

TEACHING HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH
WITH ALBERTA'S DIPLOMA EXAMS:
AN ASSESSMENT THROUGH ORAL RESEARCH
AND DRAMATIC RE-PRESENTATION

by
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and
Interviews with GERRY S. MILLER
and RONALD VAN ORMAN

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Dedication:

This project is dedicated to the memory of John Wood, whose blueprints for the Diploma Examinations and enigmatic comments about testing continue to pique my thoughts about testing and instruction.

Acknowledgements:

If I were a student at Plato's Academy, he never would have encouraged me to write educational research in the form of drama. Plato would have blessed my poetic and acting talents and then banished me from the Republic. I appreciate the opportunities of completing the Master of Education program from 1984-87 at The University of Lethbridge, where my dramatic re-presentations have been both blessed and accepted by members of the faculty, graduate students, colleagues, and friends with whom I have been privileged to associate.

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THIS PROJECT IS ACCOMPANIED BY A VIDEOTAPED RECORDING	
OF AN AUGUST 5, 1987 PERFORMANCE OF THE PLAY:	
<u>A Madman's Tale of Two Teaching Hamlets--</u>	
<u>A Narrated Dumb Show of "The Caucasian Mouse Chase"</u>	

Abstract

The concern of this project is understanding what effects Alberta's Diploma examinations are having upon English 30 and English 33 teachers and their interactions within the school system. At first, a need is shown for educational literature which analyzes the relationships between mandatory testing and language arts instruction. The emergent methodology which the author used for conducting such research is recounted. He combined methods of biography, dream analysis, oral history, and ethnographic interviewing in order to develop a personal model for "insider" human science research. A surface analysis of the culture of two high school English 30 and English 33 teachers describes how Diploma tests, interactions with administrators and public concerns outside the classroom, interactions with students in the classroom, an integrated high school language arts curriculum, and a university liberal arts education help shape the behavior and thinking patterns of this culture.

The emergent focus of the researcher and the data of ethnographic interviews with two high school language arts teachers are re-presented, retold, in the form of guerilla theatre. The researcher's initial concern for understanding the relationships between external testing and instruction expanded to include a complex network of interactions with students, colleagues, administrators, government test developers, university professors, businessmen, politicians, and the public. Each of these domains is symbolized by a section of an outer chalk circle

drawn on the floor, with an inner chalk circle representing the interviewed teachers. The interrelationships between the teachers and the domains are mimed while a taped narrative dramatically relates the reflections of the researcher and the interviewed teachers. The purposes of the dramatic re-presentation are to promote understanding of how government administered tests have affected the culture of two high school English teachers and provoke audiences both inside and outside the studied culture to dialogue on the political and pedagogical themes which the drama depicts. An accompanying videotape of an August 5, 1987 performance demonstrates how the drama can serve as a catalyst for conversation and understanding.

The project ends with the author offering his personal resolutions for continuing action. For him, this work suggests commitment for recognizing the complexity of the culture of English 30 and English 33 teachers, arguing against the myth that "every class must score above the mean," arguing for diagnostic testing services for high school English teachers, encouraging students to write essays and teachers and Alberta Education officials to evaluate student writing with the help of computer technology, and continuing the dialogue with teachers and various educational stakeholders.

Teaching High School English With Alberta's Diploma Exams:
An Assessment Through Oral Research and Dramatic Re-presentation

Introduction

I awoke from a dream wherein I had been arguing with my principal about how to improve teachers' instruction. He claimed that frequently walking in and out of classrooms was the best way to supervise what was happening. I advocated that much could be learned by simply talking about teaching with teachers, especially English instructors who strive to keep language use alive. I pointed out that thought-provoking conversations about language and literature are pearls beyond price for those who have assumed the Sisyphian challenges of encouraging lifelong applications of writing, reading, speaking, listening, and viewing to teenage and adult high school students. This project attempts to apply my dream to life and show how engaging in reflective dialogue with teachers, and with other stakeholders interested in education, can be a useful way of understanding and enhancing thoughtful, active pedagogy.

A key problem I encountered in using conversation as a method of research is that such an approach forced me to recognize each teacher as unique. Originally, I had intended to analyze the conversations of 10 to 12 teachers. My focus changed, though, as I conducted the field work and encountered the complexities of trying to interpret the comments of even one or two teachers. I discovered that I could not claim to reveal the typical perceptions of English teachers toward Alberta's Diploma tests or offer sweeping actions for educational reform.

The most confident assertion I can make is that this project reveals perceptions of myself, Ronald Van Orman, and Gerry S. Miller concerning the effects Diploma tests have upon the interactions in our respective classrooms, and we offer some of our hints and guesses about what needs improvement. Interestingly, both Gerry Miller and I have subsequently chosen not to teach any high school English for the 1987-88 school year, which may mean that this paper represents the concluding statements of two of us as practicing English teachers.

In completing this project, I have used a number of different voices to re-present, to tell the story, of my research: from the needs, to the method, to a surface analysis of two teachers' culture, to a dramatic script, to resolutions, to edited interviews, to a videotaped performance of guerrilla theatre. If one voice displeases or is of no use to one reader, I would hope that reader will forgive my flaws but search for something of value in the other sections of the paper. The three sections which I find most provoking and satisfying are the transcribed, edited interviews in the appendices and the dramatic re-presentations about the research. The transcripts allow each reader to hear the voices of teachers talking about teaching and to verify whether my re-presentations are accurately grounded in the data. The written and videotaped forms of my play are my metaphor for what it means to teach high school English. They portray what I and Gerry Miller and Ron Van Orman want when teaching--that a particular book or play or poem or essay will serve as an ice-axe

to break the knowledge frozen inside ourselves and our students. Drama, in this sense, has the power to transform the individual, disparate moment to the ". . . realm of idea and type and universal that is able to evoke our belief" (Wilder, 1976, p. x). My play will have served a purpose beyond being entertaining, informative, or personally useful if it can imaginatively vex some members of the audience to recognize what is really important for educating today's secondary students and to take whatever individual steps they can to improve the current educational situations.

