The Effects of Provincial Standardized Testing on Teaching Grade 10 and 12 English Curriculum in School District #71

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Abstract

In the modern educational era with an increase in external accountability and the residual effects of the industrial model of education, it is challenging for teachers to maintain a robust curriculum when the system asks for more and more data that demonstrates the educational development of their students. These demands have lead to an increasing movement towards “teaching to the test” as teachers feel that positive results on the externally set examinations determine whether they have been successful in their classroom. This study focuses on the Grade 10 and 12 English teachers in School District #71, which is located in the rural area of the Comox Valley in the province of British Columbia (B.C.). A Likert-based survey (Appendix A) was sent out to 18 teachers and 12 responded with both quantitative and qualitative data that revealed how the provincial exams have affected their teaching content and style. The results of the data collected revealed that teachers were internally motivated to adjust their curriculum to meet the skills and content that students are asked to demonstrate on the provincial exam, while external pressures such as administration, parents, students and public organizations were a lesser factor in the adjustment of their curriculum.
Acknowledgements

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Chapter 1: Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to discover if teachers of Grade 10 and Grade 12 English in School District #71 feel pressured to change their teaching style and content to reflect the content of the provincial exams instead of teaching a curriculum that reflects the content of the B.C. Ministry of Education Integrated Resource Packages (IRP) which represents a more robust and diverse educational experience for students. The study also hoped to discover whether the pressure, if it does exist, is internal or external. It was assumed that if the pressure to change teaching methods exists, then the data would allow teachers to adjust their teaching strategies to limit the influence of the provincial exams.

Justification of the Study

The introduction of Grade 12 provincial exams in B.C. in 1984 has resulted in over two decades of increasing incidences of the use of standardized testing in the province (Vancouver Sun, 2009). With the Foundation Skills Assessments (FSA) completed at Grades 4 and 7 followed by provincial exams at the Grade 10-12 levels, standardized testing have become a large part of a student’s educational experience in B.C. While there is a growing awareness of how these tests have an impact on individual students, there have been few studies that explore how these mandatory tests affect the teaching strategies of teachers in classes with a provincial exam as an end point. If the hypothesis of this study is proven to be true and teachers are adjusting their teaching methods to address the topic of the test at the expense of what the teacher would perceive to be best practice, then it is important to create an awareness of this and try to understand where these pressures are originating in order to ensure that students in provincially examinable English courses will have a well rounded educational experience. Curriculum should be presented through the best practice as determined by the teacher instead of limited and narrowed by the content of the provincial exams. The justification for focusing on
the English 10 and 12 courses is that both exams are mandatory, while all other Grade 12 provincial exams have currently been declared optional exams for graduation in the province of B.C. Due to the evident importance of English courses, it is necessary to ensure that students are receiving a well-rounded education and that teachers feel the freedom to develop, according to their knowledge, a robust curriculum.

**Research Question and Hypotheses**

Based on the results of previous studies (Lam & Bordignon, 2001; Jones et al., 1999; Skwarchuk, 2004; Smith, 1991; Klein, Zevenbergen & Brown, 2006; Haladyna, Nolen & Haas, 1991), it has been established that government mandated exams have an effect on the practices of English teachers. The purpose of this study was to explore to what extent have teachers of Grade 10 and 12 English in School District #71 changed their teaching content and style to reflect the content of the provincial exam and is the motivation for this change internal or external?

**Definition of Terms**

Internal pressure is defined as motivation that originates within the teacher to achieve positive results. This pressure is oriented around a teacher’s desire to have results that reflect positively on the skills of the teacher.

External pressure is defined as motivation that originates outside of the teacher. Sources of pressure could include: school boards, administrators, other teachers, the general public, parents, students, and external organizations such as the Fraser Institute.

Provincial exams are defined as mandatory examinations that are created at a provincial government level and that have an impact on the students’ final grade. At the Grade 10 level it accounts for 20% of the course mark and at the Grade 12 level it accounts for 40% of the course mark.
Effects of Provincial Exams

English teachers are defined as teachers who have taught either Grade 10 and/or Grade 12 English in the past two school years.

School District #71 is a rural district located within the Comox Valley on Vancouver Island, British Columbia. For the purpose of this study, only English teachers at the three local high schools (G.P. Vanier, Mark R. Isfeld and Highland Secondary) were used as the sample group.

**Brief Overview of Study**

Through the completion of a survey (Appendix A), teachers of Grade 10 or Grade 12 English in School District #71 have stated whether they have adjusted their teaching curriculum to meet the requirements of the provincial exam at the expense of meeting the Prescribed Learning Outcomes for the course, and they have identified the source of the motivation to change their teaching content and style. The overall goal of this study was to determine to what extent the provincially mandated exams are evoking change in the classroom curriculum and teaching style of high school teachers. If this change exists then there must be a source for the motivation to change. Once the source of pressure to change teaching style and curriculum is identified, then further studies can be pursued to determine whether the changes in the classroom are justifiable and in the best interests of students and teachers.

**Chapter 2: Review of Related Literature**

**Theory**

As noted in the introductory chapter, previous studies have determined that government mandated exams do have an effect on the teaching methods used in the classroom. Through a review of research literature directly related to the study, insight will be gained into the connection between the use of government exams and teacher practice in the classroom.
Following an analysis of the directly related literature, a tangentially related study will explore the possibility of developing student centered assessment for learning practices in the classroom while still meeting the challenge of maintaining positive results on government issued high stakes testing.

Studies Directly Related

In response to general dissatisfaction among teachers concerning the Science 10 Provincial Exam, the British Columbia Science Teachers’ Association (BCScTA) implemented an online survey in 2008-09 to assess how the exam has affected teachers and students in B.C. The non-directional hypothesis presented in the study was “What are the effects (both positive and negative) of the Science 10 Provincial Exam on you, the classroom teacher (or on your colleagues)?; and What are the effects (both positive and negative) of the Science 10 Provincial Exam on your students?” (BCScTA, 2009, p.3). In total 202 teachers of Science 10, both current and former, responded to the web-based survey (BCScTA, 2009, p. 3). Based on the quantitative data that was used to establish the background of the respondents, 60% of the teachers had 10 or more years experience, the majority of those teachers were from the public school system, and almost half of the respondents were members of the BCScTA (BCScTA, 2009, p. 4-5). In addition to supplying background information, the quantitative data also revealed that 79.8% of respondents would willingly return to the former Provincial Learning Assessment Program (PLAP) assessments that existed before the provincial exam and that 66.2% of respondents believed that there was insufficient support for the implementation of the new exam (BCScTA, 2009, p. 5-6). The survey also used the gathering of qualitative data to determine the teachers’ opinions on the provincial exam and the perceived effect that it has had on their students and while the results established both positive and negative effects, it was clear that the general
opinion was that the provincial exam has not been beneficial to either the teachers or the students in B.C. (BCScTA, 2009, p. 7-8)

According to the BCScTA, the main results of this study “indicated that the Science 10 provincial exam has caused a significant decrease or entire deletion of lab activities in Science 10 classrooms, coupled with a preponderance of direct instruction through lectures” (2009, p.3) and due to the difficulty of following the multitudinous Prescribed Learning Outcomes for the course, “Science 10 students rarely have the opportunity to do group work, research project and classroom presentations, take field trips to Science facilities or explore local topics or current events” (BCScTA, 2009, p. 3) which has all resulted in many teachers no longer wishing to teach Science 10 (BCScTA, 2009, p.3). Based on these results, it is apparent that the implementation of Provincial Exams does have an effect on teachers and the way that they teach their students, but it is important to be aware of possible flaws in this study.

