

## **Perspectives and Portraits in Innovation: The Educational Context**

**Marvin Bartell and Riva Bartell, Co-Authors**

**Department of Business Administration  
Asper School of Business  
Faculty of Management  
University of Manitoba  
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3T 5V4  
Canada  
Phone: (204) 474-8423  
[bartell@ms.umanitoba.ca](mailto:bartell@ms.umanitoba.ca)  
Fax #: (204) 488-3484**

**Department of Educational  
Administration, Foundations &  
Psychology  
University of Manitoba  
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3T 2N2  
Canada  
Phone: (204) 474-9048  
[bartellr@ms.umanitoba.ca](mailto:bartellr@ms.umanitoba.ca)  
Fax #: (204) 488-3484**

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### **Abstract**

We have been interested in exploring the initiation and development of charter schools from historical, organizational theory and social capital perspectives and hence conducted semi-structured interviews on site in eighteen charter schools in Minnesota and Alberta. We start this article with a brief description of the charter school concept and the 1991 charter-enabling legislation in Minnesota, the birthplace of the charter school. We then touch on the polarized debate and highlight some of the evidence supporting each side of the debate. Historical perspectives on school choice and charter schooling in Canada follow. School centralization and decentralization are viewed from an organizational theory perspective in an attempt to illuminate the dilemma of large-scale consolidation versus the small-scale, grassroots, relatively autonomous school - a democratic ideal. The portraits of two community-based charter schools depict collaborative, social capital-based endeavours and serve to bring a “human face” to the discourse.

*“New insights fail to get put into practice because they conflict with deeply held internal images of how the world works, images that limit us to familiar ways of thinking and acting”.* (Senge, 1990, p. 174)

We have been interested in exploring the initiation and development of charter schools from historical, organizational theory and social capital perspectives, particularly, the circumstances leading to the start-up of such autonomous schooling organizations and the individuals who undertake such ventures. We regard the charter school concept as an example of experimentation in educational innovation, within the publicly funded school system, that might have potential for lessons and implications for innovation within the traditional public schools. We certainly do not view charter schools as “a panacea for problems in education” (Delhi, 1998, p. 32). This was, and continues to be, our agenda, plain and simple.

### **On Charter Schools**

Charter schools are defined as public, non-sectarian schools that must accept all kinds of students, cannot charge any tuition, are not permitted to have admission tests, and function under a written contract, or charter, from a local school board, or some other public organization, such as state/provincial legislature, or university (Nathan, 1996). The per-student state or provincial financial allocation follows the individual student to the respective charter school. The term charter comes from the contracts that were given to early European explorers, such as the charter received by the Hudson’s Bay Company from King Charles the Second of England in 1670.

The charter school is given autonomy in terms of its governance, curriculum and pedagogy and is held accountable on a regular basis for improved student knowledge and skill achievement. The contract is awarded for a finite period, typically 3 years, and those charter schools that demonstrate improved knowledge and skill achievement of its students are considered for renewal of their contracts. Those who do not meet the charter's expectations during the contract's period are closed. Given this conditionality of the contract, the charter school typically does not locate in a permanent structure and, quite often, it may operate in unrecognizable rented makeshift quarters, such as storefronts, community centres, and churches.

The charter school movement developed with growing parental interest in making schooling choices for their children. In the context of considerable opposition to school vouchers by educators and some politicians, on the grounds that they are individualistic and anti-communitarian (e.g., Carnoy, 1996), the charter school concept represented a compromised solution inasmuch as it was, and continues to be, an integral part of the public school system. Prior to the charter school phenomenon there had been experiments in various alternative schools to the public school, such as, magnet schools (Nathan, 1996).

