Introduction

This paper serves to weave together several troubling features of today’s Canadian democracy – elements such as recent policy directions, polling data that reveals surging distrust of our politicians, the growing gap between rich and poor with a companion hollowing out of the middle class, the erosion of civic virtues, and the social identity of our political leadership – and emerges with an assertion of the growing disjuncture of our political leadership with majority society. Many solutions already populate the literature – this author seeks to add one more, namely pedagogy for the privileged. The field of adult education has begun to articulate such pedagogy that aims for the transformation of the privileged towards an understanding of their privilege and the building of companion commitment to the common good, or in other words, to build one’s civic virtues. The paper concludes with findings from my research in this area and profiles both the hopes and skepticism of such an initiative.

The Democratic Deficit of our Political Leadership

The companion fields of participatory democracy and citizenship learning inform this study, where an array of theorists reflect on centuries of practice in how to build a democracy that works for everyone. While a variety of democracy projects have met with success, there are ongoing dilemmas that relate to issues of power – and how dominance and marginalization serve to unbalance and distort the effects of these projects. Our experiences of democracy have been far from inclusive. While most espouse the significance of the Athenian polis – with its 20% involvement rate – the experiences of old excluded vast numbers of the population, namely women and slaves. Continuing through the ages, democracies continued to exclude large populations, such as Jews, non-land owners, lower castes, people of colour and immigrants. In Canada’s recent history, some women received the vote in 1918 but it took until 1963 and the *Universal Right to
Vote legislation for it to be guaranteed to all women. Aboriginal Canadians achieved the vote in 1960.

The significance of these broad class exclusions is one of power and privilege – that certain holders of power were able to create and sustain a political system that reflected only certain voices and over-represented their interests. While today formal restrictions on participation apply only to non-citizens and the incarcerated, the issue of power and privilege is far from over. From a feminist lens, Jones (1998) assesses that gender issues within citizenship debates has been to “try to fit women’s behavior into the empty spaces of political science scholarship…[leaving] unchallenged the adequacy of the traditional categories of political analysis” (p.231). Women’s issues have been locked out, pressing from the outside wanting to be heard in the corridors of power, and being left to bear the brunt of insensitive and inappropriate legislation, including divorce settlement policies, violence against women funding decisions, and labour force segregation.

Despite the commonly held belief that women have achieved equality with men, the political arena reveals this to be merely a myth1. In mid-2003, women make up only 22% of Federal members of parliament, 17% of Ontario’s members of provincial parliament and 30% of Toronto’s city councilors. Only 12% of mayors across Ontario are women (Heineck, 2003). For racialized women, we witness even slower progress. In the 1970s, our first black and aboriginal women are elected to a legislature (Rosemary Brown and Eleanor Millard, respectively). It takes another two decades for them to make it to cabinet, with Zanana Akande taking that position in Ontario (Sawer & Trimble, 2003).

Despite appearances that the problem is one of political representation, enhanced participation by women and other minorities is not the preferred path of action. Jones (1998) espouses that the problem needs not to be resolved through drawing women into participation. This is echoed by Rebick (2000) who notes: “Feminists often talk about how a critical mass of women is necessary to transform the political process and make it

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1 I have chosen to focus on political inequality for this paper. Obviously, inequality exists at other levels – namely economic, social and cultural. Each render the problem of the democratic deficit more pressing.
more attuned to the concerns of women. But my experience tells me that unless the political structures are changed, any women we manage to elect will be sucked up into the power elite and begin behaving very much like their male colleagues” (p.74).

Returning to Jones, she recognizes that the fault lies in a system of citizenship that has explicitly and implicitly privileged men (p.221) and continues to “privilege elite men’s behaviors and norms” (p.222). We must look for solutions that will address the power holders in society, for gains made by the bottom are at grave risk of cooptation and dismantling, as the failure to yield power at the top occurs despite the “veneer of public legitimacy” (Abers, 2000:10). For this reason, dialogue groups such as those used by Shulman and others are likely to generate change in governing relations. As concluded by Rebick (2000:86), “real active citizenship would have to involve real decision-making power. It cannot just be an add-on to a bureaucratic, hierarchical system. It has to change the system.”

While Young (1990) advocates for bringing marginalized voices to the table through guaranteed representation in various political bodies, it is embedded in her set of recommended reforms called “differentiated citizenship” that also includes public funding for lobby groups (representing marginalized interests) and veto rights for marginalized groups on policies that directly affect them. Young’s platform is a response to the excessive power that is held by those with political influence and decision-making power. While such an initiative holds potential for reform, it frames the solution of the powerful needing to be counter-balanced by power being given to marginalized groups. What is missing is an avenue to deal with the power of the elites and their inappropriate entitlements. Jones argues for the need to conduct thorough research to properly understand how social identities serve to “structure the space of politics and pattern alliances within and between certain groups” (p.233). It is anticipated that such research would provide evidence of the excessive links among elite groups and comparatively few across identity divides, particularly those of race and class.