The Need for Research on How Testing Affects Instruction

While a large body of research exists respectively on test development, student evaluation, curriculum implementation, and instructional improvement, very little empirical evidence reveals how high school English teachers perceive mandatory testing affecting their classroom instruction. Suhor's (1985) survey of 350 state and local language arts supervisors appears to be one of the few attempts to deal with such a question. He found that supervisors overwhelmingly disapproved of standardized objective tests (both norm-referenced and criterion-referenced competency tests), that they approved of tests requiring writing samples because they increased and improved the instruction leading to writing, and that in some cases testing had narrowed instruction to an emphasis of those tasks on the test. From his experiences in implementing state testing programs, Suhor (1977) claims that teachers tend to view the effects of external testing with

mistrust, criticism, and even non-cooperation.

One of the disturbing facts about Suhor's method of research is that his questionnaire consisted of four questions about "thinking skills" and made no direct reference to how testing affected language arts instruction. Another key problem with Suhor's conclusions is that they are based on perceptions of language arts supervisors--not teachers. Other studies neglect teachers: Harrison (1980) studied administrators perceptions; Schlawin (1981), Baron (1984) Sachse (1984), Chapman, et. al., (1984) and Hermann (1984) offer defenses of particular tests from individuals employed by departments or agencies responsible for constructing external examinations. Other groups tend to emphasize interpretations of test data. For example, Webber (1986, November/December) reports how school trustees are interpreting Alberta's Diploma test scores. Popham, et. al., (1985) view the rise in students' test scores as evidence that well constructed external tests can improve instruction because "the competencies that are covered by the test will become curricular magnets that draw instruction toward themselves" (p. 629). Samiroden (1987) takes the opposite view, criticizing Alberta's Diploma exams for limiting what is taught. Again, his conclusions did not significantly involve teachers: he only briefly interviewed teachers of all Diploma examination subjects at a single "Meet the Teacher" night. The voices of teachers are not a significant part of the data in any of these studies on testing and instruction. The perceptions of high school English

teachers toward a mandatory testing program and how it is influencing instruction and other interrelationships within a school system need to be expressed more explicitly.

Emergent Methodology And Delimitations

I view collegial, oral research as one way to fill this gap in the literature and promote an understanding of the culture of language arts instructors. My methodology for conducting such research has presently undergone four major phases of development. The first began in the Winter of 1985 when I participated in a graduate curriculum course designed to help teachers cooperatively assess their thoughts and experiences through four autobiographical writing assignments: "This is the working reality I experience"; "My pedagogy and curriculum-in-use"; "How did I come to think and act the way I do as a teacher"; and "What do I want to become as a teacher" (Butt, forthcoming). Because these assignments helped me and other class members express and better understand our past, present, and future, I resolved that I would use them as questioning guidelines for any future research I might do with teachers. In addition, the course provided me with an underlying principle for how I wanted to work with teachers:

There has been minimal dialogue between teachers (as they perceive their professional lives) and scholars of education--not only because of the nature of the relationship of outsiders to insiders, but also because of the lack of an approach to inquiry that effectively grasped and represented what one might call the teacher's voice (Butt & Raymond, 1987, pp. 69-70)

Such thinking convinced me that the personal, practical knowledge of the "teacher's voice" needed more precise articulation.

The only major concern I had about Butt's and Raymond's assumptions for research was the "outsiders to insiders" relationship. I wanted to work with high school English teachers, and I would be regarded as an insider of that group. I felt reluctant to do so, however, because I could never claim to be an objective, scientific observer. I dropped the idea of "inside" research with colleagues and began experimenting with self-evaluation techniques. The result of those efforts was a detailed report which attempted to analyze the problems I had experienced in teaching three English 30 courses during the 1984-85 school year. I submitted my analysis to my principal and superintendent, but it did not lead to more dialogue about some of the concerns I had expressed. Instead, it seemed to give my administrators the impression that I knew what I was doing, for which they thanked me, and then they proceeded to leave me alone, perhaps because their expertise was not in the teaching of language arts and literature. I had not written the report with the intent of ending dialogue but of initiating it. My efforts with self-evaluation had led me to a dead end as far as encouraging conversation with others.

In the Fall of 1985, a group of graduate students and an education professor organized a class which used journal writing and dream analysis as a means for continuing biographical, intrapersonal inquiry (Pollard & McDougall, 1986). Class members analyzed dreams according to White's (1986) approach:

1. Recording the dream and any initial feelings about it.
2. Attempting an immediate interpretation.

3. Relating the dream to conscious concerns.
4. Picking out key words and searching for synonymous word associations.
5. Asking questions about the meanings of key words and their associations.
6. Rewriting the dream, using the associated terms, or sometimes drawing pictures of it, as ways of emphasizing its symbolic meanings.
7. Applying the dream in one's personal life.

The underlying assumption behind such an approach is that individuals are responsible for their own dreams. The dreamer is the final authority concerning any interpretation. This level of dream analysis does not discount different approaches to dreams, such as Jung's or Freud's; instead, it is a method which emphasizes the importance of finding personal meanings for dreams. The search for personal interpretations to dreams is attractive to me because it is similar to my hopes that my students will make individual connections with literature, which can be regarded as public dreams (Campbell, 1972).