The first charter school opened in 1992 in St. Paul, Minnesota pursuant to enabling legislation by the Minnesota legislature in 1991, as follows:

*Minnesota Statutes Education Code:*

*(Prekindergarten – Grade 12§ 1241 . 10. Sub 1. (1991)*

*Minnesota established charter schools as vehicles to*

*“(1) improve pupil learning;*

*(2) increase learning opportunities for pupils;*

*(3) encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods”*

*(Minnesota, 1991, 1241). 10, Sub. 1)*

Since then, the charter school concept has been operationalized in almost 4,000 schools across the United States and in about 15 in Alberta, the only province in Canada whose legislature permits the formation and operation of charter schools.

### **The Debate and the Evidence**

Sixteen years since the first charter school came into being the debate on the justification for charter schools and their efficacy in relation to their mission is in full force, polarized and politicised on both sides of the ideological spectrum. An articulated expression to this debate is found in a special 2005 issue of the American Journal of Education (AJE) (Bosetti, 2005). Philosophical and sociological arguments, on one hand, on equity and social justice and concerns about drawing resources from traditional public schools to the benefit of middle-class families and to the detriment of socio-economically and ethnically marginalized families and communities, seem to dominate the debate (e.g., Lubienski, 2005; Paquette, 2005). On the other hand, arguments are strongly voiced for the right for parental choice in a democratic liberal society in the context of a monopolistic public educational system that is struggling to meet the educational and personal needs of a

growing diverse population of children, families and communities (Coons, 2005; Kolderie, 2005).

Interestingly, in Sweden, school choice for everyone resonated with Swedish social justice values. Statistical analyses of achievement records for more than 30,000 students in independent schools - that are the Swedish equivalent of charter schools - over five years, concluded that “students in municipal schools benefit from the competition from independent schools...(which) has thus led municipal schools to improve the way in which they utilize their resources and, as a result, has raised the standard of education.” (Bergstrom & Sandstrom, 2002, p.1).

### **From Ideology to Empirical Evidence: Do charter schools fulfil their missions?**

Two sets of large- scale studies provided some considerable contradictory results. In a series of articles, based on comprehensive quantitative and qualitative data sets, Lubienski (2003; 2005) and Theule, Lubienski & Lubienski (2005) concluded that charter schools failed to fulfil the two main expectations authorized by the Minnesota legislature (similar language was used by other state legislatures): (1) improved pupil learning and (2) the use of different and innovative classroom practices.

These researchers reported that their statistical analyses of NAEP mathematics achievement scores of grade four students in 385 public schools and 222 private schools, and of grade eight students in 383 public schools and 357 private schools, demonstrated that once the SES variable was partialled out, the public schools’ scores exceeded those of the private schools, thus contradicting the prevalent belief in the “private school effect” of outscoring public schools in achievement.

Regarding the use of innovative classroom practices, Lubienski (2003), in a secondary analysis, examined classroom practices reported in a collection of 56 studies of charter schools and concluded that instead of developing new and innovative classroom practices there was a tendency to revert to the familiar.

In the context of sustainability of educational change, within and outside the public school system, Tyack & Tobin (1994) described the phenomenon of “The Grammar of Schooling”, whereby the regular structures and rules that organize the work of schooling and instruction tend to undermine the efforts and sustainability of the new and the novel. Similarly, Giles & Hargreaves (2006), based on their long-term study of three innovative schools, questioned the sustainability of innovative schools vis-à-vis the predictable “attrition of change” and the tendency of the innovative school to “...also show signs of defaulting to conventional patterns of schooling in the face of standardized reform” (124).

Charter schools, with all their bureaucratic, instructional and pedagogical freedom, are still required to administer and report on the same standardized tests as traditional public schools. One wonders to what extent these and other requirements (e.g., legislated) of the standardized reform contribute to impeding the development of innovative classroom instructional practices or to reverting to the “Grammar of

Schooling” and the “Attrition of Change” - that is, to the familiar ways of doing things - once these innovative practices were in use.