Given that the authority to hire and appoint has been in the hands of privileged white men for so long, it can thus be asserted that the problem is not with the emancipatory status of
marginalized groups, but rather with the status quo of the privileged. Jones (1998) identified this barrier as the “need to eradicate the psychological barriers to women’s full inclusion in public life” (p.229). While the context of these comments are the barriers that women hold within themselves, they are more significantly located within men (and other privileged groups such as whites and upper classes).

This emerging perspective on privilege forms the base for this paper, and other works by this author. The barriers to social justice, equality and equity are more firmly rooted in the social and psychological identity of the privileged than they are in the marginalized groups, and their failure to seize power. Furthermore, this dynamic is contributing to the serious destabilizing impact on our representative democracy. It is not, as asserted by Pateman (1970), a natural outcome of “fragile” democratic systems (with the fault thus being the structure of the systems themselves) but rather a distortion induced by class conflict and other forms of conflict that distort and even preclude effective democracy.

The Trust Deficit

Consider the landscape today. Trust in government has been shrinking over the last 35 years (since such polling began). The EKOS survey, *Canadian and American National Election Studies* uncovered the answer to the following question: “How much do you trust the government in Ottawa to do what is right?” The answer was resoundingly poor – falling from a high of 57% (answering “just about always/most of the time”) in 1968 to a level of just 27% in May 2002. And the ever-popular Ipsos-Reid *Canada Trust Survey* was repeated in 2003, revealing that the trust Canadians place in the federal politicians ranks last of a list of 26 professions – even car salespeople rank one position higher at 25th. Local politicians score no better, as they take the 24th spot. Those who score higher include pharmacists (1st), doctors (2nd), teachers (4th), the police (5th), charitable organizations (9th), religious institutions (14th), lawyers (18th), journalists (19th), trade unions (21st) and CEOs (22nd). Emerging is a growing crisis in the reputation of our political leadership.

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2 This survey also inquired about the behaviors and attitudes that are most valued components of trust. These include honesty, integrity and reliability.
Further evidence of this dramatic change is revealed in the EKOS survey, as it articulates the shrinking importance of the public interest. The following question was posed: “When the federal government makes decision, whose interests do you think are given the greatest importance?” From 1998 to 2002, the public interest shrank from 18% of the population to 16%, while the combined importance of “the interest of politicians and their friends” and “the interest of big business” rose from 60% to 67% in just 4 years.

In evidence is growing distrust in politicians and rising evidence of concern with the interests of big business. In tandem, these trends displace the importance of the public interest.

**Evidence of Power Shifts**

What has caused this transition? Many attribute it to the organized campaign of right-wing corporate leaders to withdraw their support for the welfare state, and launch an offensive on government policy and civic attitudes that would result in greater stability and profits for their livelihoods. This campaign began in the 1970s with the Trilateral Commission (in 1973) that profiled raising expectations in labour as a function of “an excess of democracy.” That gathering continued to build social and economic power over the next 25 years. The following are considered its landmarks: the creation of neo-conservative economic thinking (Milton Friedman and the Chicago School as its prime catalysts), conservative think tanks (the Fraser Institute in 1969 and the C.D. Howe Institute in 1974), corporate lobby groups (the Business Council on National Issues in 1977) and culminating in the election of major conservative politicians (Mulroney in 1984, following Thatcher and Reagan in 1979 and 80, respectively). Conservative policy outcomes shortly followed and, by the turn of the century, the social safety net had been shredded.

But these were not even a fraction of its accomplishments. The most significant achievements have been in the manner in which neo-liberal ideology has entrenched public consciousness, with companion attitudes of rugged individualism, a laissez-faire
attitude towards those in need, rising significance of deficit reduction and balanced budgets (regardless of the point within an economic cycle), hostility against all forms of affirmative action programs, and even hostility against government itself.

Yet it can be asserted that there are embedded inconsistencies within the public on many of these issues. Despite the earlier support for tax cuts, the public is mightily sure that it does not want tax cuts at the expense of health care, education or, even, supports for the poor. In Ontario in 2003, we rejected the Conservative party’s mantra of tax cuts, as the outcomes of social spending cuts were felt well into the middle class. Yet, this legacy has taken its toll on our perspectives of governance. This is best evidenced in the earlier data that shows rapid deterioration of trust in our politicians and faith in our governments to act in the public interest. It is imperative that we not be detracted by the complaints of an apathetic public.\(^3\) This is asserted despite the profile that leading scholars Kymlicka and Norman (1994) give to declining voter turnout as the cause of the democratic deficit. The query raised in their research: “How should the state generate responsibility?” needs to be reframed as: “How can we expect responsible citizenship when our political leadership is failing to exhibit high moral and ethical standards?”

We can and must keep our lens focused on the political leadership for it is evoking the declining public trust of which low voter turnout is only a symptom.

