

President's Message: Expertise

We are professional educators. That's what we do. It is our task to design activities, experiences, discussions, and lessons to cause new neural pathways to form in the brains of children that greet us each day. Whether we are working in the cognitive, social, physical, or psychological domain, it is brains we are developing. This is a difficult job requiring skill, intuition, multiple intelligences, and a significant amount of expertise. We are living in the age of the Internet – that age when everyone is an expert and facts are as debateable as policies. Enter then, into this world North Forge Technology Exchange. This is a company that, according to their website, “is an innovation-based economic development agency and a powerhouse community to fuel Manitoba’s innovation economy through collaboration and access to our shared resources.” If you look past the jargon and slightly askew sentence structure, North Forge is a company that helps entrepreneurs take ideas to market. Apparently, they are good at it; experts one might say. It is the brain child of North Forge President, Jeff Ryzner, to apply his talents to fix early literacy. North Forge is accepting ideas from anyone in the province on how to improve early literacy and numeracy with a promise to fund and develop any viable idea up to the field testing stage. The problem with the North Forge approach is not that they are using engineering principles to tackle a difficult problem; it is that the general population are to be the experts. Neither the Manitoba Teachers’ Society nor The Manitoba School Boards Association was consulted on this. Teachers have lived with this as long as the profession has existed; sometimes it seems to us that anyone who went to school self declares themselves as education experts. In the end, this is private money and Jeff Ryzner is free to do with his as he likes. The worrisome phenomenon is the cheerleading this initiative is getting from our government. The North Forge “guided ideation session” was hosted at the Manitoba Education and Training Building on Dublin; both the Education Minister, Ian Wishart and the Assistant Deputy Minister, Rob Santos, have praised the initiative. The two biggest expenditures for our government are health and education; the private sector is keenly interested in the billions of dollars being spent in those files. It is the job of our government to protect these as part of the public good, not encourage a man whose stated wish is to have this project “launch a new ed-tech company that will take the solution across the country.” This is thin-edge-of-the-wedge material, and our government is hammering in the wrong direction.

Read more:

[Free Press;](#)

[Government News Release;](#)

[MTS Response;](#)

[North Forge Website.](#)

Public Good

A product that one individual can consume without reducing its availability to another individual and from which no one is excluded. In a free market, firms may not provide the [public] good as they have difficulty charging people for their use. Therefore, there will be a need for the government to provide it directly out of general taxation.

economicshelp.org

Strategic Plan: Your Voice was Heard

The Interlake School Division is in the midst of devising a new strategic plan. As you recall, teachers had three opportunities to give input into that process over the last two months. That data, along with feedback received from students, principals and vice principals, and the community, were examined by board members on Friday of last week. I and several other ITA members were invited to join the board as they underwent a facilitated process to examine the data. The focus of the day was on creating a vision and identifying some themes which will inform the next strategic plan. The day was filled with positive and encouraging dialog that was focussed on education and students. There is much work to do before the strategic plan is finalized; this day was a constructive step toward that end.

“Made in Canada” Education Privatization - By H. Mark Ramsankar

(adapted from CTF – read the full article [here](#))

Edu-business is a term used to describe the multi-trillion dollar education market. According to [Edudemic](#), a pro-tech in education website, the industry is “not only huge; it’s also undergoing more changes recently than it has at possibly any other point in history. Startups are sprouting to fill in gaps and create new technologies to service this increasingly lucrative field.”

The door for privatization was opened wide by GERM, the Global Education Reform Movement, the [people who] promote charter schools, voucher programs, increased competition between schools, test-based accountability and the narrowing of curriculum. In comparison to other countries, Canada has few private schools, so privatization and commercialization are not big problems in our country... Right? And we don’t have edu-businesses encroaching upon our classrooms. Or do we? You don’t have to scratch the surface too deeply to find instances of both privatization and commercialization. Our research into K-12 education in Canada shows a growing presence and involvement of edu-businesses.

Are any of these familiar?

- Public-private partnerships (Nova Scotia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba)
- Publicly funded private schools (British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Quebec)
- Free classroom apps and web platforms
- Cyber schools
- Direct marketing to teachers, circumventing ministries of Education and school districts

The New York Times’ series titled Education Disrupted examines how tech companies are influencing education in the US. I would wager the same applies here in Canada. Apple, Google, Microsoft, Facebook and other big names are competing to influence the subjects schools teach, the tools teachers use, and fundamental approaches to learning through their philanthropy... and to access the multi-trillion education industry.

We need to increase awareness among teachers and the general public. This involves reaffirmation of the value of public education and the necessity for public schools to be fully funded from tax revenues. But we as a society need to take a step back and take an ideological and philosophical view around the privatization and commercialization debate. We need to start viewing our students as the most valuable resource we have, and ensure they have the tools to engage in the ever-challenging economic future of our country.