Measuring “school effects” via “gold standard” standardized tests is a common, useful, credible and convenient way of assessing student learning outcomes, particularly in mathematics, that is less sensitive to home influences, as might be the case of reading test scores, and also partialling out SES variables. As important as this indicator of learning achievement is, the question remains as to “is that all there is” to learning in the classroom and to student learning outcomes?

On the other side of the evidence controversy, Hoxby (2003; 2004) was critical of the methodology of comparative studies on “school effect” that lumped together wholesale, private schools, or all charter schools, on one hand, and public schools, on the other. Instead, she advocated the need to face the “daunting analytical challenge” by “finding students in the regular public school who are truly comparable to the charter school students”. In her studies, still cross-sectional, Hoxby used a more individualised approach of “comparing apples to apples”, by comparing a charter schools’ test scores with the same test scores from the traditional public school that the charter school’s students would most likely otherwise be attending - most likely, close by, similar in SES and racial composition. Using this methodology, and based on test results from 99 percent of the U.S.’s charter schools, Hoxby’s findings showed the charter school’s “school effect” in outscoring the counterpart traditional public school in reading as well as in mathematics. This means that students in the charter school that were studied achieved more than their counterparts in the traditional public school.

Furthermore, according to Hoxby, achievement scores were strongest for charter school students who began and continued their education there. Students’ achievement scores correlated positively with length of attending the charter school. In a further research effort to improve the comparability of the comparison groups of students, Hoxby & Rockoff (2005) began a four-year study of experimental and control randomized groups involving three charter schools in Chicago which use a lottery procedure for admission when the number of applicants exceeds the available spaces. The lotteried-in applicants constituted the experimental group while the lotteried-out applicants served as the control group. The novelty here is that all applicants were self-selected. Thus, the groups were comparable not only in demographic characteristics but also in less observable ways, such as motivation and willingness to try to secure admission to a charter school.

It appears from the above that the jury is still out on the “charter school effect”. Different research methodologies, sampling procedures, the type of charter school (Henig, Holyoke, Brown & Lacireno-Paquet, 2005) and the peculiarities, mission-orientations, diversity and complexity of contexts and school cultures and other internal characteristics of the charter school (McLaughlin, 2005) all have to be taken into consideration in assessing their academic success and overall quality of education. Let’s not allow ideology, on either side of the spectrum, to trump the evidence and the discourse.

### **School Choice and Charter Schools in Canada**

In undertaking to study charter schools, we personally experienced the almost knee-jerk, reaction expressing the view, prevalent in the academic environment, that the charter school movement undermines and erodes the hallowed institutionalized publicly funded school system - with its centralized school boards and school divisions - so deeply entrenched in the Canadian psyche and value system. Having said this, it is important to acknowledge that in spite of the Canadian adherence to the concept of universal publicly funded schools, just as it is to the public universal health care system, that we are faced here with a paradox of sorts.

A fairly recent Canadian report highlights a curious fact that there is greater school choice in Canada, generally, than in the United States (Hepburn & Robson, 2002). Only the four Atlantic Provinces offer no funding for independent or religious schools. Thus, it is possible to conclude, that overwhelmingly, the Canadian population enjoys a variety of publicly funded school choices, proportionally exceeding the extent of school choice for the United States' population. However, when it comes to charter schools we witness the reverse. How can we try to explain this apparent contradiction?

While the United States and Canada share numerous historical and institutional characteristics of elementary and secondary schools, philosophical and ideological differences between them can account for the different perceptions and attitudes toward charter schools. Several principles that differentiate the Canadian and U.S. historical contexts may shed some light on the greater propensity for the development of charter schools in the latter.

- (i) Unlike the principle of separation of church and state, in the United States, the historical two-founding-peoples concept in Canada, – French Catholics and English Protestants – allowed for the establishment of religiously affiliated school systems and parental choice in this regard, in two of the earliest and largest provinces, Ontario and Quebec. However, this arrangement excluded the freedom to choose other alternatives to the existing systems.
- (ii) The historically different status accorded to existing authority, respect for the Crown, in Canada, is in distinct contrast to the United States' fundamental value of distrust of authority. The historically rooted deferential attitude to established authority and the status quo still tends to characterize Canadian public policy in its approach to education and educational change.
- (iii) A greater propensity to use market mechanisms for experimentation in educational innovation is consistent with the more general value system of the U.S., that is centred on free enterprise, capitalism and entrepreneurship.