**Erosion of Civic Virtues**

The crisis can best be conceptualized as an absence of civic virtues within our political leadership\(^4\). Civic virtues, when joined with learning about how to participate in the democratic structures (also called status learning), form the foundation for citizenship learning that is addressed within the literature. The various forms of status learning, such as the rights and responsibilities that citizens hold, the constitution, laws and policies that exist today and the full slate of geographic, political and historical facts of the nation will

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\(^3\) Even this concept has been de-legitimized by Burt (2002:238) as having been derived from Milbraith’s concept of “apathetics” as ill-founded and insufficiently supported by the research.

\(^4\) Political leadership is the chosen term for this paper as it denotes both our elected officials and those senior bureaucrats, including policy advisors who make up the political decision-makers in Canada.
not be addressed within this paper. It is the civic virtues side of the learning that is directly relevant to the behavior and attitudes of our political leadership. This paper is also not about civic learning as applied to the average citizen (which most of the civic virtues literature addresses) and it is not about the role that schools play in such learning (as, at this juncture in time, we need to educate those already holding leadership positions – and it is too late to use schools to address their learning needs).

Civic learning typically encompasses the values and behaviors expected from good citizens. While the range of such behaviors runs from obedience to critical engagement (Schugurensky, 2003), the specific values addressed in this paper center on those virtues that are connected to these three features:

a. Transcending one’s narrow self-interest and broadening concerns to the common good.

b. Becoming aware of power issues and how they are evidenced throughout society, with a particular focus on one’s own role and complicity in upholding systems of dominance. This concept is sometimes referred to as “critical thinking.”

c. That specific values form the benchmarks for the good citizen. Typically these include empathy for others, tolerance of difference, commitment to inclusive democracies, and courage to act in concert with these values. Acting on these values becomes the responsibility of citizenship.

Civic Learning & Civic Virtues – Connecting to the Literature

Starting with Aristotle, the value of civic behavior that was altruistic was deemed critical for a healthy democracy. This has continued as a theme in citizenship learning. Generally speaking, however, democracy theorists have focused their attention on how to catalyze the political involvement of its majority population (Pateman, 1970; Kymlicka and

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5 The author’s understanding of critical thinking is connected to critical theory – whereby we consider issues of power and dominance and the effect of power asymmetries on the current situation. I do not intend for critical thinking to be understood in its more limited meaning – that of the ability to see the links between different issues and layers of analysis.

6 Such values are identified and expanded upon by Westheimer (1999) in his denotation of the “justice-oriented citizen” (p.7).
Norman (1994) but it is in fact a hollow aim when our political leadership are, as posited by Hobgood (2000:14), “moral pygmies.”

Heater (2002) highlights that the history of civic education has been a site for the debates and power clashes between conservatives and liberals (or, right and left). This is illustrated in the shifting priorities of rights and responsibilities, as well as the role that public and private interests take in the citizenship debates. Citing the European Union’s new work on civic learning, we find that in this context a broad commitment to the common good is emerging. Canada also reflects this commitment, including several common good types of values such as “care for…the environment” and “respect the rights and freedoms of others.” It concludes with: “to eliminate discrimination and injustice,” adding impetus to this call for building civic virtues so as to facilitate investment in the common good.

Regarding the debates on rights and responsibilities, and their connection to left and right politics, it is necessary to recognize that democracy’s failure to provide for the human rights of all its citizens (namely basic needs such as safety, security, education, health care, adequate work and fair treatment – and others formulated within the Universal Declaration of Human Rights). It is this failure that generates additional impetus for remedy of the democratic deficit in our political leadership.

**Understanding the Socialization of the Privileged – Theory and Evidence**

As a decision-making body, today’s political leaders have mostly shown themselves to be seriously out-of-step with the majority of the population. To explore the causes of this destabilizing dynamic, we need to turn to theory drawn from the study of privilege. Hobgood (2000) asserts that there is a natural process in play for the privileged whereby their separation (socially and economically) from majority population leads to an ignorance that stems from their lack of contact with the lived realities of the average and more vulnerable citizens. This ignorance, in time, leads to an arrogance that stems from assuming that the world works for the majority in much the same way that it works for the privileged.
Asserting this to be a natural process of alienation, Hobgood thus calls on us to problematize the world of privilege. It is they who are out-of-touch and suffering the effects of social exclusion (Curry-Stevens, 2004), not the majority world that lies below them. The gravely serious arrogance that is bred unfolds as follows: the privileged person looks at the lived reality of the less privileged and assumes that the world works for others the way it works for themselves.7 The reality is, in fact, contrary to this logic. They assume that if they lived their lives as poor, blue-collar, racialized, immigrant or as woman, that they would achieve mostly the same accomplishments as they have as white, male and upper class. What they do not realize is that nothing would be the same. Most of them would not have gotten off the starting plate. As encapsulated by Hatfield (2002), when discussing George Bush Junior, “He’s one of those guys who was born on third base and thinks he hit a triple” (p.53).