Despite the purpose of the study not being clearly stated, it could be interpreted that the questions and the construction of the survey were designed to lead respondents to provide negative responses in reaction to the exams. There are also political motivations associated with the B.C. Science Teachers Association and the connection with the B.C. Teachers’ Federation (B.C.T.F.) which is involved with the distribution of the study, as the B.C.T.F. is openly opposed to the government implementation of standardized testing. This influence can be seen in the wording of one of the questions which states, “Would you support removing the current Science 10 provincial exam and returning to the ‘assessment for learning’ process in the PLAP program?” (BCScTA, 2009, p. 5). Through connecting the PLAP program to assessment for learning, the researchers are drawing on the positive connotations associated with that educational movement to persuade teachers to answer in agreement.
So while this study does establish and support the idea that provincial exams do have an impact on teachers and their teaching methods, there are some flaws in the research methods and there needs to be an awareness of possible political motivations concerning the research. In order to add to the validity of this study it is necessary to move beyond anecdotal qualitative responses and poorly worded quantitative questioning to evidence that is more measureable combined with observational data that would lend legitimacy to the responses of the participants.

Similar to the BCScTA, Ana Klein, Andrea Zevenbergen, and Nicole Brown (2006) established a study in semi-rural New York in reaction to questions arising over “how to manage the large amount of testing that takes place in our school systems and how to adapt instruction to this new format” (p. 2). The researchers outlined three key problems they hoped to address in their non-directional qualitative research. The issues were “the impact of testing on teachers and students…the way teachers manage instruction towards testing…[and] the way teachers assist student learning while testing” (Klein, Zevenbergen, & Brown, 2006, p. 3). Despite the lack of a clear hypothesis, based on the review of the literature is it apparent that the authors were hoping to find a negative correlation between the implementation of standards-based assessment and the curriculum that was being taught in the schools. In order to prove this unstated hypothesis, they placed 200 surveys in the mailboxes of teachers in five different schools and they received a 10% response rate as 20 teachers provided a detailed written response. The background of the sample group was diverse with 30% males and 70% females, 43% elementary school teachers, 29% middle school teachers and 19% high school teachers, and the mean level of teaching experience was 15 years (Klein, Zevenbergen, & Brown, 2006). So while the sample size was quite low, it did represent the diverse background of all levels of education.
The qualitative responses to the survey in general were negative towards the use of standardized exams as “77% were negative and 23% were positive” (Klein, Zevenbergen, & Brown, 2006, p. 4). The teachers found that they were directing their teaching towards the content of the test while neglecting higher-level thinking and authentic instruction (Klein, Zevenbergen, & Brown, 2006). Based on the data, “low percentages of authentic instruction (4%) were reported as well as a low percentage of adapting instruction to the individual learning styles of students (9%)” (Klein, Zevenbergen, & Brown, 2006, p. 6) as teachers felt more pressure to produce positive results on the exams instead of creating curriculum that developed more higher-level thinking (Klein, Zevenbergen, & Brown, 2006). There were a few instances where teachers reported that they were taking “advantage of the format or test question itself to promote higher-order thinking…some teachers also expressed that they use the opportunities of exploring teachable moments through some of the testing strategies that they model for students” (Klein, Zevenbergen, & Brown, 2006, p. 6), but these examples were clearly the minority on the survey.

Even though the sample size was very low and limits the value of the data acquired, Klein, Zevenbergen and Brown, based on the results of their research, do succeed in establishing a negative relationship between classroom teaching and the use of standardized testing to increase accountability. This limited survey can be expanded and built upon by studying further research that has larger sample sizes and is based in Ontario, such as the work of Tony Lam and Catherine Bordignon. Due to a lack of evidence that presents the benefits of standardized testing in the classroom, Lam and Bordignon (2001) designed a survey to explore the effectiveness of the Grade 9 literacy exams first implemented in Ontario in 1993. The goal of the survey was, from the perspective of the teacher, to assess the perceived quality of the exams and to determine
the effects that the exams had on the learning process in the classroom. After randomly selecting 60 schools to involve in the survey and receiving a 51% response rate (30 schools), the results “revealed teachers’ negative opinions of the Grade 9 test’s quality and impact on teaching and learning” (Lam & Bordignon, 141). The survey is a moderately small sample size and it was given during a period of political tension between government-led initiatives and teachers, but it does support previous research completed in 1995 and 1997 by the Ontario Secondary School Teachers’ Federation [OSSTF].

Statistically, 64% of the teachers surveyed “would not like their classes to participate in future province-wide testing” (Lam & Bordignon, 2001, p. 136) and “84% did not find the Grade 9 testing program useful for enhancing quality of education” (Lam & Bordignon, p. 136). When analyzing the “correlations between teachers’ ratings of the Ministry efforts to reform education … and of its effects on teachers (.33), students (.53), and parents (.28)” (Lam & Bordignon, p. 136) it was found that the correlations “were positive and statistically significant” (Lam & Bordignon, p. 136). Based on the results of a 4 point Likert scale on the survey, the teachers felt that the test did not accurately measure what the students learned in the classroom, and that the results did not add assessment information that teachers were not already aware of based on classroom assessment. Teachers also felt that testing does not “foster progressive classroom and curriculum management approaches (76%)” (Lam & Bordignon, p. 138) but “for the two items dealing with the test inducing teachers’ narrowing of the curriculum, the teachers’ ratings showed no agreement (50% and 35%)” (Lam & Bordignon, p. 138). This unexpected result may be explained by an unwillingness to question their own professionalism, but it will be necessary to engage in further research to determine the validity of the results. Based on their findings, Lam and Bordignon recommended that the Ontario government “must make efforts to increase
the test’s diagnostic value and minimize its role in the evaluation of schools and teachers” (Lam & Bordignon, p. 142) and that further research must be more thorough with “larger survey samples and more in-depth data and analyses” (Lam & Bordignon, p. 143).