Notwithstanding the above comparisons regarding openness to the development of charter schools, as was noted above, even in the U.S., the birth place of charter schools, the charter school concept evokes considerable debate with strong ideological overtones by both proponents and opponents, each viewing school choice through the lens of their respective ideologies. It appears, that the concept of charter schools may connote to adherents of the traditional public school system the notions of vouchers,

choice, privatization, elitism, market-based schooling, etc., - all posing a threat to the coherence and the functioning of the existing public school system, its equity and social justice. The advocates of the charter school concept, on the other hand, not without less zeal, consider it an expression of democratic principles for parental choice, grassroots- and community-based schooling and the dispersion of power and authority in the educational domain.

In the context of a growing trend in Canada and the U.S. towards consolidation of school boards/divisions – for example, in Ontario from 129 to 72 in 1997 (Fullan & Hannay, 1998) and in Manitoba from 57 to 38 – ostensibly for efficiency and economies of scale (e.g., Fleming, 1997), and its concomitant increased centralization of authority and decision-making, the emergence and flourishing of the charter school movement represent a trend in the opposite direction. As noted above, some view charter schools as counterproductive and likely to draw away resources from the already struggling traditional public schools. While the argument for increased consolidation and centralization is that they will “...attract higher quality teachers, provide specialized staff, increase students’ curricular options, meet the need of exceptional students, and offer more and different instructional resources”. (Leithwood, 1998, p. 35), studies showed a significant inverse relationship between achievement and school board size (cited in Leithwood, 1998).

### **Centralization and Decentralization: An Organizational Perspective**

In general, in determining the design and redesign of their structures, organizations face key factors: the environment - including culture - technology, the strategy they wish to utilize and the characteristics of the human resources employed (e.g., Jones & George, 2008). Organizations must determine a balance between centralization and decentralization of authority in decision-making (Kenis & Knoke, 2002).

Given high stability of environmental components, relatively unchanging technology and routine products or service, there is no compelling need to decentralize authority and decision-making. In this situation, managers in the uppermost echelons can maintain effective control. On the other hand, in unpredictable and changing environments, such as characterize our time, where unusual needs and unanticipated problems arise and technology undergoes rapid change, upper level managers must empower those in lower levels and teams who are closer to the problem, to make important strategic decisions. This will enable the organization to continue to meet its goals and objectives, thus meeting the criteria of efficiency in the use of resources (Blau & Schoenherr, 1971; Zabochnik, 2002).

In transposing the foregoing to educational organizations, such as, school districts and consolidated school boards, the argument follows quite logically. Specifically, since environments vary considerably in terms of socio-cultural, economic, technological and historical factors, among others, schools that are incorporated in a large consolidated district are likely to be impeded from bringing about the synergies to be obtained from judiciously blending local, unique characteristics and historical background with school

redesign. That is, an organization's locus of decision-making will determine the extent to which it is mechanistic, ('tightly bureaucratic'), or organic ('loosely bureaucratic') (Burns & Stalker, 1961, p. 121).

School systems in which there needs to be much more innovation because of high diversity on ethnic, linguistic, racial and socio-economic dimensions - all of which give rise to new challenges and unanticipated need for action – would find it necessary to adopt organic control systems in order to succeed in coping with the challenges confronting them. However, the increased consolidation and centralization of school boards, mentioned above, strongly indicate that this trend is in the direction of mechanistic rather than organic structure, with the concomitant obstacles to organizational learning, meaningful communication, diversion of staff energies and resources from the primary goal of education for children and adolescents, and less likely to generate sufficient commitment to the board, board mission and to student learning. (Leithwood, 1998). In these circumstances, how could the school system adapt to meet the increased challenges of diversity to student learning and achievement?

