to greater student success, especially if this would come at the expense of time spent in creative, innovative, and exploratory learning and arts instruction. As research that is being done into the Sistema music program shows, equitable access to music and the arts has great potential to increase student well-being, self-efficacy, and ultimately student achievement, especially for students from lower SES environments (Morin, 2015). MASS is interested in the work of a Manitoba research consortium working toward identifying other indicators of student success which would be based on well-being, flourishing, or even “well-becoming.” As important as quality instruction and student achievement are, percentage grades related to literacy and numeracy

and scores on external assessments do not and cannot tell a complete story of student success.

Simon Breakspear, our 2014 MASS Summer Institute facilitator, in his response to our Friday morning large group discussion, referred to the MASS position on equity as “leading with your chin.” This was to illustrate that meaningful and significant improvement in equity is very difficult to achieve across a school division, never mind a system, a province, or a nation. It was also to suggest that public, and hence government, support for improvement of quality in the short term is more likely than a public or long-term government commitment to increase spending significantly to reduce very real and longstanding equity and access gaps. Breakspear’s comments were not intended to sow discouragement, but rather to underline that an effective advocacy for increased equity requires a clear headed and purposeful commitment—knowing what we mean by “equity,” knowing why we actually want the equity we understand, and knowing where and how to act to make meaningful improvements that are measurable and demonstrable. His answer for us was simple—put the money where the needs are, and put your best teachers with the children that need them the most (Breakspear, 2014). Again, equity and quality are two strands of a double helix, not competing goods or alternate paths to success.

### Theme Three: Purposeful Professional Learning

As in the previous two themes, embedded in the MASS approach to professional learning are commitments to collaboration, advocacy, and action. Christopher Hodgkinson (1978) defined administration as putting moral philosophy into action. In MASS, talking and thinking about ethical leadership and equity must necessarily lead to action and be seen in our practice, through our leadership in learning, collaboration with other partners towards shared ideals, and effective and persistent advocacy for improvements in equity and access in both the educational system and the broader society.

One of our most important areas of action would be professional learning, given that our roles are increasingly complex, our responsibilities are immense and far-reaching, and the stakes are very high—the success of everyone and every one in the system, child and adult. In order to gain clarity in this critical area, the following statement of belief was added to our MASS *Priorities 2014–2015* document at our planning session in 2014:

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

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

MASS sponsors summer institutes and fall conferences on an annual basis that go beyond professional learning as a one-time event. Although MASS conferences are often organized around one major theme at a time, a number of strands or elements are included in every conference to highlight inclusion, diversity, poverty reduction, and Indigenous perspectives. In this way, MASS offers in-depth and timely professional learning on emergent themes while keeping the conversation going with respect to these important broader societal and educational areas.

When MASS members became increasingly aware of a dearth of in-service leadership training or pre-service preparation for Manitoba superintendents, an ad hoc Leadership Development Committee was struck. Leadership programs from other provinces such as Alberta and Saskatchewan were observed and studied. The result is a highly effective series of leadership modules developed and facilitated by MASS members for MASS members. An early winter mini-retreat features emergent topics in administration and management, such as Human Resources, The Political Environment, Educational Funding, and Critical Incident Management. The spring session features big topics in educational leadership, including instructional leadership, essential learning, and assessment and evaluation. These sessions now serve as important parts of the MASS mentorship program for new members—each session includes a pre-session exclusively for new members and free registration for the main event to help professional learning dollars for new members to go further. At these events, new and veteran superintendents meet and learn together—learning from each other and observing each other learning. New superintendents have noted the power of this collegial learning, and veteran members continuing to struggle with the same dilemmas that new members face have affirmed its value.

One more area of collaboration in professional learning that has provided opportunity for MASS to share in educational leadership for the whole province is a series of biennial provincial conferences under the series rubric of *Educating for ACTion*, with “ACT” writ large. Each of these conferences has focused on a major area of concern for educators and the community—organizing themes included The Engaged Learner (2008), Social Justice (2010), Sustainability (2012), and Mental

Health and Wellness (2014). Program planning for the conference drew together a wide range of educational partners including the universities and community partners from the appropriate sectors. With over 700 attendees, including divisional teams of trustees, senior administrators, school administrators, teachers, and students from across the province, MASS has been able to share considerable educational leadership by highlighting a critical area and bringing to Manitoba a host of high quality speakers and presenters as resources, including international, national, provincial, and local voices.

