

The NDP's curriculum plan revealed?

By John Hilton O'Brien, 11 February 2023

We've heard a lot about the Alberta K-6 curriculum reform over the last two years.

The attacks have been relentless. Opponents, led by the Alberta Teachers' Association and the New Democratic Party, accused it of plagiarism, "whitewashing," and being just a "list of facts to memorize."

At the same time, the NDP has been very cagey about its own plans for the curriculum. The only item on their official website is a measure to develop Filipino language curriculum "for interested schools."

Last summer, however, the NDP held an event on "[The Future of Public Education](#)" in Calgary Northeast, with Education Critic Sarah Hoffman. In the event page — now buried deep on the NDP website — they tell us what they think a "PROPER, [sic] modern curriculum is."

It's a vision that has dire consequences for education.

Here's the agenda, as it appears on the NDP website:

"And our children will have a PROPER, modern curriculum, one that ACTUALLY prepares them for their future."

"One that teaches them about climate change, gender equality, poverty reduction, anti-racism AND the history of residential schools — something they will start to learn in kindergarten, because we know that's what is

needed to walk the path towards Truth and Reconciliation."

"We will do all of this for our K-12 schools and more."

A couple of years ago, we wrote a blog post suggesting the principle differences between UCP and NDP visions of curriculum was primarily about the difference between "knowledge-based" and "skills-based" curricula. Much of the rest of the conflict was about whether the teachers' union had the right to dictate the curriculum (they think so) and the position of education as an academic discipline.

The curriculum position described by the NDP event is not about skills. If implemented, nobody will develop the critical skills to critique historical narratives or the experimental laboratory skills to challenge scientific orthodoxy. Instead, they will have to memorize a list of "facts" that will be unassailable — perhaps as 'settled science.' Anyone who disagrees with the teachers' conclusions about "climate change, gender equality, poverty reduction, anti-racism AND the history of residential schools," may be labeled a homophobe, TERF, or racist — and shunned.

The fact those appearing at the forum think that this "ACTUALLY prepares them for the future" is terrifying. What kind of Orwellian future are we talking about?

It is a vision of a joyless classroom where children do daily penance for

the sins of anthropogenic climate change, racism, poverty, and the suffering of sexual and gender minorities. Celebration of cultural heroes from Charlemagne to Sir John A. Macdonald will be forbidden as colonialism. Dogmas of sexuality will be preached, to which children must pledge allegiance — even if they contradict observable facts.

This vision of the curriculum is also harmful to the faculties of education. Education academics have long preferred the skills-based approach, as it tends to maintain the priority of the professional faculty over the arts and science faculties that deal in the content teachers are supposed to pass on. Here however, we see the conclusions of specific non-education disciplines trump the professional subject-expert teachers' right to teach the skills that go into evaluating such claims for oneself. Professional skills are irrelevant: opinion orthodoxy is everything.

Hopefully, this is all a mistake. The NDP can tell us this post really was the product of the local NDP candidate, Gurinder Brar. They can disavow his remarks. We certainly hope that they do.

However, the NDP owe us all an explanation.

What, really is their intention for the curriculum? We cannot afford to let them say that they will develop a plan "by collaborating with stakeholders." Their public statement has made it

apparent that they have an agenda before development begins.

“Trust us, we support teachers” is not an argument they can make any more.

They need to make it very clear what their real agenda is.

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