### **Portraits of Two Charter Schools**

The following portraits were derived from a larger set of eighteen case studies, based on semi-structured interviews with key school personnel, such as directors, teachers, parents and student advisors, and document analysis, conducted in Minnesota and Alberta. All eighteen schools were mission-oriented (Henig *et al.*, 2005). Six of these schools targeted populations at risk - marginalized ethnic, linguistic, aboriginal, and dropout students. The others consisted of a wide array of specialized themes and curricula – science school, fine arts school, grade four to grade nine girls' school, school for the gifted, school for basic skills, school for personal development, four rural schools, and the like. All schools were founded and have been administered by educators, or social workers, and parents. Several of these schools developed through collaboration of a surrounding community.

Out of the eighteen charter schools that were included in our study we selected to put a "human face" on two, as illustrative of charter schools that are functioning successfully and accomplishing the respective missions that they set out to attain. Both schools demonstrate the use of social capital in that they developed and grew as integral parts of their respective communities, collaborating and reciprocating resources and benefits (Portes, 1998). More specifically, the portrait of the Minnesota New Country School (MNCS), on one hand, and that of City Academy in St. Paul, Minnesota, on the other, as presented below, illustrate two examples of how performance gains can result from melding the resources of a rural community and a marginalized community in an urban setting, respectively, with an innovative governance, pedagogy and curriculum and thriving student learners.

### ***City Academy***

In 1991, the state legislature of Minnesota began an innovative departure in the organization and governance of public education that has helped provide the impetus for change in more than forty states and in Washington, DC. In essence, the idea was that no



longer would local districts have exclusive control of education in their respective school districts. This monopolistic power was diluted by legislatively enabling members of the community, primarily parents and teachers, to develop and manage new public schools that would be less regulated than the conventional public schools and beyond any direct control of local school districts. The underlying principles of public education would still apply, that is, universal access, funding by the public purse, no discrimination based on, for example, gender, race, ethnicity, no tuition and the exclusion of teaching religion. Such schools would provide a choice for parents and students and would be accountable to the chartering agency through evaluation of achievement results.

As ‘fortune occurs to the prepared mind’, Milo Cutter, a former social worker, and a veteran teacher striving to provide innovative learning opportunities to students at the margins of the educational system, immediately grasped and acted on the long awaited opportunity provided by the enabling legislation. Thus we have seen the birth of the first charter school that opened in St. Paul, Minnesota in the fall of 1992 under the founding leadership of Milo Cutter. The mission of this grade 9-12 school is to provide individualized learning opportunities for community youth who are not enrolled in any school.

This school is located on the east side of St. Paul in a city recreation facility that had been underused, in a relatively low-income, racially diverse part of the city with many troubled families. The fact that City Academy functions in a municipal facility and that the space it utilizes is leased from the city of St. Paul, allows the school to focus its attention and energies on education rather than on school maintenance, roof leakage or pipe repair.

Milo, on meeting her, exudes an aura of pleasant confidence, passion, optimism and a strong goal orientation. Her dedicated focus on her students is readily apparent. . At City Academy, the students range in age from thirteen through twenty-one, although most are sixteen to eighteen years old. For one reason or another, the students are essentially dropouts from conventional public schools. The student mix is ethnically and racially heterogeneous and includes aboriginals, or Native Americans, African Americans, Hispanics, Asian Americans as well as European Americans.

As you walk through the spacious, high ceiling facility, you see students working individually, or in small groups, independently or with a teacher. The relatively small size of the school, as measured by the number of students, is viewed as a strength by board members. While expansion of the student body beyond about sixty students had previously been rejected, at least in part, due to the intensive focus of engaging and working with the students individually, the policy was more recently revised and the student body now stands at 120.