Such beliefs infuse the privileged with arrogance and lead them to policy decisions that belie the seriousness of their isolation. Recall the following, and consider whose interests are addressed and whose are deemed irrelevant:

- When, in Ontario, welfare rates are cut by 21.6%.
- When, nationally, income tax brackets are cut from 10 to 3, with the top levels coming down and the bottom going up.
- When, nationally, the prohibition of workfare is abolished allowing provinces to introduce work in exchange for welfare benefits.
- When, in British Columbia, people are about to be thrown off welfare permanently for needing it too much.
- When, nationally, the national social and cooperative housing program is abolished.
- When, in Ontario, minimum wage rates are frozen for the entire two-term duration of the Conservative rule.

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7 In most situations, I label myself as privileged and the analysis that I apply to the privileged I apply to “us” or “me.” I do not do so in this paper as it is focusing on the political leadership of Canada, of which I am not a member. I do, however, want the reader to understand that Hobgood’s analysis is one that I find concurrent with my own experience of privilege. It is not a framework that I am applying on “them,” but rather one that I apply to myself as well.
• When, in Ontario, the regulation of hours of care (of a minimum of 2½ hours per day) for our aging parents in nursing homes was abolished.

• When, in Ontario, seven people died from drinking tainted water, leading many to not trust the water supply coming from our taps, a problem stemming from the privatization schemes being seen across the country.

• When, in Toronto, the actions of councilors embarrass the nation – as former Mayor Mel Lastman makes racist statements and allege African cannibalism, and later to be seen as only one part of a larger hotbed of intolerance and white racial arrogance among more councilors.

• When, in Toronto and elsewhere in Canada, top level bureaucrats and some politicians are implicated in corruption scandals that had served to, at the very least, generate travel and entertainment activities as “gifted” by corporations.

Stanford (1999) profiles the disjuncture between the federal government’s policy landscape and the common good, accomplishing this through identification of the pro-business policy changes that were implemented between 1980 and 1997. Details of the pro-business agenda cover the macroeconomic environment (such as the abandonment of full employment strategies), the role of government in the economy (such as deregulation, privatization and downsizing), international trade (such as NAFTA), taxes (such as lowering corporate tax rate from 36% to 28%) and labour relations (such as the erosion of unemployment coverage from 85% to 40% of eligible workers).

Features of this pro-business landscape are its profound impact on economic inequality. All measure of market incomes (what we earn from the labour market) show that Canadians are a much more deeply divided country over the last two decades (Curry-Stevens, 2004 and 2001; Yalnizyan 1998) regardless of whether we are measuring Canadian families or individuals, whether we are measuring them through deciles or quintiles (10% or 20% slices of the population) and whether we are measuring their population distribution within certain income groups. The most pressing data can be summarized as follows: the gap between the rich and the poor has gone from double digits in the 1980s to triple digits by the turn of the century, meaning that the richest earn
at least a ten-fold more in income than the poorest over the last generation. There are significantly more struggling poor and companion erosion of the middle class, with those earning between $30,000 and $60,000 shrinking by 21% from 1980 to 2001 (Curry-Stevens 2004). While this evidence indicators of rising inequality has been attributed to a failure of the market to deliver on promises of decent jobs at decent wages (except for those at the top of the income ladder where it has performed very well), it can also be understood as an indicator of the failure of the pro-business agenda that our political leadership has embraced. It is not a far reach to the next assertion – that it is the shrinking importance of civic virtues as embodied in our political leadership that has precipitated this failure.

The Role of Those Governed
To a large extent, our electorate mostly continues to support such attacks on our social fabric, and to vote against their class interests. As McLaren (2003) quotes Gore Vidal, “the genius of our system is that ordinary people go out and vote against their class interests. The way our ruling class stays out of sight is one of the greatest stunts in the political history of any country” (p.79). Rebick (2000) faults the left with this disjuncture: “Unless the left comes up with better proposals than simply reinstating the social programs we have lost, the overwhelming public presence of the right will once again pressure government to do what’s wrong” (p.6). She further reflects: “As a leader, Harris [former Premier of Ontario] appeals to the worst in people. It’s an ‘us-against-them’ mind-set: hard-working, taxpaying citizens against welfare bums…the polarization is deep… the cleavages are between those with power and those without” (p.6).

Any apparent disjuncture between these authors can be resolved through an understanding of hegemony – the process whereby the marginalized and exploited agree to their domination, achieved through a set of cultural norms and values that leaves the unsuccessful blaming themselves for their lack of achievement rather than the elites who continue to exploit them (Gramsci, 1971). This lack of agency of the less privileged is not cited to elicit blame but rather to point us toward the urgency of reducing the isolation of our political leadership.
So while the issue is fundamentally about power imbalances, the lower classes are relatively willing supporters of the class structure, which is an essential (even if subconscious) element of ruling relations. A large body of literature on this topic exists within citizenship learning – as the “hidden curriculum” is manifested throughout our school systems.