The most important effect of that class is that it serves as an analogy for the challenges I would face as an inside researcher. Many of the behaviors and language of my culture are so commonplace to me as an insider that I would have to force myself to consciously question what my colleagues and I are really doing and why. According to Taylor (1983), "Our collective circumstances are so ominous that most people prefer to simply repress their unease and sense of utter helplessness in the face of these problems and not to think consciously about them at all" (p. 12). Dream work, I found, served as a process for breaking down my closed prejudices, opinions, ideologies, and

world views. For example, part of the dream work involved sharing our dreams and interpretations with the six members of the class. When the group work first began, I felt very comfortable telling other people what I thought their dreams meant. It was not until I read my first recorded dream and attempted to interpret it that I experienced the helplessness and doubt which comes in trying to understand and explain the symbols and metaphors of one's own dreams. Everyone in the class had also experienced this same initial roadblock to interpretation. Through keeping a journal and practicing the approach outlined in the previous paragraph, I became more aware of my subconscious imagery and confident about the interpretative actions I inferred from my dream work. As I gained more experience with this type of phenomenon, I began to suspect that the processes I had used for intrapersonal analysis could be applied to more than just dreams. In fact, it seemed natural to extend the methodology of my dream work to develop a model for insider human science research. Admittedly, other models exist for helping humans study other humans, but most do not embrace the process of inside research. The science of anthropology, for instance, discourages "opportunistic" participant-observation (Spradley, 1980). The literature of dreams, however, offered me an approach which encouraged inside research as a legitimate method of understanding personal and external dilemmas simultaneously.

To complete the first step of my research process--recording a phenomenon--I searched for a mode to interact with teachers. I

did not have the built-in support system of a graduate course, such as Butt and Pollard, which would allow me to have teachers generate their own written documents about themselves. Interviews seemed a way for me to engage classroom teachers in the types of conversations I had been hoping to stimulate through my self-evaluation report. In the Spring of 1986 I became aware of an oral history course taught at Brigham Young University (Embry, 1984), probably the only oral history course in North America taught by correspondence. I followed the outlined procedures of the course for conducting interviews (Shumway & Hartley, 1973):

1. I selected a topic--How are Diploma tests affecting classroom instruction?
2. I did background research and wrote a paper on how Diploma tests were reinstated as a part of the provincial assessment.
3. I formulated an outline of open-ended and close-ended questions which I wanted to ask teachers about their instruction and testing. I used the four themes from the autobiographical writing assignments as a guide for the types of questions I would ask. (See Appendix C for the original outline of questions.)
4. I selected four interviewees from names suggested to me by Alberta Education's Regional Language Arts Consultant. (I had previously worked with one of the interviewees, but I did not know the other three.)
5. I obtained a Sony reel to reel tape recorder, a PZM microphone, and blank tapes for recording.
6. I tape-recorded four interviews. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. I had committed my outline of questions to memory, and I mentally noted when an interviewee had addressed an issue on my outline. I tried to make sure that all issues on the outline were covered.
7. Each interviewee signed an agreement which specified under what conditions they would release the contents of the interview.
8. I selected one interview for transcription and editing. First, I made a verbatim transcript and audit checked it. Then, I edited the transcript in order to make it more readable.

9. I revisited the interviewee, allowing a week for him to make any additions or deletions to the edited transcript. I informally interviewed the interviewee and assured him that any changes or concerns he had about the edited transcript would be addressed before it was published. (pp. 1-21)

One reason I have specifically outlined this interviewing process is to show the complexity of transforming speech to a written document. I was not able to complete the process with all of the interviewees because of the time required to produce one edited transcript for subsequent analysis. I was beginning to understand why so little literature exists which attempts to represent teachers' voices on issues--oral research is very time-consuming to change to written form, and then, it is difficult to analyze. As Carson (1986) explains, ". . . the relationship between research and practice is far more complex and ambiguous than it had been assumed to be" (p. 73).

The interviewing process also defines the procedures I used when I began the oral portions of my research. The Ron Van Orman interview on July 10, 1986 happened to be my first (See Appendix A). I did not know Van Orman before I interviewed him, but I was impressed by what I perceived as an immediate frankness. I did not observe that same openness in some of my other interviews. One interviewee, who had recently begun teaching English 30, approached me about one week after I had interviewed him and asked me to tell him what I had learned. I started to recapitulate some of the issues teachers had raised when this individual interjected, "You know, if I really knew how to teach my kids to score higher on the exams, I would not tell you." That single

sentence revealed more to me than an entire hour of conversation had. I was beginning to discover firsthand that not all of my colleagues trusted the intentions of my interviewing (Weber, 1986), and the competition for higher averages on the Diploma exam seemed to be one of the impediments for collegial sharing. Van Orman, however, did not seem reticent to talk about the influences the Diploma exams were having upon him and the school systems where he worked. Nearly seven months later when I had him review the edited transcript of the interview, I asked him if he wanted to add anything to the transcript. He replied, "No, I think it expresses how I still feel." His affirmation that the statements he had made in July 1986 were still valid in February 1987 is one of the primary reasons why I have chosen to focus on Van Orman in this project. He also represents the early phases of my oral research.