## Regenerative Leadership

As an organization, MASS has increasingly embraced its role in shared leadership of public education in Manitoba through collaboration, advocacy, and action.

### Collaboration

Although MASS has some members days and professional learning events which are primarily for members, the high level of cooperation between partners has already been noted above. MASS thrives in the Manitoba culture of collaboration, especially in the educational sector, where government (Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning), trustees (Manitoba School Boards Association or MSBA), senior administration (MASS), school administration (Council of School Leaders or COSL), school business officials (Manitoba Association of School Business Officials or MASBO), parents (Manitoba Association of Parent Councils or MAPC), and teachers (MTS) regularly meet and plan joint professional learning. This goes at least as far back as the large provincial Aboriginal education conference co-hosted in 2003 by a wide range of educational partners, including MASS, and continues to this day with plans for a province-wide human rights conference hosted by MTS and MASS in April 2017. The partners listed above and important Indigenous partner groups all work together on a regular basis through the Manitoba Education Research Network (MERN) to advance research and learning in the Manitoba context.

One area of collaboration with great potential and increasing urgency is that of Indigenous education. Many of the partner organizations, including MASS, have had their own Aboriginal Education committee for some time, and there have been inter-organizational meetings of committee members over the years. Recently, however, collaboration in this area has been more robust, with a three-day Aboriginal Education Leadership Institute hosted by MSBA, MASS, and MASBO, and attended by over 150 participants from these three organizations and from MTS. In an effort to bring these groups together to work more effectively towards a common goal, MTS has hosted two sessions of *Emamawiwitatoskemitowak*—an inter-organizational forum with the aim of developing a common plan of action, based on the call to action published in the MASS position

paper on Aboriginal education (*Transforming Manitoba Public Education: A View to the Future*, March 2013). Another indicator of the high level of collaboration is that this MASS paper has been officially endorsed by both MSBA and MTS.

The area of Indigenous education, however, is a perfect example of how collaboration that stays between partners within the system is not adequate. MERN, through its semi-annual forums, has made great contributions in the area of bringing together the traditional educational partners that operate within the public school system with Indigenous groups, often outside of the system. The initial session of *Emamaawi* hosted by MTS included panels of Elders who responded to our discussion and guided us in our thinking. The MASS Aboriginal Education Advisory Committee, whose original mandate was the writing of a position paper, included members of the Indigenous community, which greatly increased the value and ultimately the acceptance of the paper by so many. This same committee, in its new mandate to support the call to action in the position paper, is going out into the Indigenous community and holding meetings by invitation on site at organizations such as the Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre (MFNERC), the Treaty Rights Commission of Manitoba (TRCM), the Manitoba Metis Federation (MMF), and Neechi Commons.

MASS is encouraging members and educational partners to adopt a similar approach in the interests of greater awareness and friendship building as well as practically supporting social enterprises such as Neechi Commons by leveraging organizational funds that have been budgeted for meeting expenses. The 2014 MASS AGM was held by invitation in Thompson and MASS members boarded a charter bus to travel north. The timing was coordinated with spring ceremonies at Mile 20 Camp, and MASS members were invited by Elders to participate in medicine collection walks, tipi building, storytelling, and sweat lodge ceremonies. As educators we had talked much about the value of learning on the land for Indigenous students—at Mile 20 we experienced first-hand and personally the power of this approach to make “head” learning take root in the heart. Leading learning involves doing the learning. Collaboration with other learners is an authentic and powerful way to learn.

## Advocacy

MASS could easily be primarily a member services organization—this is in fact one of its mandates—as senior administrators perform complex and demanding roles within organizations where they have few or even no counterparts, so they need strong support from their professional organization. It could also be a professional development source where members can come to learn the things they need to survive on a daily or annual basis—professional learning is another mandate of MASS, albeit for higher purposes than survival. But, a third mandate of MASS is to be a strong advocate for high quality universal (equitable) public education—and this mandate has become an increasingly important part of our organizational identity, largely as a result of the things we have learned along



the way in our journey towards a deeper understanding of ethical leadership and equity.

Books about the leadership of senior administrators or even chapters in books are still rare. Looking for research on the leadership of superintendents can still be a challenge, even at the movable feast which is the annual meeting of the AERA. In studies of the effects of administration on student achievement, it is generally acknowledged that it is the teacher in the room that makes the biggest difference, a school administrator can have a small effect of maybe 10% (Leithwood, 1999), and senior administrators are thought to be too far from the action and too entangled in politics and bureaucracy to have much effect at all, unless possibly negative in the form of administrating system constraints on what could otherwise be innovative schools.