**Social Exclusion of the Political Leadership**

Such policies reflect the isolation of the privileged from majority population as well as the growing emphasis that corporate and self-interests hold in their priorities. This is the time to question, as many are doing since corporate CEO Paul Martin become head of the country, whether business savvy equals good political leadership. Evidence of his isolation from majority society is seen with his pressing ahead with large tax cuts for corporations – while espousing the difficulty he is having in finding sufficient dollars for health care highlights the dilemma of unacknowledged privilege. Olive (2003) surfaces evidence of this troubling alliance between our Prime Minister and the corporate world: “With decisions of national import weighing upon him, Martin nonetheless finds the time to continue hitting up corporations and other deep-pocketed donors at a furious pace, with the goal of swelling the party coffers before corporate political donations are outlawed in January. So much for the spirit of the legislation.” Hobgood further addresses this disjuncture: “We become further isolated when others see us as moral pygmies because, in order to deny preferential treatment, we resist fundamental questions of politics and ethics” (p.14).

**Flyvbjerg’s Treatment of Habermas and Foucault**

Power analysis is similarly at root of Flyvbjerg (1998) as he profiles the contributions of Habermas and Foucault in their perspectives on democratic participation. Their materials relate more directly to the participation of the average or marginalized citizen rather than that of the political leadership but the material is directly relevant to these privileged political elite. Foucault addresses the issue of power more directly than Habermas – and

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8 “We” in Hobgood’s language, refers to the privileged.
in Flyvbjerg’s assessment, Habermas simply falls down in his failure to remedy his theory with a recognition of the power imbalance in political activity. In a well-recognized quote from Foucault, “power is always present,” leading Flyvbjerg to assert, “it is therefore meaningless… to operate with a concept of communication in which power is absent” (p.194).

Yet before we discard Habermas’s attempts to create a universal theory for decision-making, let us review his contributions. Within his five preconditions for successful deliberation, Habermas recognizes the need for equalizing the power of the participants:

- No affected party is to be excluded by the process.
- The participants must be willing and able to empathize with each other’s validity claims.
- Equal possibility to present and critique the validity claims.
- Existing power differences must be neutralized.
- There must be transparency of process (Flyvbjerg, 1998:188)

Habermas, in his articulation of the ideal speech situation, is typically assessed to be too disjointed from a realistic understanding of the depth and breadth of power issues. Certainly it is hard to imagine that these conditions could ever be met, when one understands the pervasiveness of power issues. Yet, when we view his conditions through a lens that is concerned with the privilege of our political leadership, we can understand how privilege distorts the possibility of coming to agreement. What if these distortions could be modified? For all its idealism and visionary sophistication, Habermas’ theory could be realized through pedagogy for the privileged – for if the privileged could build an analysis of their own subject position, and could problematize their privilege, as it applies to the depth and breath of the issues at hand, and reorient their interests towards the common good, they could come to the table as equals. Habermas offers up a framework for placing adversaries at the table to resolve differences. Habermas holds forth the values around such participation, once transformation has occurred.
Thus indicated, the real problem is not that the lower classes (and immigrants, the racialized and the women) are apathetic but that the politicians and bureaucrats have become isolated from the average person. The problem, essentially, is one of privilege. Where does this lead us? It compels us to examine the elites and the vehicles through which their power could be reined in, and to have their excessive alliance to other elites and to corporate power replaced with alliance to the common good and to public interest. Recognizing that we can’t undo whiteness, place of birth, gender or a heritage of income security and access to the corridors of power, we can examine our available tools to facilitate their integration into mainstream society. This is where pedagogy for the privilege offers considerable hope, as it is intentionally a pedagogy that aims for the transformation of the privileged, so that they can work for the common good.

The Ethical Dilemma

As one reviews this body of writing, a nagging doubt will likely surface as to the premise that there is something wrong with these privileged individuals that the educator can fix. Hopefully, the arguments convince the reader that the common good has been sacrificed by the compromised abilities and virtues of our political leadership. While there is nothing defective in these individuals, it is worthy to note that they have undergone a socialization process common to privilege – these are not malicious nor bad people. It is the nature of the socialization of their privilege that has rendered them isolated, ignorant and arrogant (Hobgood, 2000).

Criticism can stem from the remedy – one of re-molding the values of our political leadership so they can better act for the common good. This can be construed as “indoctrination” (Heater, 1999:165). Schugurensky (2000) also treats this subject in a

9 While it is asserted that the problem of privilege extends to our political leadership, it is noted that there are exceptions to the standard. One way of explaining the exceptions is simply that they are exceptions to the standard. The socialization process does create this embodied privilege, acting in narrow self-interest and highly vulnerable to the interests of other elites, most problematically the corporate elite. Some that are born privileged do buck this trend – as either children whose parents consistently raise them with alternate values or as adults who have intentionally sought non-mainstream experiences, such as service experiences, international solidarity or solidarity with marginalized populations. Such experiences would serve as protective factors against the more mainstream socialization.
similar context, that of popular educators who claim to have a critical consciousness while that of the learner is, by extension, a naïve consciousness, needing development.