The fourth stage of my methodology began to evolve when I worked with Dr. Keith Parry in an anthropology class on field research methods. Parry introduced me to discovery grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), which helped free me from some of my preconceptions about what my colleagues should be telling me. My original outline of questions did in some ways impose my view of external testing on my interviewees. According to Glaser and Strauss I should discover what questions were meaningful to the teachers I was studying. That is not to imply that I had to throw out all of my questions and determine if Diploma tests were an important issue. Such an action would be similar to telling

researchers on a cancer ward that they should not talk about cancer unless the patient brought up the subject. As a member of the studied culture, I already knew that external testing was an important question, and the fact that teachers could easily carry on conversations of an hour or more implied its importance to them. But I did not know all the significant questions for each interviewee. For example, one teacher, who was a friend, seemed hesitant to talk to me. Once I was able to interview him, I discovered that he had been banned from participating on provincial test committees because of a controversy surrounding his providing a reader for an English 30 student. He was so angry with how his local school administrators and provincial officials had treated him that the thought of granting an interview on Diploma tests was also uncomfortable for him. Another teacher I wanted to interview kept declining. Finally, I asked her if she did not want to talk to me to simply tell me, and I would leave her alone. She replied, "No. I would like to talk to you. But right now our school is going through so many evaluations that I'm afraid I would not have anything positive to say about tests." For her, other questions, which were related to testing and instruction, superseded her desires to talk to me about a concern I had designated. Testing was only one of many serious issues surrounding teachers.

My challenge became one of not just turning on my tape recorder but of opening my eyes and ears to what teachers wanted to discuss. The first thing I did was abandon the idea of

asking all the questions on my outline. I forgot the outline as much as possible, clinging only to the four categories of questions used in the biography class. I also found that key times for free discussions occurred before the interview ritual of turning on the tape recorder and after the ceremony of turning it off. It was not that teachers seemed anxious about being tape-recorded; it was more that with the tape recorder on both the teachers and I assumed the respective roles of interviewee and interviewer. I also conducted three interviews without the use of a tape recorder as a means of decreasing the formality of the interview. Perhaps because of my questioning techniques, I did not notice any appreciable differences in how teachers responded. In order to keep track of anything that occurred before, during, or after the interview, I needed to begin a journal. I followed Spradley's (1979) recommendations for organizing field notes into four sections:

1. A condensed account section contains any notes taken in the field or artifacts given to the interviewer. I frequently made notes on small note cards because I could conveniently carry them wherever I went, and they were not intimidating for interviewees.
2. An expanded account section contains any notes about the field work taken after interviews. I usually made such notes on standard notebook paper or on my word processor in the tranquility of my own home. I also placed transcripts of interviews in this section.
3. The journal section is similar to a diary, allowing me to record my introspective perceptions and my assessments of how the work was influencing me personally.
4. The analysis and interpretation section contains my attempts to generalize from the data, wherein I identified meanings, insights, themes, or interpretations. (pp. 75-76)

The value of organizing my journal in this fashion is that it

helped outline and organize the tasks of my research. Part of my job was to collect data, but I needed to keep track of what changes occurred within me as I went about my tasks. I also needed to focus my efforts on analysis and interpretation. As I saw the usefulness of the journal for the entire scope of the field work, it became a valuable research friend which I relied upon more regularly.

I should have recognized the importance of the journal earlier, especially since my work in dream analysis had emphasized the use of journals. I had abandoned the use of the journal when I began my oral history work because I had the misconception that the interview encompassed the entirety of data for analysis. I also had a delusion that my interviewees would assume the roles of co-researchers and assist me in analyzing the transcripts. My devotion to the individual responsibilities of dream analysis and my readings of Terkel (1974, 1980) led me to believe that all I had to do was record the data, edit it, and let the readers interpret it for themselves. With these naive expectations I presented Van Orman with the edited transcript of his interview and told him to circle key words and identify themes. When he returned the transcript to me, he had underlined a few key words, but generally he corrected punctuation and usage errors and changed the wording of a few sentences for clarity. My second interviewee (Appendix B, Miller, 1987) reviewed his edited transcript in the same manner as Van Orman. I do not know why I expected them to do a detailed

analysis of their transcripts when I was having difficulty completing an itemized analysis of them myself. I had taken commonplace conversations and as Grele (1985) says made them "anthropologically strange" (p. 170). Because of my familiarity with the culture, I was experiencing problems similar to those I had undergone in interpreting my own dreams. According to the processes of dream analysis, I should circle key words, suggest synonymous associations, and ask questions about those key words and associations before attempting an analysis. An anthropological methodology recommends a similar process: I should conduct domain, taxonomic, and componential analyses before attempting to write an ethnography (Spradley, 1979). One of the limitations of the present work is that such specific types of analyses have not been done; I have opted for a "surface," "holistic" approach (Spradley, p. 134). At a later time, I hope to focus more attention to key words (domains) and produce an in-depth analysis.

Sample

When I reached the point where I believed that I had to interpret my data before I went any further, I had interviewed nine teachers. For the record, I should explain something about the demographics of my sample. Teachers were not randomly selected. I did obtain names of candidates from Bernie Gommeringer (Southern Alberta Regional Language Arts Consultant), but interviewees were selected on their willingness to be interviewed. I also tried to maintain some kind of balance in terms

of location, sex, experience, familiarity, and method of interviewing. Five teachers were from cities (Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, and Calgary); four were from rural Southern Alberta. Six were men; three were women. Only one had taught English 30 or English 33 for fewer than 10 years. Two had previously served as English department heads; one is still serving as a department head. I was personally acquainted with five of the individuals before I interviewed them; four of the interviewees were new acquaintances. The tape recorder was used for six interviews; field notes for three. No attempt was made to control attitudes toward Diploma tests, but through the interviews I discovered that seven teachers in my sample favored the reinstatement of external tests, while only two unequivocally opposed them.