One book, however, that does include the role of the superintendent, is *Working on the Work: An Action Plan for Teachers, Principals, and Superintendents* (Schlechty, 2002). Schlechty condemns the bureaucratic tendency of boards who work on superintendents, to work on principals, to work on students, to do the work. He calls for a system within which we are all “working on the work” together (p. xiv). Schlechty insists that we must start from the belief that “every child can learn at high levels” (p. 89) and that this is possible when teachers provide authentic and engaging “work.”

But, according to Schlechty, what happens in the classroom and the resulting student achievement or lack of it is ultimately the responsibility of everyone—not just the teacher in charge of a particular class. Although the role of a superintendent is often seen as top down, ensuring compliance and productivity, Schlechty challenges senior administration to take on the role of leading in all directions and taking the risk of allowing themselves to be led (p. 45), in the interests of shifting practice at the school level at the same time as making the necessary systemic changes. For me this is a good understanding of the kind of advocacy that MASS and its members practise.

A form of advocacy that has become increasingly effective over the past ten years has been the publishing of discussion and position papers in areas of major concern for MASS. These papers have been printed and distributed to members, educational partners, and government, and are available on the MASS website for the world to read. Areas of advocacy include democratic education, preservation of strong local school division governance, equitable funding of public education, equity of access and inclusion, fair assessment and reporting, identification of essential learning, Aboriginal education, early childhood education, and mental health and wellness.

The recent development of the MASS position on mental health and wellness (*Mental Health Framework for Students*, September 2012) and the response to this position best illustrates how this form of advocacy has begun to characterize MASS leadership. Concerns around the high levels of emotional and mental

disturbances, which increasingly affect even our youngest students, caused MASS to form an ad hoc committee to research this concern to determine its scope and to develop an effective response for MASS. Data from the EDI (Early Development Instrument), from the Manitoba Youth Health Survey, and from Tell Them From Me all pointed to significant issues for children from the early years through to graduation—*anxiety, sleeping and eating disorders, depression, and even adult-level mental illness* were all increasingly evident, impacting negatively on the learning and well-being of up to 25% of our students.

But data only confirmed what teachers were experiencing daily in their classrooms: children as young as Kindergarten and Grade 1, entering the system with huge and demanding issues, with few real resources to assess and address them in a timely or effective manner; middle years students with such high anxiety that they either could not attend school regularly or could not concentrate on their learning when in class; and high school students dropping courses or leaving school early or even contemplating suicide due to depression.

Members of the committee decided this was an urgent and critical situation on which MASS needed to have a clear position—leading to a set of six recommendations and a tight timeline of one to two years for implementation. This was “sharpening our ask” in an area in which we felt the time had come to take meaningful action.

The power of a position paper for an organization is the way in which it is developed. At MASS, the committee first of all has to have agreement from the MASS Executive Committee that this is a priority for the organization. They then engage in extensive research into theory and practice in this area. A draft paper is written and presented to the full membership for discussion—always resulting in extensive revision and rewriting. Only after being vetted through full membership discussion on numerous occasions over the course of a year or more is the paper presented for approval by the membership. Once a position paper has been approved, MASS members and representatives can confidently speak for the organization on critical topics, knowing that they in fact represent the will of the members and not their personal position. This provides an articulate, authoritative, and credible voice for the organization and gives government the security of knowing that the recommendations being made are not random or localized but in fact represent the carefully considered will of an entire organization. And an organizational position becomes even more powerful when a wide range of educational partners endorse the position and move forward together in “leading up.”

The primary recommendation of the position paper on mental health and wellness was the development of a provincial mental health framework for children and youth, so that their concerns would not be considered secondary to the pressing adult mental health concerns already on the agenda. This framework would help coordinate the communications, efforts, and resources of all of the sectors responsible for the well-being of children and youth—education, health, social

services, and justice, to name a few of the major players. The logical place for MASS to present these recommendations was the Healthy Child Committee in Cabinet (HCCC), a legislated committee of eight departments in government, with the mandate of addressing the health and well-being of Manitoba's children.