My research has uncovered similar tensions among educators engaged in pedagogy for the privileged. They encounter some discomfort within themselves as they feel the arrogance that is bred by having a better or more comprehensive, worldview. Pedagogically, this ethical dilemma has been softened when they have decided to offer up their analysis (or critical thinking) as an invitation and an option to understand the world – rather than a dictum. In my own practice, I invite participants to try on another way of looking at the world, and to suspend their disbelief, and they will be free to choose to ignore or integrate these offerings at the close of the sessions. I further premise that they are being asked to consider how their social identity has shaped their life’s achievements, as well as the way they walk through the world. It is suggested that their experience has more to do with their social identity than they had likely been previously willing to consider.

This strategy\(^\text{10}\) of inviting the learners to an alternate analysis is similar to strategies used by other educators. It is the primary avenue through which educators reconcile the ethical dilemma of “indoctrinating” the learner to a better way of seeing the world.

**Solutions – Pedagogy for the Privileged & Companion Policies**

There are four key elements to rebuilding the trust of our political leadership and their capacity to act for the common good. The first is pedagogy for the privileged and the following three are the companion policies that strengthen the possibility for its success. They are:

1. Pedagogy for the Privileged – educational program that serves to bring awareness to the unexamined privilege housed in our political leaders. Such examination will

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\(^{10}\) I have chosen to frame this a strategy although it is actually more reflective of a desire for integrity on behalf of the educators. The most reflective educators are voicing an awareness of the shortcomings of even their own critical analysis. Observed is its inability to provide decent direction to marginalized groups striving for change – as it generates a strong sense of helplessness as individual agency seems insufficient to create change. Similarly, it provides little direction for how to create new democracies and better direction for how groups can build collective power for resistance.
evoke a transformation of understanding and a commitment to a new worldview, one that is congruent with civic virtues and trustworthy leadership11.

2. Getting Money Out of Politics – In order to free up our political leadership from the excessive influence of corporate elite interests, we must get rid of corporate donations to political campaigns as well as evoking greater controls over the lobbying activity of well-financed corporations12.

3. Special Initiatives to ensure attention and power for marginalized groups – required until we have faith in the conversion of our political leadership. These initiatives need to include those raised by Young (1990) including funding for the lobby groups of the marginalized and special initiatives that would require power to be allocated to such groups or such processes that included these groups.

4. Transparency and Accountability of those holding public office – As a remedy for the absence of trust in our officials, we need to ensure that their decisions and the reasons behind them are a matter of public knowledge. As noted by Gaventa and Valderrama (1999), accountability to the citizenry is a critical element of building effective democracies. Through avenues such as report cards or accountability sessions (Moore Lappe and DuBois, 1994), we can promote direct dialogue between officials and citizens and build the expectation that officials are accountable to the electorate. The dismally low expectation of elected officials being held accountable only during elections needs to be raised.

The first necessary companion component in renewing the civic virtues in our political leadership is to de-link corporate donations from political campaigns and also undo the

11 Of note, only one article was uncovered in the literature that spoke of educating and sensitizing our political leadership. This was Gaventa and Valderrama (1999) and their suggestions were limited to training them to listen to their electorate, and become invested in participatory approaches. The potential for transformative education was not considered.

12 The lobbying activities of NGOs is not deemed to be a distortion of the democratic process as it typically brings forward issues of the marginalized or the environment, which actually may serve as a healthy counterbalance the existing excessive influence of corporations. Right wing lobby groups such as the Canadian Council of National Executives or the think tanks such as the Fraser Institute serve to do not serve this function, as they advocate for policy reform that is outside of the interests of the common good (even though they may wrap it up in such packaging). Surging economic polarity provides evidence of their existing “effectiveness” on the policy landscape and how its overall impact is outside that of the common good.
excessive influence of corporate lobbyists in political decisions. The “clean campaign” initiative of former Prime Minister Chretien (and referenced above) will assist this goal. Without such initiatives it will remain impossible to build the civic virtues of our political leaders as their interests are unduly influenced by the self-interest of corporations. It is interesting to note that the logo for Toronto mayor, David Miller’s campaign is a broom. This not so subtle innuendo of the “dirtiness” of city hall points to the need to clean up at all levels of government.

One of the questions that emerge is whether change, instituted from the top, is a promising vehicle for change (as opposed to grassroots-generated change). Abers (2000) asserts that, while counter-intuitive, top-down change has been responsible for the successful participatory budget process in Porto Alegre, Brazil. While it is an immensely grassroots-embedded form of change, the initiative was rooted in the Workers Party which began it as an experiment and now involves 18% of the population. The process has been vulnerable to three significant and pervasive difficulties – namely cooptation, inequality and implementation (Abers, 2000). It is possible, indeed likely, that pedagogy of the privilege could reduce the severity of each barrier, particularly cooptation and inequality, thus providing support for participatory democracy initiatives that are currently vulnerable to these realities.