As to why I focused on the two teachers whose transcripts accompany this study, I was initially impressed by Van Orman's frankness in the interview. He had also taught English 30 and English 33 for at least 10 years to teenagers at Lethbridge Collegiate Institute and to adult students at Lethbridge Community College, giving him a range of experiences which many other teachers had not had. A third reason involved his criticisms that the field testing practices Alberta Education used for constructing multiple choice tests produced a test that achieved a pre-specified means but did not adequately measure students' competencies. Even though the other teachers I interviewed thought that field testing is absolutely necessary for checking the validity of questions, Van Orman's views made me think about

test development from a different perspective. I believe that his concerns need more open reflection and debate because they emphasize the vexing discrepancy between a pre-established norm and the competency of students. Finally, when I had Van Orman review the edited transcript of our initial interview, I had started asking the question interviewees, "Of all the literature you teach, which character are you?" Van Orman responded that he enjoyed thinking and analyzing situations as Shakespeare's Hamlet did. This remark allowed for interesting parallels with Miller.

Miller was selected primarily on the wide experience he has had both in teaching and in developing the Diploma exam. His comments add an historical perspective that is lacking in Van Orman's simply because Miller served on provincial curriculum committees which also became involved in developing the Diploma tests of the new curriculum. Perhaps because of his committee work and his administrative experiences as a former department head, Miller reveals political strategies for affecting future decision-making concerning test construction. He also displays a "test-wise" approach to multiple choice questions which none of the other teachers had discussed: students can pass multiple choice tests by carefully reading the questions and ignoring the reading selections. His integrated method for teaching Hamlet is impressive because his approach is unique and because I have observed at Diploma grading committees that Hamlet is probably one of the most widely taught English 30 plays in Alberta. The correlation of both teachers being strongly influenced by the

play Hamlet was more a matter of serendipity than plan. I did not select these two interviewees because of the convenience of juxtaposing two Hamlets for a dramatic effect; instead, I find Miller's and Van Orman's comments thought-provoking.

A Surface Analysis of the Culture of Two Teachers

I began my research with the question: How are Alberta's Diploma exams affecting high school language arts instruction? As I talked with my colleagues and focused my attention on two of them, I began to realize that the problem was not simply explaining relationships between testing and instruction. I could not separate instruction, what a teacher does, from ontology--what a teacher is. The more important question became one of understanding the archipelagic culture of Alberta's English 30 and English 33 teachers, with culture referring to ". . . the **acquired knowledge that people use to interpret experience and generate social behavior**" (Spradley, 1979, p. 5). This particular social group of university-trained individuals has a regimented teaching schedule which tends to isolate its members within classroom islands across the province. The only times they gather as a distinct Albertan society is when they meet in Edmonton to mark Diploma essays, but even then the tasks of grading up to 15,000 essays, which some teachers work at 10 to 12 hours a day for up to two weeks, tends to curtail socialization. They appear to have a common language, though, which is derived from their liberal arts education, from a government-mandated curriculum, and from practical knowledge gained through years of

teaching high school students in the classroom and dealing with administrative and public concerns outside the classroom. In my view, though, experience with Diploma tests serves as the rites of passage for teachers to become a part of this community.

Since Diploma tests serve as the initiation, I will discuss them first and then holistically work back through the distinguishing traits of this culture. According to Alberta Education (September, 1984), Diploma examinations were reinstated in January 1984 as a means for schools and teachers to cooperatively evaluate student achievement for purposes of graduation. A final grade for a Diploma subject, like English 30, is a "blended mark," 50% awarded by the teacher and 50% from the Diploma examination. In order to obtain a General Diploma, every student must have a "blended mark" of at least 50% in English 33 or English 30, along with 95 more credits from their school. For an Advanced Diploma, students must have a 50% "blended mark" in English 30, Social 30, Math 30, and a science course, such as Biology 30 or Chemistry 30 or Physics 30, along with 80 more credits from their school. Adult students' marks are not blended if the Diploma exam score is higher than the teacher's mark; the mark on a Diploma exam becomes their final grade, but their marks are "blended" if the teacher's mark is higher than the Diploma mark. At the moment, English is the only high school subject required for graduation.

Alberta Education (1983) maintains that a Diploma examination for English is a ". . . course-specific examination based on

those skills and concepts from the Program of Studies For Senior High Schools and the Senior High School Language Arts Curriculum Guide" (p. 1). Both English 30 and English 33 tests have two equally weighted parts: a written portion and an 80-question multiple choice test. The English 33 writing test tends to emphasize practical, functional types of writing (letters, responding to a cartoon), while the English 30 test requires students to react personally and critically to literature. English 30 students are expected to refer to literature studied in high school English classes when they compose their written responses. Only those certified English teachers who have taught English 30 or 33 courses for at least two years and are currently teaching a Diploma English course are eligible to grade students' essays. Tests are marked on a scale from 1 to 5 according to criteria specified on a scoring guide. The multiple choice test is neither a criterion-referenced test nor a norm-referenced test, although both types of test procedures are used in constructing the tests. Again, only practicing classroom teachers are allowed to help write multiple choice questions according to criteria outlined in a test blueprint: testing students' skills to understand, interpret, and evaluate a reading passage in terms of meanings, form and content, and human experience and values. Questions are field tested with students in order to check the validity of questions and to insure that the test mean will fall within a range of 62-66%. Unlike other Diploma courses which use multiple choice questions to test specific concepts covered in

class, English 30 and English 33 multiple choice tests deliberately refrain from asking any questions about literature authorized for teachers to use in the classroom. This is done in order to prevent students who have studied a particular piece of literature from having an advantage over students who studied a different authorized selection. English 30 and English 33 multiple choice tests are designed to measure reading skills, not previously studied content.