Response to the MASS position paper from HCCC led to an invitation to present to the committee. A group of MASS delegates attended and used this opportunity to tell real heart-wrenching stories from the field that could provide real faces of children and youth (without names) to illustrate the themes of the paper. Shortly thereafter the Oversight Committee for Children and Youth Mental Health (OOCYMH)—pronounced “awesome” by MASS—was appointed by the Minister for the HCCC with the mandate to address the recommendations in the paper. MASS was invited to represent the major educational partners in a co-chair position on the committee. The committee set to work on developing the framework for children and youth mental health called for in the paper, but of course, this was not a small task and was not accomplished within the optimistic timeline suggested by MASS in the paper. However, MASS and its educational partners continued to advocate in every way possible, in meetings with government, and in letters signed by multiple partners, sent on the anniversary of the founding of the committee each year, to reiterate support for this work and to continue to highlight its urgency. Recently the government announced the imminent release of the framework and a long-term commitment to implementation, along with budgeted funds to start the work (Manitoba, 2015). And of course, MASS is committed to continued collaboration and leadership where required to bring these recommendations to fruition in the short and long term.

## Action

The experience of MASS in its role as advocate through the development of position papers in critical areas of concern has had a positive “backward” effect on the entire organization. The annual planning of MASS has become much more focused as a result of seeing the results of concentrated and persistent action in a limited number of critical areas. Members supported moving from the strategic planning exercise and the resulting multi-page document to identification of three priority action or focus areas—Aboriginal Education, Mental Health and Wellness, and Early Childhood Education. They also directed the MASS Executive to maintain these focus areas as long-term commitments, rather than to look for new areas of involvement each year.

MASS now has member support to focus all of its efforts in these areas, supported by well-researched organizational position papers to provide direction. It was a natural outcome that MASS professional learning and communications would also become more focused and aligned with these organizational priorities. The 2014 Educating for ACTION conference supported the work of the MASS Mental Health Ad Hoc Committee and their position paper by bringing together the entire

province. A host of international, national, and local presenters included Corey Keyes, whose model for mental health and flourishing (2005) was an important foundation for the MASS position paper. The *MASS Journal* (Spring 2013) focused on mental health and wellness and included a lead article by Stan Kutcher, another keynote speaker at the conference. The annual MASS book club selection of five books is now consciously being made to support learning in our areas of focus.

One of the things that MASS as an organization learned from the mental health and wellness initiative was that a well-researched position paper containing concrete recommendations has the power to move people, programs, and policy. Our next critically important position paper was our paper on Aboriginal education, already discussed above. What is important to note in this context, however, is one of language—MASS moved from making “Recommendations” in the mental health paper to a clearly enunciated “Call to Action” in the next paper—moving more confidently and self-consciously into an advocacy role. And for the first time, MASS has decided to revisit one of our earlier papers on early childhood education, seeing the need to update the call to action to continue our advocacy effectively in today’s environment. It should be noted that the early childhood education and care paper was followed closely by the creation of an Early Childhood Education Unit within Manitoba Education.

As most Manitoba superintendents come into senior administration through school administration, MASS also has a strong interest in school principal preparation, as this could be considered pre-service education for the superintendency. Noting the lack of a comprehensive and robust provincial principals’ certification program, and hoping to replace a somewhat random system of contact hour credits for attending a variety of professional learning events, MASS, with MSBA, MTS, and COSL, encouraged the province to put into place a certification process that would combine academic rigour with important local knowledge gained in the field. Many school divisions had embarked on their own principal preparation programs in order to provide a more concrete and complete preparation for school administration at the local level. This work by MASS and its partners has resulted in a recent memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the partners, the university, and the Province that establishes a Post-Baccalaureate Diploma in Education (PBDE) in Educational Leadership, with 24 credits in administrative studies from participating universities and 6 hours of field credits to be provided by the educational partners, including MASS. The collaboration in developing the MOU and the five domains of leadership that provide the framework for the certificate has continued into the implementation of the new certification program. MASS and COSL co-sponsored an opening session on ethical leadership at the COSL Summer Institute, the first approved field course to be offered in this program. MASS is now working with a course developer and superintendents to develop a field leadership course that will be available to all divisions as the basis for their divisional leadership preparation programs.

## Conclusion

The regenerative leadership concept did not come from research into leadership or from a carefully constructed theoretical model—rather, it came almost serendipitously from a comment made by a co-presenter at the 2012 MASS *Educating for ACTion: Sustainability* conference. Ray Cole, an architect and educator from the University of British Columbia, was speaking about educational architecture and provided an example of a building on the campus that was being designed, not only to be sustainable or net-zero energy consuming but rather to provide energy back to an adjoining building after extracting enough heat for its own use from the waste energy of that building. This was his vision for regenerative or “generous” architecture where a building could give back more than it would take from the grid.