Interestingly, while violence has plagued some large schools, such as Columbine in Colorado, or Dawson College in Montreal, violence has not been a problem at City Academy. Interpersonal relationships within and between students and teachers appear to

be positive and productive. The small size of the student body apparently contributes to a culture characterized by listening to one another and the absence of threat.

In addition to learning reading, writing and arithmetic, every student is guided in developing a post high school graduation plan that then becomes the focus for goal setting for the individual student. Utilizing an active hands-on approach, City Academy offers in-class courses and various projects in order to meet students' goals.

Milo Cutter places a high value on the separation of tasks in managing the school. Specifically, the City Academy board develops the budget, a school finance and accounting person administers the budget and the teachers focus on educating the students. "Scientific Management" and elements of Henri Fayol's principles still resonate with relevance.

The school succeeded in developing a productive relationship with other organizations in the broader environment. For example, the then power company of the 1990s, Northern States Power (NSP) donated equipment, specifically computers, provided seed money and employed some City Academy graduates. Propelled, in part, by its location in a community facility, outreach activities in its neighbourhood have been facilitated. With external support funds, students have had the opportunity to help in the reconstruction and renovations of buildings and homes in the area for new residents. Shovelling snow for the elderly in the community is another example of positive students' interaction with the surrounding community.

Since its inception, City Academy's charter has been renewed at several intervals, the first renewal occurring in fall 1995 when the evaluators found the school had "either met or exceeded" all the "requirements and obligations" stated in the Minnesota enabling law and its charter. One conclusion that emerges from the foregoing is that City Academy's structure, organizational culture and leadership, as well as its size and location, are favourable to achieving its objectives. It is an option and an experiment worth preserving.

### ***Minnesota New Country School (MNCS)***

The Minnesota New Country School (MNCS) is located in rural Minnesota about an hour south of Minneapolis, in Henderson. Originally established in a nearby community of Le Sueur, in 1994, the school moved to a new building in Henderson that is consistent with the pedagogy of the school. With the move, the size of the school was expanded and, in addition, a satellite school was established thirty miles away, mainly serving students from an isolated religious sect culturally different from the MNCS community.

A distinctive feature of the MNCS model is that it is based on cooperative principles, which have a long and successful history in agriculture in the Upper Midwest, including Iowa, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Nebraska and the Dakotas. Dating back to the mid-nineteenth century, cooperatives were a response by farmers to the drastic economic changes that were taking place. Cooperative organizing had begun in Germany and

Denmark in the 1860s and since the Upper Midwest included a prominent number of Germans and Scandinavians, it was only natural that they would apply their experience and background in new surroundings. Furthermore, such factors, as distance from markets and shared values and experiences in a frontier environment, reinforced the commitment of these farmers to the cooperative model.

In the contemporary world, a cooperative is an economic entity, or business enterprise, that is owned and controlled by those who use its services. In addition, co-ops are characterized by (1) providing goods and services at cost; (2) the distribution of benefits proportional to use; (3) one-member one vote stipulation in decision-making; (4) a limited return on ownership.

The above description of the co-op and its features serves to shed light on the efforts made by MNCS to effect a shift in the role of the teacher from employee-worker to owner. Viewed against the background of severe economic and socio-cultural changes that had taken place in the area, specifically, the loss of the Green Giant food company along with the loss of managerial families, the cooperative model applied to school structure, culture and governance was appealing. In addition, the prospect of Le Sueur schools being consolidated with an adjacent district was not viewed favourably.

While MNCS was officially granted the school's charter, the entire educational program of the school was outsourced to a cooperative of local educators, EdVisions Cooperative. Doug and Dee Thomas, along with others, were the founders of MNCS, and the Le Sueur-Henderson school board chartered it in November 1993. The school opened in the fall of 1994 as a school of sixty-five students, in grades seven through twelve, and has grown to 118 as of 2007.