**Pedagogy for the Privileged**

“Privilege and oppression do not simply co-exist side by side. Rather, the suffering and unearned disadvantage of subordinate groups are the foundation for the privileges of dominant groups” (Hobgood, 2000:16)

Pedagogy for the privileged is an emerging form of adult education that is aimed at the transformation of individuals with privileged identities (white, upper class and/or male) into allies for the promotion of social justice. In linking this pedagogy to the field of citizenship learning, pedagogy for the privileged will build awareness to one’s own

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13 For excellent ideas, visit the Democracy Watch website which has a lengthy history of building pragmatic solutions to lobbying legislation.
privilege – bringing to light the ways in which one’s achievements are more tied to one’s identity (such as birthplace, heritage, inheritance, race, etc.) than to one’s merit than most privileged people have previously been aware. It will also bring to light the ways in which privilege operates in everyday life.

Educators engaged in this practice structure workshops for privileged learners to catalyze and assist with this transformation. Their function is to disrupt the existing worldview (through a variety of approaches), assist the learner to work through the emotional and cognitive tasks that stem from this disruption (and in doing so aid the reconfiguration of a new worldview) and inspire agency and confidence in the learner to take action based on his/her new worldview.

The logic follows that as one builds this personal awareness and ties this learning to understanding systems of domination and oppression, such awareness places one at odds with the status quo. Drawing from Hobgood (2000), and McLaren (2003), this transformation serves to replace an adherence to liberal political theory (that understands inequality as a function of “personal choices or abilities or the effects of random good or bad luck”) with one of critical theory (that profiles the asymmetries of power and privilege as foundational to inequality). This emerging disjuncture causes what is called “cognitive dissonance” when ones existing worldview no longer is compatible with the emerging awareness. This cognitive dissonance or “disorienting dilemma” (Mezirow, 2000) serves as a stimulus to shift one’s worldview to one that is compatible with understanding power and privilege and one’s own role in perpetuating systems of domination.

**Research Overview**

My dissertation research has focused on this topic, interviewing of 10 educators who have been engaged in this type of practice for more than 10 years. They each have fascinating perspectives on the prognosis for this pedagogy as a significant force for individual and social change. Accordingly, their perspectives will be summarized in the remainder of this chapter – to help the readers to assess the viability of such an avenue
for social change. As a source of information, these educators have been able to reflect on the learning experiences of thousands of privileged learners, who have been through such educational practices, and to assess their learning achievements. While privileged learners themselves would be another source of good information, their experiences are beyond the scope of this study.

It is important to note that pedagogy for the privileged is a relative newborn in the field of adult education. It emerged embedded in the fields of social justice education (from the mid-1990s) and whiteness studies (from the late 1990s), and only recently achieved its real birthing with a publication from Goodman (2001). Educators have, however, been doing such work for more than a decade. Transitioning away from workshops on oppression (such as those based in popular education and anti-oppression pedagogy), educators have been developing both theories and practices for focusing on privilege and systems of domination. This dissertation research marks the first time that such educators have been formally studied with the intention of collecting their tacit knowledge and transforming it into more formal knowledge.

Findings – Prognosis for Pedagogy for the Privileged

Despite the powerful arguments raised earlier for educating our political leadership to become aware of their own privilege, it appears that the educators’ success in the practice of such transformation is not conclusive. While there are strong supporters, there continues skepticism. In terms of a breakdown of supporters and skeptics, there is a strong bias towards support (with 7 of 10 strongly encouraging such practice) and the skeptics are not entrenched in opposition – they mostly doubt the viability of voluntary and committed change. They are concerned about the wisdom of placing expectations for change in the voluntary actions (expressions of their civic virtues) in the hands of the privileged. Theoretically, we understand that if the privileged become aware of the existence of, for example, racism, then they would elect not to engage in racism and to commit themselves to building racial equality. The problem stems from the voluntary nature of this process. They can always choose not to take action, and in fact, most educators have gone through a process of reflexivity to uncover that their own voluntary
change process has yielded limited change. While there may be great changes in their own lives, they have not been effective in generating change in the institutions in which they live and work.

**Details from the Skeptics**

To remedy this shortfall, the skeptics advocate the parallel process of outside pressure for change. To minimize the likelihood of choosing inaction, the privileged should experience pressure from independent groups — who press for greater social justice. In doing so, we raise the possibility for lasting change. The urgency with which change is needed is too pressing to simply rely on voluntary actions of the newly aware. Such a perspective grants additional impetus for the recommended companion policies of transparency and full funding for lobby groups that represent the causes of the marginalized. While we would love to place utmost trust that their new awareness would stimulate action, our democratic deficit is in too grave a situation to continue to leave it to voluntary action. Accordingly, we can embrace Young’s (1990) “differentiated citizenship” and advocate for full funding of lobby groups that represent the marginalized in Canadian society.