This was also his challenge to us as educators to set our standards higher than “sustainability.” His question or challenge to us was about the language we use with children, which also betrays our expectations for them. After equating sustainability with survival, he asked whether this was really a worthy enough dream for the next generation. To be encouraged to learn something or do something because it might help us “survive” would not be compelling for most adults, and for children it might provide a less than hopeful subtext—telling them subliminally that this is the best that they can do, considering the mess we have left them with. His contention was that as adults we have to provide children with the hope and the dreams of creating a world that is better than the one they have been gifted by us—the same dream that motivated our generation (Cole, 2010).

Regenerative educational leadership would be courageously and possibly outrageously hopeful, according to Purpel (1999), who calls for a new language that would have the potential to save us from settling by default from the “much narrower possibilities within the perspective of existing practices” (p. 4). Giroux (1997) challenges us to use “a language of possibility that is capable of thinking risky thoughts, engages in projects of hope, and points to the horizon of the ‘not yet’ ” (p. 223). Lakoff (2004) insists that until we learn to frame things in our own positive ways, not using the baggage-laden concepts and language of the status quo, we will only continue to do the bidding of others, rather than move our project of hope forward.

Many educators and educational leaders see themselves as “merchants of hope.” It is our job to always hold on to and hold out hope—to be the best hope for the children in our care. But what do we do in the case of children that are not capable of hoping for themselves, due to seemingly intractable domestic situations brought on by poverty and societal inequity in spite of parents who love them and want to do their best for them? And what about those who bear the brunt of generations of systemic abuse or neglect in the residential school system? And how do we respond to the increasing numbers of children with mental and emotional health issues that rob them of their learning opportunities? These and a host of other

factors lead to almost 30% of students in the Tell Them From Me data admitting to having experienced hopelessness in the past year—a statistic that educators and in fact all adults should not be able to digest without serious introspection.

Zander and Zander (2000) refer to educators as “architects of possibility”—an even more compelling metaphor for me than “merchants of hope.” A merchant has to accept the fact that some or perhaps many will choose not to take what is being offered—to walk right by—leaving the merchant standing passively with their goods. Architects, on the other hand, work with end-users in an integrated design process. The first step is to determine together what the charter for the project will be—the big picture, the dream, what the finished structure will look like and feel like—how it will serve far into the future as something functional, beautiful, and as a positively lived-experience for those inside and in the surrounding neighbourhood. The architects then draw and consult, redraw and consult again, provide pictures and models as reference to the possibilities that exist, allowing the end-users to express their needs, wants, preferences, and desires at every step. When a 99% drawing finally emerges and the end-users see the building of their dreams clearly outlined in detail on paper, the architects do everything within their power to align all systems, materials, costs, and codes to ensure that the finished project will most closely and realistically reflect the shared dream—something new, unique, and better in every way than anyone imagined at the start of the process.

This architectural metaphor serves well for what I am calling regenerative educational leadership—a leadership model that is built on this process of respectful, hopeful, innovative, and creative collaboration, backed up by persistence, hard work, revisiting, reworking, and always finding a way, until the desired dream is the outcome.

I believe that this concept was already eloquently outlined much earlier in the twentieth century, by Hannah Arendt (1954), in her definition of education:

Education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it, and by the same token save it from that ruin which except for renewal, except for the coming of the new and the young, would be inevitable.

And education, too, is where we decide whether we love our children enough not to expel them from our world and leave them to their own devices, nor to strike from their hands their chance of undertaking something new, something unforeseen by us, but to prepare them in advance for the task of renewing a common world. (p. 196)

Thus, regenerative educational leadership is an act of love towards the world and our children—and when a village raises children, they are everyone’s children.

Regenerative educational leadership also necessarily accepts the responsibility to model and teach sustainable living, so that the new and the young will have the hope and the chance of renewal and regeneration of their world, not ours.

Regenerative educational leadership accepts the accountability to provide a high quality educational experience that ensures our children will have the skills but also the understanding necessary to renew their world—while avoiding the temptation to predetermine that world through coercive transmission of a package of cultural knowledge which petrifies the status quo at our comfort level.

And finally, regenerative educational leadership prepares our children to confidently go far beyond us, with our blessing.

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