Lam and Bordignon completed an effective study of the literature available concerning the use of provincially mandated standardized testing in Ontario and added to the validity of their study by drawing comparisons between their findings and the findings of two previous studies completed by the OSSTF. The purpose of the study was very clearly stated, and while there were some difficulties with mortality as some schools did not administer the exam and some respondents were eliminated, Lam and Bordignon did do an effective job of designing their survey to allow for an elimination of subjects who did not have a high level of experience or were not informed enough to be contributors to the sample group. Some of the discrepancies in the data results were justified by possible weak item construction on the survey, but the survey was not included in the article so it is difficult to ascertain if there were any further weaknesses in the survey used for this study. Fortunately, Lam and Bordignon made an effort to rationalize and explain their discrepancies and gain further understanding.

“The Impact of High-Stakes Testing on Teachers and Students in North Carolina” was a study implemented in 1998 by Jones et al. (1999) in reaction to the state-wide development of The New ABCs of Public Education. According to Jones et al., the problem with this recent educational reform is the use of high-stakes testing and accountability, and the study sought to show how these changes in the educational system have affected both teachers and students. The directional hypothesis, while not clearly stated, is that the use of state-wide exams has a negative impact on the learning environment in schools.

In order to obtain data to support their research, 16 elementary schools were randomly
selected using three levels of stratification (geographical location, demographical location, and previous test scores). All certified teaching staff (470 teachers) were given a voluntary survey and 50.2% responded. While the specific details of the survey were not presented in the article, the quantitative data revealed that the exams did affect instruction content and time allocation as teaching was directed more towards preparing students for the exams while the exams also decreased teacher moral within the school system. A majority of teachers (67%) indicated that they had changed their teaching methods to help students prepare for the exams, but the data came to no direct consensus as to what changes had been made and what the overall effects were in the classroom. Based on the data, the conclusion was made by Jones et al. (1999) that “teachers are trying to adapt their instructional practices to meet the new demands of end-of-grade testing…[which] could signal a move toward less meaningful and lasting forms of pedagogy” (p. 202).

Even though the findings of this study follow the research (Smith, 1991; Haladyna, Nolen & Haas, 1991; Klein, Zevenbergen & Brown, 2006) that has been completed on the use of high-stakes testing, the data does not effectively support the conclusion of the research. The data provided through the survey provides general guidelines and the conclusions are drawn through references to other sources such as other research projects or articles written on the subject. Even though the sample group was selected randomly and was large enough, in many cases the data collected is inconsistent as it does not effectively reveal what the impact of the testing has been on teacher instruction, which brings question to the appropriateness of the survey questionnaire, which was not included in the article. Jones et al. relied on the impromptu opinions and observations of the teachers to report how “the ABCs program had a negative impact on students’ ‘love of learning’” (p. 201) instead of seeking the information from the
students. Overall, the study does bring an awareness to the fact that educational reforms that involved high-stakes testing do have an impact on teachers and students but it does remain unclear just how it affects teacher instruction and whether that results in a negative learning experience for the students.

Due to concerns surrounding the implementation of government mandated provincial exams in Manitoba, Sheri-Lynn Skwarchuk (2004) initiated a study through the University of Winnipeg to assess teacher attitudes towards the use of provincial exams. This topic was divided up into four main categories: what is the general attitude towards the exam; do attitudes differ if the teacher is directly involved in a class that must write a provincial exam; are there differences between teachers in urban areas versus rural areas; and what strategies do teachers use to prepare students for the exams. Based on a review of the current literature, Skwarchuk developed a series of directional hypotheses that predicted that teachers would react negatively to the provincial exams but that teachers of classes involved in the provincial exams would “be proactive in terms of preparing their students in the best way possible” (Skwarchuk, p. 262).

Using a quantitative approach that was generally supported by qualitative data, the measurement tool consisted of a seven page survey that involved the use of five-point Likert scale items and open ended questions. All levels of education were represented from elementary to secondary and on a voluntary basis all teaching staff were asked to complete the survey and either mail it back anonymously or place it in a drop box in a sealed envelope. The response group consisted of 133 teachers (34% response rate) with 57 teachers (43%) actually involved in teaching a provincially examinable course. In order to analyze the data for teachers who taught provincial exam courses versus teachers who did not, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVAs) was implemented to make these group comparisons. In the case of the strategies used by
teachers to prepare students for the exams, the Pearson product formula was used to analyze the correlations between the strategies used and the self-reported class average final exam results.

In general, the results of the study followed the hypotheses. Skwarchuk (2004) found that a large number (66.2%) of teachers disagreed with the use of the exams, especially at the elementary level (Kindergarten to Grade 4, M=1.69 out of 5). There were also differences found in the level and aspect of the disagreement based on the rural or urban location of the teacher’s school. Urban area teachers felt that the exams discriminated against ethnic minorities while rural teachers felt that “results were a poor measure of teacher ability … and that the testing inhibits differential instruction procedures” (Skwarchuk, p. 268).

The data collected was not substantial enough to complete an accurate study of student preparation techniques, but at the Grade 3 level, where there was a substantial amount of data, it was found that a variety of strategies were used to help prepare students for exams, but only one had a significant correlation. Based on Skwarchuk’s data, the “discussion of studying techniques was positively correlated with teacher-reported exam results” (Skwarchuk, 2004, p. 269). The main area of deviation from the pre-established hypotheses was in the area of attitudes of teachers involved in a class with a provincial exam requirement. Skwarchuk found that teachers in these situations were more accepting of the provincial exam than teachers who were not teaching an exam related class. There are numerous possible explanations for this unexpected result, but the conclusion presented by the author was that more research was necessary to understand this result.

This study brought forth some important observations concerning the use of provincial exams. The results in some areas were unexpected, but could provide some insight into future research. Overall the data collected and the calculated results supported the hypotheses of the
study. Further study is necessary to establish why teachers do not feel more negativity towards the exam when they teach a course directly associated with a provincial exam, what pressures are being exerted upon these teachers and why are they reacting in this way. Based on the results of the Skwarchuk (2004) study, there are differences between the elementary level and the secondary level of education in terms of opposition to the use of provincially mandated examinations, therefore further studies involving a larger, more representative sample size should divide along these lines and explore the different levels of negativity experienced and how teachers cope with the pressures.