The EdVisions Co-op continues to function and it now provides educational services to a number of other schools. The Co-op conceptualizes, designs and implements the total educational program, hires and evaluates the teachers (known as advisers), engages in budget planning and assumes responsibility for all of MNCS's daily operations. The structure of MNCS was designed to provide teachers with a unique role as professionals, entrepreneurs and owners of their work.

MNCS is a fine example of a charter school that is structured on co-operative organizing that informs and impacts classroom life and the entire educational experience. The physical building at Henderson, opened in 1998. The heart of the school consists of one large, cavernous, high ceiling, spacious and open room with numerous activity areas that allow a flexible flow and movement. The appearance of the room seems to reflect the educational philosophy of the school founders and a sense of ownership radiates from both the teachers and the students. This room is filled with "white noise" that results from the numerous activities being undertaken by students on an individual or group basis. It is readily evident that students and teachers are comfortable in their interpersonal relations, hierarchical levels are reduced, and even flattened, and the implementation of the job characteristics model is apparent (Hackman & Oldham, 1980). Pedagogical practices focus on the intrinsic motivation of each student as an individual rather than on

standardized, mindless techniques applied to students conceptualized as interchangeable parts of a vast machine.

Project-based work is clearly evident as is the use of computers for purposeful activity in relation to standards and expectations. During our first visit, one independent study project focused on the Holocaust and clearly involved a considerable measure of library and internet research, characterized by historical depth and personal engagement of the student in her subject matter. The project was posted in a coherent flow on the surrounding classroom walls. It was highly informative, in terms of the facts presented, from the Nuremberg War Criminal Trials and numerous materials from the public press.

The single open classroom seems well suited to this form of learning as both levels of students (level 1 grades – seven through nine- and level 2 grades – ten through twelve) can experience and benefit from the study projects of their peers.

The board of directors of MNCS consists of a majority of teachers and the other members are parents of current students. Duties and responsibilities of the board relate to overseeing the school's general operations rather than conventional school board functions of employer and manager of day-to-day operations. It is EdVisions Co-op that is mandated to design and manage the educational program, and the board regularly evaluates the results of that contractual relationship.

MNCS demonstrates that a charter school has the potential to be successful and innovative in structure, governance and pedagogical practices. Given a sufficient threshold of student motivation, MNCS acts as a coach, adviser and facilitator. Benchmarks are set out in eight basic areas: communication, the arts, earth systems, citizenship, mathematics, technology, personal management and life-long learning. In addition, a skill rubric for students and teachers consist of (a) basic skills, such as, reading, writing, mathematics and communication; (b) thinking skills, including creative thinking, problem solving, task completion, and contexts; (c) personal qualities, including responsibility and respect; (d) managing resources, including time and information management. (e) interpersonal skills, including team membership and service and ownership.

One of MNCS's main partnerships is with EdVisions Co-op which received a Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation grant to provide it with the resources to create and disseminate the MNCS model as a prototype across Minnesota, and to sustain a national network of thirty five small, personalized secondary schools in urban, suburban and rural communities that replicate the design essentials of MNCS.

In 2006 MNCS was recognized by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Innovation and Improvement as one of only eight schools from more than four hundred charter secondary schools across the U.S. that are meeting achievement goals under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), and recognized for achieving remarkable success, particularly with traditionally underserved populations.

## About the Authors

**Dr. Marvin Bartell** is a professor of organizational theory at the University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Canada. He received his B.A. (Hons.) in Economics and Political Science from McGill University, M.B.A in Finance and Economics from the Graduate School of Business, University of Chicago and Ph.D. from the Kellogg Graduate School of Management, Northwestern University. His current research interest is in innovation and resilience in educational organizations and the internalization of universities.

**Dr. Riva Bartell** is a professor of counseling and school psychology at the University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba. Her Ph.D. is from the University of Chicago. She is a registered psychologist with extensive clinical practice. Her recent research interests are in school innovation and resilience and developmental patterns of self-efficacy. Her clinical interests are in family systems dynamics, attachment and intimacy.

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