On the surface, Diploma examinations seem quite straightforward--always focusing on student achievement. In the teachers' culture, these two teachers see them quite differently. "I think they are being used as judgment calls of teachers" (Appendix B, Miller, p. 6). "If your marks are high for a particular class, then they are happy with you. If they're not, they want to know what you've done wrong" (Appendix A, Van Orman, p. 2). Students receive their marks in July and do not have to return to school to explain why they scored as they did; teachers receive statistical analyses in September or October, and in the cases of both Van Orman and Miller they had to justify why their students scored as they did to administrators and school boards later in the Fall or Winter. Both interviewees see Diploma tests as an evaluation of teachers.

Diploma exams became the public's method for making teachers responsible for what they have done in the classroom. Each public naturally expects its students to score above the mean. For Miller this attitude is ignorantly conceived: "Boards seem to

have this idea that everybody has to be above the mean. I argue that half of us will be below" (p. 18), which he explains is "Just a fact of means" (p. 17). Van Orman adds that a naive attitude about mathematical averages is not limited to those outside the school, "Administrators and principals want you to be way higher than the average, and it is built in that you can't be" (p. 12-13). Somehow, English 30 and English 33 teachers become the scapegoats for student performance in the school system. Van Orman points out that English 20 is the most popular course to teach at his school ". . . because there is no pressure. You can do the kinds of things you want to do as a teacher that you don't feel you can do now with English 30" (p. 14). Candidates who may contemplate joining the culture of English 30 and 33 instructors must take that into consideration:

I think they have an extremely demoralizing effect, particularly on young teachers. . . .Go back to your first English 30 class and consider facing that group with the Diploma exam and tell me if you would have willingly accepted that English 30 class. You would have been as reluctant as hell. (Miller, p. 16)

The political pressures which originate outside the classroom from boards and administrators force instructors of English 33 and especially English 30 to cope with more external scrutiny than other teachers within the same school system or even the same department. They also serve as a discouragement for new teachers to become a part of this more closely monitored culture.

How these two teachers see their work with students in the classroom is probably not that much different from other teachers. Kottkamp, Provenzo, and Cohn (1986) surveyed 251 Dade

County schools and found that the intrinsic reward 86.7% of the teachers found most satisfying was: "The times I know I have 'reached' a student or group of students and they have learned" (p. 565). After describing a special teaching moment with a student, Miller unequivocally asserts, "Those are the things that keep me teaching. If it weren't for those things happening, I'd go" (p. 8). Van Orman says that what he enjoys most about teaching is:

I liked the idea of being able to look at a class, and after a few days all teachers can tell what kind of kids they are. You could adapt your course to fit your own kids for that particular semester with what you saw as their strengths and weaknesses and playing on both of them. (p. 13).

The Diploma test has changed this relationship, though. One of the positive effects is, "When that Diploma exam came, it became they and I against that stupid exam, which is a different leg than we stood on before. For years it was, to a large degree, the kid pitted against you" (Miller, p. 27). Even Van Orman admits, "The English 30 student is very worried about the Diploma exam, and wants you teach to that test" (p. 8). Fourteen of Miller's students demonstrated how much of a motivator the Diploma test can be by attending an impromptu Saturday workshop on how to prepare for the English 30 exams (p. 24). On the negative side, "With the exam, you become very mechanical, and you can't escape it" (Miller, p. 6). Van Orman agrees, "It has made me feel more like a tradesman. . . . It is not nearly as open, as much fun, to teach an English 30 class as it once was" (p. 14). The midwifery joys of pulling weak students "through

the knothole" of an English 30 course is more difficult for Miller and his colleagues at Medicine Hat High School because administrators and the public want higher class averages (p. 17). The reduction of one of the most important intrinsic rewards for these two Diploma English teachers has serious implications for their longevity in the classroom. The fact that Miller has decided not to teach any high school English in 1987-88, an action which his interview foreshadows, is shocking. It suggests that political influences outside of the classroom may threaten the motivations of a successful language arts teacher, such as Miller, to continue teaching English to students in the high school classroom.

Alberta's Senior High School Language Arts Curriculum Guide (1982) does not appear to have the political power of Diploma examinations, partly because the public and administrators cannot easily understand it or measure if it is being implemented. It is, however, a familiar and important document for both Miller and Van Orman. Outsiders should understand that it is a pedagogical instrument which involved practicing English teachers in its composition, Miller and myself being two of a number of teachers who served on committees and provided input. Part of the stated rationale for the 1982 Curriculum Guide is:

The new program differs from the previous one in terms of balance and organization. Whereas the previous program was almost entirely literature-oriented, with the expressive skills subordinated to the literary genres under study, the 1981 program is organized around the development of important concepts in the five language arts: speaking, writing, reading, viewing and listening. (Alberta Education, 1982, p. 6)

This passage indicates that Alberta's present high school curriculum for language arts is a reaction against the previous one, which had been written at a time when Departmental examinations existed. In other words, it had taken educators and teachers nearly 10 years since the abolition of Alberta's Departmental tests (1973) to formulate a high school language arts curriculum for teaching without external testing; inserviceing of the new curriculum began in the Summer and Fall of 1981. New elementary and junior high language curriculums had been written prior to the high school one, and all three curricula were designed to facilitate a "functional approach" and a "common philosophy of language arts learning and teaching" (Alberta Education, 1982, p. 2). As part of this philosophy, the new high school curriculum emphasized the integration of students' needs and interests, communication skills, and literature.