**Studies Tangentially Related**

In a related study that focused on science and mathematics classes in Britain, Dylan Wiliam, Clare Lee, Christine Harrison and Paul Black (2004) looked at the effect that the implementation of formative assessment in the form of Assessment for Learning (AFL) had on the classroom results on the externally set examinations. The main problem that the researchers sought to challenge was the belief that the use of formative assessment in the classroom has a negative effect on standardized testing results (Wiliam et al., 2004). The purpose of the study was to disprove the claim around the use of AFL that “the pressure in schools to improve the results achieved by students in externally-set tests and examinations precludes its use” (Wiliam et al., 2004, p. 49) and to further develop the implementation of AFL by looking at how to support teachers in changing their teaching practices and the costs associated with it (Wiliam et al., 2004). Without a clear hypothesis, it can be inferred that the researchers directly believed that the implementation of formative assessment practices would have either a neutral effect or positive effect on the results on the examinations used (Wiliam et al., 2004).
In order to meet the purpose of the study, Wiliam et al. (2004) developed a non-traditional approach to their research as they used a design termed ‘local design’ to collect their empirical qualitative data (p. 56). The main characteristic of their approach was that they used externally set exam results as input and output values in order to determine the effect size of their research. They did recognize the inherent weaknesses and strengths of using an externally set variable, but did determine that it was the most appropriate method to use (Wiliam et al., 2004). In order to gather their sample group of teachers, the researchers did select educational districts where formative assessment was already a priority, but they did leave the selection of specific teachers within the schools up to the schools that were involved (Wiliam et al., 2004). So while the choice of districts could have had an impact on the results of the study, the randomness of the teachers selected provided a balance as a variety of teachers were chosen to form the sample group (Wiliam et al., 2004). A total of 24 teachers were selected with a mortality rate of 2. The teachers were put through a training process to learn effective AFL strategies and formulated their own personal action plans that were to be implemented the following year when the teachers were then observed once per half term and time was often provided to discuss their efforts after their observations (Wiliam et al., 2004). The results of each class on the standardized testing were then compared to some form of control group that varied based on each individual teacher. Some control groups involved the same teacher, while other groups were forced to use another teacher teaching a parallel set, which did lead to a lack of robustness in the comparisons (Wiliam et al., 2004). Through comparisons between the control group and the sample groups, the results determined that the median effect size was 0.27 and the mean effect size was 0.34, which does support the belief that teachers can use formative assessment without sacrificing success on the externally-set examinations (Wiliam et al., 2004).
Despite the positive results, there were some flaws in the research done by Wiliam, Lee, Harrison and Black. The selection of districts which supported AFL, the lack of robustness in the control groups, the infrequent observations to witness the teachers following through on their action plans, and the use of externally determined input and output data collection devices do affect the validity of this study, but the results are encouraging for those who fear the loss of authentic forms of assessment as AFL encourages. Wiliam et al. (2004) also used the sample group as a “living example” for other educational districts looking to implement formative assessment in their districts as they provided strategies that were used to encourage the use of AFL and the costs associated with it. They also acknowledged that “it is worth noting here that teachers’ practices were slow to change, and that most of the changes in practice that we observed occurred towards the end of the year, so that the actual size of the effects found are likely to be underestimates of what could be achieved when teachers are emphasizing formative assessment as an integral part of their practice” (Wiliam et al., 2004, p. 56). Based on the results, this study does provide hope for teachers who fear the use of formative assessment will disadvantage their students when they write standardized testing as, in this instance, teaching to meet the needs of an externally-set exam is not reflective of the results.

According to the directly related and tangentially related literature, there is strong evidence linking the negative connection between the curriculum being taught in the classroom and the educational attitudes and approaches of teachers with the implementation of government initiated standardized testing. Additionally, based on the research of Wiliam et al. (2004), there is additional evidence demonstrating that even though teachers feel pressure to adjust their teaching habits to meet the objectives of standardized tests, it is not necessary to make these changes in order to achieve success both in the classroom and on the tests.
Chapter 3: Procedures and Methods

Research Design

The goal of the research was to explore the effect that Grade 10 and Grade 12 English provincial exams has on the teaching style and curriculum content used by English teachers in School District #71. The research design for this study involved the use of a Likert-based cross-sectional survey that involved the use of a 5-point Likert scale combined with some qualitative open-ended questions that were used to provide some rationale and explanation for the quantitative results. In September 2009, the voluntary surveys (Appendix A) were distributed, along with a cover letter (Appendix B), through a combination of inter-school mail or they were emailed to a specific sample. Once the anonymous surveys were mailed back to the investigator in sealed envelopes, the results were tabulated and conclusions were drawn based on the results.

Sample

The units of analysis for this study were drawn from the target population, which was the Grade 10 and 12 English teachers from the three high schools in School District #71. All 18 teachers who met the criteria were approached but, as the study was on a voluntary basis, all possible units of analysis did not participate. The target population for this study was defined as any teacher in School District #71 who had recent (past 2 years) experience teaching either Grade 10 or Grade 12 English. It was necessary for all recent experience to be from School District #71. A certain level of experience was not necessary, but teachers who had never taught the course before were not considered part of the target population because at the time of the research, they will have not experienced the provincial exams at the end of the course. Administrators who also fill the role of teachers within School District #71 were also not
considered part of the target population due to the possible conflicts between external pressures existing between teachers and administration.

**Instruments Used and Scoring Procedures**

The instrumentation used for the study was a survey (Appendix A) that involved the use of both quantitative and qualitative data. For the quantitative data, a 5-point Likert scale involving six items for each grade level was used to gather and tabulate data. The qualitative data was gathered through the use of three open-ended questions for each grade level that were designed to support the quantitative data and provide some insight into the results of the Likert scale. The quantitative data was calculated to recognize the general reactions to the use of provincially mandated exams, and if there is perceived internal or external pressure associated with the exams. The quantitative data was calculated through a tabulation of the mean, median and mode for each response at both the Grade 10 and the Grade 12 level. The qualitative data was used as anecdotal support for the results of the mean, median, and mode through the use of citations and explanations. The survey was also used to gather some necessary demographic information including years experience as a teacher, whether the respondent has taught Grade 10 or Grade 12 English in the past two years, and whether they have taught one of those classes in School District #71. This information was necessary to verify if the respondent met the requirements of participation in the study.

**Explanation of the Procedures Followed**

The names of eligible teachers in the target population were acquired through the school administrators and the English Department heads of the individual high schools in School District #71 in September 2009. Subsequently, through email and inter-school mail the teachers were approached to anonymously complete the survey (Appendix A) and mail it back to the
researcher in a sealed envelope through the inter-school mail. In November 2009, once many of the surveys were received, the data was digitally recorded and kept in a secure, password controlled location.

**Discussion of Validity**

There were numerous threats to the validity of this study surrounding the subject characteristics, mortality, data-collector bias, historical threat and implementation, but through adjustments to the design and implementation of the data collection most threats were negated or addressed in some manner.

Subject mortality was expected due to the voluntary nature of the survey, and did have a possible negative effect on the validity of the study. The possible reasons for non-response may be connected to variables that would produce a different response than teachers who did complete the survey. Some mortality can also be attributed to a respondent not meeting the requirements of the subject group. The threat of data collector bias existed through the investigator’s role as an English teacher within School District #71. Efforts were made to limit this bias through the use of quantitative data, by not completing interviews, and allowing subjects to complete the survey anonymously and in private outside the presence of the investigator.

The main historical threat that had an effect on the study results was the legal battle between the British Columbia Teachers’ Federation [BCTF] and the British Columbia Ministry of Education over the administration of the Foundation Skills Assessment tests in 2008-09. The negative associations connected to the conflict could have affected the responses given by the subjects which warranted consideration on the part of the investigator.
The last major threat to validity was through the administration of the survey. In order to avoid any possible external pressure, the surveys were not administered through the administration of the high schools or the BCTF union representatives. All potential participants were contacted personally by the investigator and surveys were distributed either through interschool mail, or electronically through email.