Returning to the research findings, these three skeptics were also concerned with the transformative potential of pedagogy for the privileged. They are unsure if the newly aware are actually transformed and if there is permanence in the changes experienced. These concerns are essentially:

- **Whether the privileged can truly be transformed**
  Privileged learners do not fundamentally change their social identity, and as a result, they cannot step out of their subjectivities. Additionally, society will keep bestowing them with power according to their privilege, making it difficult to adhere to their commitments.

- **Whether the aware can again become unaware, and the process can reverse**
  Most educators believe that change in awareness is permanent, and that the process is similar to the blinders being taken off a horse. Noting that the blinders are in place to keep the horse single-minded and safe, the image is
powerfully applied to the pedagogy for the privilege. Once off, blinders cannot typically be put back on. A few educators noted that backsliding could occur, especially in two conditions: where limited supports exist and where there are high costs of change. Without supports for change, the old worldview can exert a strong pull. When considerable risks for change exist, it may be safer to live in denial than with the consequences of change. In this situation, denial serves as a self-protective device to keep one’s discomfort at tolerable levels.

Non-skeptics also surface an issue that potentially strengthens the arguments of the skeptics. Most educators have noticed that they are less successful with the more resistant learners. While those with the utmost resistance will be deterred from joining such educational projects, much resistance surfaces in the midst of educational processes. The corollary is also experienced – learners who most successfully move through these programs may have already been predisposed for the transformation. The net effect is that we may be doing our best work with learners who may have gone through a transformation without our intervention, and perhaps did not need us. And we are least successful with the most resistant learners – those who are in greatest need of the work. We thus need to deeply consider how best to motivate learners, especially the more resistant ones where our success has been more limited. It is imperative that we build this knowledge base. As solace, the experience of all educators reveals that they have the ability to move most learners through differing levels of resistance – with success largely dictated by the depth and breadth of the other issues on the table.

These arguments are persuasive, leading us to understand that the nature of the change process comes with no guarantee. While the skeptics are guardedly optimistic, they do proffer indicators of how to strengthen its viability. These have been translated into policy recommendations listed in the “solutions and companion policies” section.
Details from the Advocates

Perhaps the reader is now left somewhat dubious about the transformative potential of pedagogy for the privileged. To rebalance our skepticism, we now turn to its advocates. The advocates voice tremendous hope in this pedagogy, with its strongest allies voicing its possibility for a new theory of social change that responds to the current context of most of the population being implicated in systems of dominance, yet also not true beneficiaries of such systems. Specifically, we are responsible for considerable complicity in oppression (where the oppressed also serve as agents of dominance when, for example, comparing northern and southern dwellers). As well, increasingly, many of us have a non-traditional composite identity as both oppressed and privileged (for example, mixed-race identities or middle class yet highly income vulnerable). Both of these factors serve to add such complexity to our social relations as to render traditional social change theories (such as those of Marx, Freire and Gramsci) as “unhelpful” (quoting from a research participant).

Accordingly, transformative pedagogy of this nature offers insight as to avenues for creating social change that recognizes our need to involve and engage the privileged. Without such pedagogy, the privileged fail to be implicated in the problems suffered through oppression. As they continue in their ignorance, the only avenue for change that exists for the marginalized is through seizing power – likely in the form of violence. As noted by one educator, “violence thus becomes the only form of reconciliation.” This generates great hopefulness for a pedagogy for the privileged – where we can see a flash of optimism whereby future conflicts can be resolved differently as the privileged come to understand their roles in upholding dominance and oppression.

All educators noted that there is a shortfall in both the literature and the common sense of educators on how to do this practice well. Selecting the best educators for the job may prove difficult, not because of their skills but because of the novelty of the field and the relative shortfall of wisdom for the task. It does remain a possibility that the educators collected each hold pieces to the puzzle, and that together a composite picture of the pedagogy can be drawn. When this thesis process draws to a close, we will have greater
knowledge before us to engage in this task. Note that within this premise lies a tension –
one that straddles the urgency to get moving and the need for patience to consolidate our
skills in the area.

Closing Comments and Bold Solutions
We have before us the opportunity, through pedagogy for the privileged, to assist
privileged learners through a transformative process that will catalyze their awareness of
their privilege, and in doing so, will start to take down the walls of arrogance, isolation
and exclusion. This will bring them to a place of empathy for the other, of an awareness
of their power and a corresponding capacity to make decisions with greater compassion,
understanding and self-awareness.

It is time for bold solutions. The state of our democracy is so vulnerable to the
asymmetries of power at work in the disconnect of our political leadership from its
electorate, and more broadly, from all of its residents. When Kymlicka and Norman
(1994:368) note that “a striking feature of the current debate is the timidity with which
authors apply their theories of citizenship to questions of public policy,” it strikes a deep
cord within me. It is time to “imagine democracy”14 and take bold initiatives to reverse
the deep slide of the trustworthiness of our political leadership. Similar to the mandatory
public service of most European countries, it is time for our political leadership to build
their civic virtues through mandatory educational programs.

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