Ironically, at the same time that the 1982 curriculum was under development, a groundswell of public opinion was calling for a reinstatement of mandatory Grade Twelve examinations. Van Orman explains his view of why this happened, "I feel that one of the major reasons Diploma tests were instituted was pressure from various interest groups to standardize marks" (p. 1). A brief highlighting of incidents preceding the development of Diploma exams backs up Van Orman's perception. When the University of Calgary administered its first Effective Writing Qualification Test to 2060 first year students, 55% failed (The Calgary Herald, September 27, 1976). Stohle (1978, an Edmonton Vice-principal,

made headlines when he claimed that a student ". . . would increase his odds at getting 'A's' many times over if he registered in five or six different schools for different subjects and did his homework in a taxi while commuting between classes" (p. 24). A Gallup (Alberta Report, November 21, 1980) poll revealed that 70% of the public wanted the province, not individual schools, to set standards for student evaluation. Alberta Education administered Achievement tests in 1978, 1980, and 1982 in order to better monitor student achievement. When the Minister of Education in 1983 called for all Grade 12 students to voluntarily take Comprehensive examinations (tests designed to measure all elementary and secondary education), an Alberta Teachers' Association poll (1983) showed that a meagre 24% of teachers favored the Comprehensive tests while 41% of teachers favored a return to Departmental tests. The result was a compromise in the Spring of 1983 in which teachers agreed to support the Diploma testing program, providing that Diploma tests were restricted to the confines of the curriculum.

While the above chronology is an oversimplification, it appears that the marriage of curriculum to Diploma tests came almost as a hurried afterthought. Miller's recollections of his work on a curriculum committee confirms this interpretation:

Once we had our blueprint roughed, we called testing personnel to come and look at it, and that is where the disagreements set in. . . . I felt that there were really some grave differences in this whole thing, but I think it became a case of curriculum saying, 'Testing does not dictate. Testing must meet curriculum's needs. Curriculum does not meet testing's needs.' (p. 2)

In Miller's opinion, curriculum should be the dominant partner in the relationship. In order to effectively use his class time, he has developed an elaborate course outline and syllabus which allow him to teach a unit on Hamlet that relates that play to poems, essays, short stories, a Greek tragedy, two novels, and the communication processes (pp. 21-23). In spite of his devotion to implement an integrated curriculum which meets the needs and interests of his students and improve their communication skills, he is still concerned that testing is trying to overpower curriculum, "Why I was extremely suspicious and why I still monitor very closely the design of that exam is because I did not come away with the feeling that testing was all that prepared to stay by our blueprint" (p. 2). Miller's misgivings about testing not only make him politically watchful of it, they also justify his creating homework activities which help his students learn literature terminology (p. 5) and holding Saturday workshops on how to become test wise (p.p. 24-25)--activities which he regards as a useless waste of his and students' time (pp. 6, 24). Miller's definition of how to implement an integrated curriculum has been greatly complicated by an external testing program which he seems less able to influence or counteract.

Van Orman's view of curriculum and testing is somewhat different. He was not a member of curriculum or testing committees but only a recipient of both phenomena. Of his introduction to the curriculum he recalls:

An interesting thing has happened. We came out with a new curriculum just before the Diploma exams. The new

curriculum de-emphasized literature. It increased the creative writing, the business and the personal writing components. . . . I was new enough in the teaching profession that it struck me as interesting and challenging to change. . . . After a year of it, because that was all we had before the exams came in, I dumped the changes. That was kind of sad. (p. 8)

Van Orman's actions indicate that for him testing defines curriculum. He is not happy with such dictation, but active opposition is not a safe response: "You can play God and say, 'I think it is more important that my students get this education regardless of what they do on the Diploma exam.' That is a dangerous position to be in, one that I don't want" (p. 7). Both Van Orman and Miller seem forced to admit that their implementation of curriculum is being circumscribed by Diploma tests. They do not talk about curriculum without talking about its related power struggle with Diploma tests.

The common language of English 30 and English 33 teachers is largely acquired from their experiences of teaching literature and from a liberal arts education at a university. Miller is a good example of this because he dropped out of school at the age of 14 and returned to university in his late 20's (pp. 25-26), yet he talks as a high school English teacher should. Terms such as "lit critics" (Miller, p. 1), "lit crit" (Miller, p. 5), "literature oriented" (Van Orman, p. 7), or "less critical nature toward literature" (Van Orman, p. 9) all refer to a university approach for teaching and studying literature, which emphasizes formal analysis and interpretation through a specialized vocabulary. Miller and Van Orman refer to literary imagery to

emphasize what they have to say: for Miller, "I can be a Dr. Faustus if I have to" (p. 5), "She will watch for the Jack Merridews" (p. 7); for Van Orman, "I found that a Catch-22--a nightmare" (p. 11), "It seems so Kafka-like to me" (p. 12), "Big Brother is watching over us" (p. 15). Because of their frequent use of literature in their personal and professional lives, its imagery has become an inherent manner for expressing themselves. The testing programs have added a number of words to their vocabulary: "blueprint," "item building," "50-50 weighting," "quarter questions," "item revision," "provincial means," "fourth reads," "class averages," "Departmentals," "Comprehensives," and "Diploma tests." When they talk about "descriptors" for grading essays, they speak of it as "competent," "proficient," "reduces," or "impedes." While such terms are not unique to English teachers, the way English teachers mix them with literary metaphors is. The workplace and their associations with students and other teachers also affect their way talking about "the curriculum guide," "supervision," "an English 33 student," "a 30 course," "matric subjects," or "L. C. I." The point is that while English 30 and English 33 teachers have a range of language which easily enables them to work with a diversity of students and adults, Alberta's English 30 and English 33 teachers also have a vocabulary and way of looking at the world that is in many ways distinct from any other social group. It is important to gain at a least a surface understanding of their personal, practical knowledge in order to learn how to improve high school language arts instruction in this province by working with them.