**Description and Justification of Statistical Techniques**

For the purpose of this study, the survey research approach was deemed to be the most suitable as it allowed for the combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods. The use of a survey (Appendix A) and a cover letter explaining the procedures (Appendix B) allowed for a level of anonymity, and the facilitation of the survey which was flexible and accounted for the diversity of the subjects being studied, served to limit subject mortality by making it easier for subjects to respond on their own time. The hybrid format was selected for the opportunity to provide quantitative data which limited data collector bias and qualitative data which allowed for the opportunity to verify the validity of the quantitative results.

The simplicity of a Likert-based survey allows for an easy completion of the survey. As a teacher of Grade 10 and 12 English, the investigator was aware of the workload and employment obligations associated with the job. If mortality was going to be limited, and completion rates maintained at a high level, the survey needed to be moderately short and easy to complete. For this reason, the Likert scale, which involves focused, closed-ended questions, was an effective format. The main fallacy with the Likert-based survey was the possibility of the subject’s response not being a possibility, which was limited by the addition of open-ended responses.
Even though the sample size for the research was limited, it was necessary to make sure that the teachers involved had experienced teaching a complete class that had a Grade 10 or 12 provincial exam as the end point. The data collected from the Likert portion of the surveys was tabulated and the mean, median and mode were calculated to measure the results of each question and determine the overall response of the sample group. Those calculations determined whether teachers are changing the content and style of their teaching to reflect the provincial exam and if that is the reality, where the pressure is coming from. The qualitative portion of the data was transcribed and used to support the quantitative calculations and provide some rationalization for the results. The results collected can be used to further explore larger sample sizes in the future if it is warranted based on the results of the data.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis

As stated in Chapter 1, the research question being explored in the survey (Appendix A) sought to determine if teachers of Grade 10 and Grade 12 English in School District #71 feel pressured to change their teaching style and content to reflect the content of the provincial exams and whether the pressure, if it does exist, is internal or external. A total of 18 surveys (Appendix A) were mailed out to the eligible teachers of Grade 10 and 12 English in School District #71 at the beginning of September 2009 and there were 12 respondents for a 67% response rate with a mortality of 2 surveys as the participants did not meet the requirements as outlined in Chapter 3. The average years of teaching experience in the sample group was 10.3 years with a high of 21 years and a low of 5 years. Teachers from all three high schools in the district were sent surveys, but due to the anonymous nature of the surveys (Appendix A) it cannot be guaranteed that each high school was represented in the results. As the survey (Appendix A) was directed towards both Grade 10 and Grade 12 English teachers, there was a difference in participation rates as
some teachers only qualified for one grade level. Of the 12 participants, 9 submitted responses for Grade 10 English while 8 submitted responses for Grade 12 English.

Tables 4.1 and 4.2 display a summary of the data received from the quantitative 5-point Likert scale portion of the survey. The mean, median and mode results of the survey are outlined for both Grade 10 (Table 4.1) and Grade 12 (Table 4.2) portions of the survey. The statistical data found on Tables 4.1 and 4.2 is based on a score range of 1.0 – 5.0 as the Likert scale used a 5-point system that used the descriptors (Never, Rarely, Neutral, Sometimes and Always) instead of numerical values (Appendix A). The following statistics converted the descriptors back into numerical data.

Table 4.1
Quantitative Results of Survey for Grade 10 (9 of 12 respondents)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Mode</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#4. To what extent do you follow the Prescribed Learning Outcomes as outlined by the Ministry of Education when teaching Grade 10 English?</td>
<td>4.28</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#5. To what extent do you direct your teaching content to reflect the content of the Grade 10 English Provincial Exam? (Ex: Content would be the type of materials and you use in class)</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#6. To what extent do you direct your teaching style to reflect the content of the Grade 10 English Provincial Exam? (Ex: Style would be the types of assignments you assign and how you approach teaching the course.)</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
#7. In general, are you pleased with the achievement results of your classes on the Grade 10 English Provincial Exam?  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Mode</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.39</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#8. Do you place personal pressure upon yourself for your classes to score well on the Grade 10 English Provincial Exam?  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Mode</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.13</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#9. Do you feel external pressure for your classes to score well on the Grade 10 English Provincial Exam?  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Mode</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2  
Quantitative Results of Survey for Grade 12 (8 of 12 respondents)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Mode</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#12. To what extent do you follow the Prescribed Learning Outcomes as outlined by the Ministry of Education when teaching Grade 12 English?</td>
<td>4.19</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#13. To what extent do you direct your teaching content to reflect the content of the Grade 12 English Provincial Exam? (Ex: Content would be the type of materials and you use in class)</td>
<td>4.44</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#14. To what extent do you direct your teaching style to reflect the content of the Grade 12 English Provincial Exam? (Ex: Style would be the types of assignments you assign and how you approach teaching the course.)</td>
<td>4.31</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#15. In general, are you pleased with the achievement results of your classes on the Grade 12 English</td>
<td>4.38</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
#16. Do you place personal pressure upon yourself for your classes to score well on the Grade 12 English Provincial Exam?  

| 4.5 | 4.5 | 4/5 |

#17. Do you feel external pressure for your classes to score well on the Grade 12 English Provincial Exam?  

| 4 | 3.5 | 4 |

As is evident in the responses, both Grade 10 ($M=4.28$) and Grade 12 ($M=4.19$) English teachers believe in following the Prescribed Learning Outcomes (P.L.O.’s) in their classroom curriculum as the mode responses were 5.0 (Always) for both sample groups. This represents a dedication to providing a well-rounded and diverse educational experience for students, but there is a fear of testing accountability affecting that curriculum as the responses indicated that teachers also sometimes directed their teaching content and style to meet the limited number of skills tested on the Grade 10 provincial exam ($M=3.78$ and $M=4.11$). This number increased with the Grade 12 English teachers ($M=4.44$ and $M=4.31$) as the mean and median values jumped up ahead of the responses given to following the P.L.O.’s, which indicates a shift in importance in the classroom. It is noteworthy that the mode values still do reflect a stronger support of following the P.L.O.’s at the Grade 12 level.

In Grade 10, English teachers recorded a mean of 4.13 for the personal pressure that they place upon themselves to have their students achieve positive results on the provincial exam and they felt that the results were positive ($M=4.39$). The personal pressure increases in Grade 12 ($M=4.5$) but the reaction to the results of students on the provincial exams remained very similar at a mean value of 4.38. Based on the results, it appears as though teachers have a strong desire to have their students achieve success and are content with the results that their students are achieving. Surprisingly, the question exploring the amount of external pressure that teachers feel
to have their students achieve success on the provincial exams was moderately lower than the internal pressure they place on themselves. At the Grade 10 level the mean value for the external pressure was 3.11 but there was a significant increase to 4.0 at the Grade 12 level which was still lower than the responses to the internal pressure that teachers feel at those grade levels. This may be attributed to a misunderstanding of the definition of internal and external pressure as some of the emotions may be rooted in external sources.

In combination with the Likert-based questions, there was also an optional opportunity on questions #5, 6 and 9 on the Grade 10 portion and #13, 14 and 17 to provide written feedback in a qualitative format. This information was used to further expand upon the results of those questions and to provide a rationale for the quantitative results. An analysis of these responses revealed trends and recurring responses that are revealed in Table 4.3 and 4.4. The data found in Table 4.3 and 4.4 are direct transcriptions of the responses received on each survey that was submitted so spelling mistakes or short hand writing were preserved in order to maintain validity and eliminate possible errors in interpretation on the part of the researcher.

Table 4.3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualitative Results of Survey for Grade 10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| #5. Can you list some examples of your teaching content that reflects the exam: | • The exam has poetry, fiction and non-fiction my choices reflect the exam content however I also use a number of other “forms” of literacy that are not on the exams.  
• I practice 2 examples at the end. I always have my students write literary essays on 2 or more pieces of literature read in the |
Effects of Provincial Exams 25

course.
• Working on synthesis writing (poetry/stories/non-fiction).
• Comparing two genres engaging similar themes; incorporating graphs/visual imagery that relates to literature.
• Poetry responses/terminology, Lit responses tailored to meet exam specifications (6 point scale).
• Response to Lit and responses to prompts. Synthesis of 2 separate pieces of writing/movie comparisons.
• As planning and developing:
  o Help them prepare for exams (format and pacing).
  o I often use it as a goal – helps to reinforce the need for stronger voice and analysis in written work.
  o Helps emphasize the need for close reading.
• Past exams, short stories or poems with questions marked using Provincial 6 point scale.

#6. Can you list some examples of how your teaching style reflects the exam:

• I do assign both narrative and expository essays and I do have them practice answering multiple choice.
• Essay writing on 2 or more selections studied (ex: compare and contrast type)
• Teaching synthesis.
• Emphasis on reading comprehension and written fluency over the other outcome strands.
• Writing assignments are all evaluated using 6 point scale/ministry rubrics.
• I take an “ideas” approach to a lot of the literature and keep an eye on the skills needed to be successful on provincial exam.
• I feel justified in using more analysis, formal writing – building rubrics to break down the elements of strong writing so we look at it more closely.
• Focus on provincial rubrics when marking assignments.
#9. Can you please list any sources of the [external] pressure that you feel:

- I have found that class marks and exam marks are very close.
- Comments from Administration.
- Admin, media, parental pressure.
- Just that I am sensitive to others opinions and I constantly self-question myself to make sure I am being effective with my teaching.
- I want them to walk away feeling they have learned something relevant, developed skills and the exam can be a form on this kind of validation.
- Administration.

Table 4.4

Qualitative Results of Survey for Grade 12

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| #13. Can you list some examples of your teaching content that reflects the exam: | • Using writing samples from previous exams / focus on narrative essays / literary language and vocabulary on multiple choice sections of exams / rehearsal of formal writing styles  
 • Majority of written assignments are reflective of Provincial exam questions.  
 • Exam prep – use exemplars, practice runs, timing, and pacing. The exam worries me less and less – I am more concerned with process and real learning instead.  
 • Most of my writing assignments reflect the reality of what students will see and do on the exam.  
 • Extremely heavy focus on the literary analysis form of writing and narrative essay structure.  
 • Poetry, non-fiction, short stories, composition writing.  
 • Studying similar prose forms, assigning |
similar questions. Always writing essays.

#14. Can you list some examples of how your teaching style reflects the exam:

- Most assignments reflect a focus on the formal literary essay as the essential form – especially as a response to poetry and prose. Assignments are less creative.
- Review of marking 6 point scale and use of exemplars
- I try to include more student-driven, active participation, other forms of literary because the weight of the exam is so high – and yet such a small marker of how much they do learn in English 12.
- I incorporate literary devices into my discussion / analysis of literature.
- In-class essays and synthesis writing.
- Writing similar style essays in class, compare and contrast theme, character ect…

#17. Can you please list any sources of the [external] pressure that you feel:

- Other teachers of English, comparisons by administration, parental pressure, student pressure.
- Administration
- They realize that this exam is a key piece in their academic goals ie: exam prep, writing under pressure, language for life, academic achievement for scholarships and self pride and a measure for personal and academic growth.
- Just that I am sensitive to others opinions and I constantly self-question myself to make sure I am being effective with my teaching.
- Media, Fraser Institute, school board, admin, parents, students.
- Admin comments.
- The admin usually brings up the stats after the exam. I don’t pay too much attention.
Further analysis of the qualitative data reveals that English teachers in School District #71 do allow the provincial exam to affect the content and style of their curriculum. When looking at the content of their courses, the general response was that the literature studied in the course reflected the prose, poetry and non-fiction format of the provincial exams and that often sample exams are used to prepare students. At the Grade 12 level there is much more of a focus on preparing the students for the provincial exam as there were frequent references to having writing assignments reflect the provincial exam, completing rehearsal exams, studying writing samples from past exams, and having a heavy focus on writing essay-type analysis responses.

When it comes to having the provincial exam affecting teaching style, the qualitative responses continued to demonstrate this connection as respondents indicated that when it comes to assessment, many of them use the 6-point holistic marking key from the provincial exam to mark all of their assignments and that they feel “justified in using more analysis, formal writing”. Numerous respondents also indicated that they approach literature through a synthesis format because that is reflective of what students will face on the provincial exam. There was some guilt associated with these behaviors as one teacher admitted that the “assignments are less creative” and that “the weight of the exam is so high – and yet such a small marker of how much they do learn in English 12”. One respondent did indicate an awareness of moving away from using the provincial exam as a guide by recording that “I try to include more student-driven, active participation” in order to counteract the effect of the exam, but most qualitative responses indicated a variety of attempts to prepare students to achieve success on their provincial exams. One teacher admitted that the provincial exams cause him to be “sensitive to others’ opinions and I constantly self-question myself to make sure I am being effective with my
teaching” while another commented on how the provincial exam provides validation for the students as an indicator of the skills and knowledge they have developed.

In general, the statistical results of the survey indicate that while teachers do believe in the importance of following the P.L.O.’s, there is also a significant effect on the style and content of their curriculum when the course involves the writing of a provincial exam as an endpoint. The English teachers in School District #71 do feel a significant amount of personal pressure to have their students perform well on the exams, especially at the Grade 12 level, but in general they are content with the results of their students and do not begrudge the existence of the exam. External sources of pressure consisting of administrators, parents, students and the school board office were a less significant source of pressure to have students do well on provincial exams as the results were significantly lower than the personal pressure that teachers placed upon themselves.

Chapter 5: Summaries and Conclusions

Overview of the Study

In September 2009, Grade 10 and 12 English teachers in School District #71 were asked to complete a survey (Appendix A) exploring the effect that provincial exams have on their approaches to teaching their courses and whether they feel internal or external pressure to have their students achieve success on these exams. In total 18 surveys were sent out to teachers of the three high schools in the district and 12 teachers responded by completing the survey and anonymously mailing it back to the researcher. All participants, in the past two years, have taught a complete Grade 10 or Grade 12 English course in the district and freely offered their anonymous input by completing the 5-point Likert survey along with some accompanying qualitative open-ended responses.
After receiving the surveys, the researcher calculated and tabulated the mean, median and mode for each quantitative Likert-based question and transcribed and tabulated all of the written qualitative responses. The results were studied to explore the hypothesis: to what extent have teachers of Grade 10 and 12 English in School District #71 changed their teaching content and style to reflect the content of the provincial exam and is the motivation for this change internal or external?

The results of the quantitative and qualitative data submitted revealed that English teachers do have a strong belief in following the P.L.O.’s in their classrooms but there is also a significant amount of internal pressure to adjust their teaching content and style to meet the requirements of the provincial exam. It appears as though a larger percentage of the pressure that teachers feel for their students to achieve success on the exams is internally based instead of externally based as the pressures of school boards, administrators, parents and students were not as strong as the personal motivation they feel to have their students succeed. There were some difference between the results for Grade 10 English and Grade 12 English which can probably be credited to the increased impact of the Grade 12 Provincial Exam. At the Grade 12 level, teachers were more willing to adjust their teaching style and curriculum to reflect the skills needed for and the content of the provincial exam as both the internal and external pressures felt increased.

In general, the study revealed that teachers do feel pressure to adjust their teaching style and content to reflect the provincial exam but they are still dedicated to maintaining the P.L.O.’s in their curriculum. The motivation to adjust their teaching largely originates in the personal desire to have their students achieve success rather than the external sources that use the exam for accountability. In general the sample group felt a high level of contentment with their
students’ achievements on the provincial exams and feel minimal resentment towards the existence of the exams as an end-point for Grade 10 or Grade 12 English.

Discussions of Implications of the Findings

Supporting the literature studied, it was found that English teachers are adjusting their teaching style and content to meet the requirements of the provincial exams. Based on the increase in the significance of the Grade 12 Provincial Exam, it was also not surprising to find that the level of teaching that reflected the exam increased as did the internal and external pressures felt by the teacher. The unexpected element to the qualitative responses received was that the reaction to the provincial exam was not as negative as was expected. Based on the political conflict between the Ministry of Education and the BCTF over the implementation of the Foundation Skills Assessments at the elementary levels (British Columbia Teachers’ Federation, 2010) it was expected that teachers would express negative reactions to the use of externally based standardized testing to be used as a form of external accountability, but the opposite was true. Through their written comments teachers expressed their perception of the exam as a “goal” as it provides a focus to their students’ learning and it is also perceived to be a source of “validation” for student learning that has occurred in the classroom. One teacher sees the results of the provincial exam as an avenue for self-reflection that can help ensure that the teacher was maintaining effectiveness in the classroom. Another teacher expressed that students “realize that this exam is a key piece in their academic goals ie: exam prep, writing under pressure, language for life, academic achievement for scholarships and self pride, and a measure for personal and academic growth”.

The question that arises from these comments is whether teachers are questioning the skills learning and the content studied on the provincial exam. Based on their responses to the
question concerning the following of the P.L.O.’s in their class, teachers still believed that their courses followed the P.L.O.’s as outlined by the Ministry of Education, but there appears to be a conflict between the responses given on that question and the responses given concerning the adjustment of curriculum to meet the needs of the test. If the provincial exam provides a “focus” and “validates” student learning, but it only assesses a minimal number of the P.L.O.’s then is it a true form of assessment and does it deserve to be the focus of the course? How can it “validate” learning if it does not assess all learning outcomes of the course? There is a fear that teachers have allowed the pressure and the weight of the provincial exam to dictate the curriculum of their courses without being aware of how it has affected the content of their courses and their own autonomy of teaching style.

Limitations to the Study

The main limitation to the study is the size of the sample group. Only 12 teachers participated in the study with a response rate of 67%. The mortality rate could have a possible effect on the results of the data as the teachers who did not respond could have provided insight and comments that would have changed the perspective of the data. There is also the concern with such a small sample group that outliers would have a larger impact on the results of the data. Based on the median values of the Likert survey results, the response range was diverse on the questions concerning internal and external pressure at the Grade 10 level, but otherwise, based on the median scores and the modes, the outliers did not have a significant effect.

The need to create a survey that would be completed with ease and a minimal time commitment was important to keeping the mortality rate low, but it did result in the use of a limited 5-point Likert survey that did not allow for a diversity of responses. The use of
qualitative additions to the responses did help offset some of these limitations, but the 5-point response does not allow for insightful data.

There were also some issues concerning the role of the researcher as a fellow English teacher in the district. The potential conflict of interest involving friendships and working relationships existed, but the anonymous nature of the survey hopefully helped to offset the potential for existing relationships to affect responses. It may have had an impact on the responses to the use of P.L.O.’s in the classroom as the Ministry of Education deems it mandatory to follow the P.L.O.’s in the classroom. Teachers may have not wanted to reveal perceived deficiencies in their teaching to a colleague which may explain the discrepancies between the adjustment of teaching to meet the needs of the exam and maintaining the P.L.O.’s in their curriculum.

**Suggestions for Further Research**

The results of the data gained from the research and the limitations of the study have left numerous questions concerning the research of the effect provincial exams have on teachers. In order to expand upon the research completed in this study, there are further areas that should be explored. Even though teachers reported that their classroom curriculum followed the P.L.O.’s ($M=4.28$ and $M=4.19$), further evidence should be gathered to report on the validity of this perception being put forward by the subject group. There is professional pressure to follow the P.L.O.’s and any admission that a teacher was not following them would be revealing their unprofessionalism. As an extension of this further research, it should be determined if there has there been a loss of authentic forms of assessment in Grade 10 and 12 English classes due to the teaching style and content of the class being directed to develop the skills and content knowledge necessary to achieve success on the provincial exams.
The other area in need of further research is the emotional connotations associated with the implementation of a provincial exam. The subject group reported that they felt more internal pressure ($M=4.13$ and $M=4.38$) than external pressure ($M=3.11$ and $M=4.0$), but it raises the question of whether the internal pressure felt by Grade 10 and 12 English teachers originates from external sources of pressure. The qualitative data only extrapolated on the external pressure felt and there was no opportunity for the respondents to expand upon their responses to the existence of personal pressure. This topic could be further explored through a questioning of whether teachers of Grade 10 and 12 English feel resentment towards the use of provincial exams as the end-point for the course or if they support the existence of the exams.

**Recommendations for Policy**

The results of this research have revealed a need for teachers to be aware of how the existence of the provincial exams has affected their teaching style and content and more reflection is necessary for teachers to continue to develop a robust curriculum that creates a positive learning environment for their students. Based on the literature of Kaser and Halbert (2009), “overly intense external accountability policies seem to increase the use of behaviourist styles in schools” (p. 84) These traditional behaviourist styles are revealed through a system of assessment of learning instead of moving forward and creating a more student-centered educational system that supports assessment as learning. As revealed in the review of the literature, the research of Dylan Wiliam et al. (2004) demonstrates the possible effectiveness of implementing assessment as learning strategies in a school system that uses externally set examinations for accountability. Not only did it create a positive learning environment for students by reinforcing the use of authentic forms of assessment, the results on the externally set exams increased (Wiliam et al., 2004). The implementation of and cultural shift towards
assessment as learning is a necessary step in preserving the robust curriculum as outlined in the P.L.O.’s for Grade 10 and 12 English.

If the shift is going to be made from assessment of learning to assessment as learning, then school districts need to recognize that teachers need support in developing these teaching strategies. Wiliam et al. (2004) recognized this in their study and release time was given to educate teachers on the possibilities of assessment as learning and support was given to help them develop action plans that were individually based according to the abilities and desires of each teacher. Wiliam et al. (2004) projected the cost per teacher to be about $3000 USD for release time and expenses, which is a significant number, but unless a school board is willing to provide financial support then teachers will be unwilling to embrace such a change as the existence of the provincial exams is already setting the goals and direction of their courses and there is no other motivation to change as long as teachers continue to feel pleased with their students’ achievement on the exams.

Conclusion

This research project, which explored the impact that the existence of provincial exams as the end point for Grade 10 and 12 English has on the teaching style and content of the curriculum in School District #71, has successfully raised an awareness of just how much the exams affect these courses and has revealed that the pressure to make these changes is primarily rooted intrinsically in the teachers of these courses instead of being externally motivated. It is hopeful that the revelations of this study will create an awareness among the English teachers in the district and provide an opportunity for self-reflection on what constitutes best practice for their students. As long as teachers allow the provincial exams to determine the content and style of
their teaching and they continue to be content with the results on the exams, change will not occur at a time when change is necessary to meet the needs of their students.
References


Appendix A

Survey on Effects of Grade 10 and Grade 12 English Provincial Exams on Teaching Strategies

Instructions: Answer the following questions. If there are questions that you find objectionable, please place an “X” on the question number and leave the response area blank. Thank you for your cooperation!

Once you have completed this survey, please place it in the sealed envelope provided. Send the envelope through inter-school mail to Dwayne Mills at Vanier.

Section A

1. How many years experience do you have teaching English at the high school level (English 10-12)?
   __________ years.

2. Within the past two years, have you taught a complete Grade 10 English course in School District #71 which culminated in a provincial exam?
   Yes  No

   ***If you answered No to this question, please skip Section B and move on to Section C.***

Section B: To be completed by teachers who have taught a complete English 10 course.

3. Are you currently teaching Grade 10 English?
   Yes  No

4. To what extent do you follow the Prescribed Learning Outcomes as outlined by the Ministry of Education when teaching Grade 10 English?
   Never  Rarely  Neutral  Sometimes  Always

5. To what extent do you direct your teaching content to reflect the content of the Grade 10 English Provincial Exam? (Ex: Content would be the type of materials and you use in class)
Can you list some examples of your teaching content that reflects the exam:_______________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

6. To what extent do you direct your teaching style to reflect the content of the Grade 10 English Provincial Exam? (Ex: Style would be the types of assignments you assign and how you approach teaching the course.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Can you list some examples of how your teaching style reflects the exam:_________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

7. In general, are you pleased with the achievement results of your classes on the Grade 10 English Provincial Exam?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

8. Do you place personal pressure upon yourself for your classes to score well on the Grade 10 English Provincial Exam?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

9. Do you feel external pressure for your classes to score well on the Grade 10 English Provincial Exam?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Can you please list any sources of the pressure that you feel: ________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
Section C: To be completed by teachers who have taught a complete English 12 course.

10. Within the past two years, have you taught a complete English 12 course in School District #71 which culminated in a provincial exam?

| Yes | No |

***If you answered No to this question, please skip Section C and mail in the survey as directed.***

11. Are you currently teaching English 12?

| Yes | No |

12. To what extent do you follow the Prescribed Learning Outcomes as outlined by the Ministry of Education when teaching Grade 12 English?

| Never | Rarely | Neutral | Sometimes | Always |

13. To what extent do you direct your teaching content to reflect the content of the Grade 12 English Provincial Exam? (Ex: Content would be the type of materials and you use in class)

Can you list some examples of your teaching content that reflects the exam:

____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________

14. To what extent do you direct your teaching style to reflect the content of the Grade 12 English Provincial Exam? (Ex: Style would be the types of assignments you assign and how you approach teaching the course.)

Can you list some examples of how your teaching style reflects the exam:

____________________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________________
15. In general, are you pleased with the achievement results of your classes on the Grade 12 English Provincial Exam?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

16. Do you place personal pressure upon yourself for your classes to score well on the Grade 12 English Provincial Exam?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

17. Do you feel external pressure for your classes to score well on the Grade 12 English Provincial Exam?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Can you please list any sources of the pressure that you feel: ________________________________

______________________________________________________________

Thank you for completing the survey! If you have any further questions please contact Dwayne Mills at Dwayne.mills@sd71.bc.ca or call 250-336-2131.
As a student currently enrolled in the Masters of Educational Leadership program at VIU, I am required to use action research to explore an issue that is of concern within the educational system. As such, I have designed a research project to study the impact that standardized testing in Grade 10 and Grade 12 English has on the approach of teachers in those courses within School District #71.

During this study you will be asked to complete a brief survey concerning your personal experience teaching Grade 10 English and/or Grade 12 English, including questions about how your teaching style changes vis-à-vis the existence of Provincial Exams, and if you feel pressures, internal or external, to change your teaching approach. Your participation will require approximately 15 minutes of your time.

There are no known harms associated with your participation in this research. The potential benefits include creating an awareness of how Provincial Exams affect teaching within the classroom, including the identification of internal or external pressures that prompt teachers to adjust what they believe is best practice for their students.

All records of participation will be kept strictly confidential, such that only my supervisor and I will have access to the information. The paper data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet within my supervisor’s office located on the Nanaimo campus at VIU, and digital data will be stored on a password protected network through G.P. Vanier Secondary. All data will be destroyed in June 2012, two years after the projected completion of the project. The anonymous results of this study will be reported in a written thesis report and presented in an oral format as a requirement of completion of the Masters of Educational Leadership program. If you would like to see a copy of the final results and have access to the thesis report, please contact me at the email address above.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. However, there will be no means to withdraw individual data after submission of the completed survey, as I will have access to only anonymous survey data.

Completion and submission of this survey indicates your free and informed consent to participate in this study. I appreciate your willingness to volunteer time to participate in this study, and, should questions or concerns arise, you may reach me at the email address above.