Re-presenting a Culture

The term **re-presentation** is largely one of my own invention. It refers to Plato's (1974) criticisms that artistic creation is mimetic representation. I added the hyphen in order to deliberately emphasize that what the audience sees when this play is performed is a copy of a copy. I am presenting again, in an intensified form, the lived reality of my research and the voices of my interviewees. Most of the words in the play are taken from the initial, tape-recorded interviews, but as a playwright I could include conversations which occurred when the tape recorder was off or from follow-up interviews. I could also take poetic license to change a few minor details for creating a better dramatic effect: Jack Merridew in Miller's interview (p. 7) becomes Claudius in my play. Through live drama I can bring the audience face to face with one breathing member of a culture of English 30 and English 33 teachers and re-present, tell the story, of two others. After the play is over, I can engage in dialogue with those members of the audience who have chosen to stay and watch it. We can talk and reason together about what a successful language arts program for today's youth should be. The videotape freezes the presentation of the play and the conversation which occurred on August 5, 1987, but it does not allow for new, breathing interactions between the actor and the audience. When the play is simply read, the dimension of the "now," which theatre is best able to convey (Wilder, 1976), is lost; a reader has a copy of a copy of a copy.

I hope, however, that the purpose of the play is evident enough to make it meaningful even as a reading experience. I do not want the play to just tell the specific tales of a group of three. At the very least, I wanted to remind myself and others that education is not a list of last year's averages, nor is it "scoring above the mean"--it is the interactions of teachers and students going on in classroom now. I hope, therefore, that this drama will exhibit some general truths that members of the audience can individually identify and recognize and take with them. May it effect cathartic resolutions within those who see or read it.

A Madman's Tale of Two Teaching Hamlets--A Narrated Dumb Show of "The Caucasian Mouse Chase"

An Explanation of the Setting. The setting for the play is symbolic chalk circles. The inner circle represents the teacher; the outer circle represents various interactions of the teacher in the school system: the students, the curriculum, English teaching colleagues, other teachers, school administrators, provincial education officials, politicians, university professors, and the public (i. e. chamber of commerce representatives, the press, ratepayers, and parents of students).

I have called the play "The Caucasian Mouse Chase" for several reasons. First, Canada's educational system is largely an attempt to compromise European and North American philosophies of education for the Canadian middle class--hence the term Caucasian. Caucasian is also an allusion to Bertholt Brecht's The

Caucasian Chalk Circle, a play based on the Solomonic myth that parental love is that which does not selfishly attempt to tear a child in half. Finally, an educational phenomenon such as Diploma tests affects all interactions throughout the educational system. The test can prompt the parties involved to chase each other around the system, with each interest group attempting to blame failures on a different segment of the system.

(The rest of the presentation is narrated by the tape recorder.)

Prologue. It would do no good to start this story, entitled A Madman's Tale of Two Teaching Hamlets--A Narrated Dumb Show of "The Caucasian Mouse Chase," with the two Hamlets, for this a tale told by an idiot, a tale full of sound and fury, signifying nothing. Those of you, therefore, who wish to leave, rather than submit to the musings of one half lunatic, are invited to withdraw--the door is not locked that leads to exits from this room and to the maze-like hallways of this institution of higher learning.

Those of you who have decided to stay must be warned. The teller of this tale is highly suspect: he is biased; his findings are not objective; his methodology involves talking to his acquaintances; it is not representative of high school English teachers; he is, after all, a member of the culture he is studying, AND ALL SCIENTISTS KNOW THAT YOU CANNOT TRUST ANYONE TO STUDY THEIR OWN CULTURE. TRUTH LIES IN OBJECTIVE COMPARISON AND TRANSLATION, NOT IN INSIDE GOSSIP.

You are again invited to leave. You have been forewarned.

Well, since you have chosen to stay, to take a chance on the musings of a madman, let me introduce him to you. For he has made himself both the beginning and the end of the play, and a most bitter and mean end he is too, and he wants to tell tale of mean meanings.

He returned to University in 1984, hoping to learn how to do research on teachers. He believed at that time that research involved the surgical dissecting of educational behaviors. Some classes he took taught him that education was not a science but a field of study, and a couple of education professors encouraged him to not approach research antiseptically, and he began to take off a glove of objectivity.

He began by experimenting on himself; biography, dream analysis, and self-evaluation were his subjects. No one could charge him with unethical research as long as he experimented on his own body. But the work was lonely; he felt isolated from other teachers and professors; and he longed for more than mere navel gazing in this search to find out what he and his profession meant.

He tried a history class, which lead him to interview other high school English teachers. They were, after all, consenting adults, and he didn't have to have such work approved by scholarly committees in order for him to proceed with the work. And these teachers were also like him; they were responsible for teaching the same mandated curriculum; their students were competing against his students for the better scores on the

provincial exam; and most seemed to want to talk with him and explain what they were doing and why. And even when they didn't want to talk with him, they seemed to share his loneliness towards their work. Like him, they all fought their daily battles of teaching in the hamlet of the isolated classroom--and they fought these battles alone.

But the tape recorder now became the god of idolatry for this researcher's methodology. "The research had to be on the tape, or it was not research." That was what the madman thought.

Then came anthropology, the science of human beings. The anthropology professor taught the madman to take off another glove and to begin to touch and taste the subjects of his study. Research was what went on before the interview, after the interview, in between interviews, and pocket note cards and a research journal became the tools for recording the whole breadth of the research process.

Initially, the madman enjoyed eating his research. Life was now an anthropological experience until the time came to publish his findings and subject them to analysis and focus and interpretation. Now, the body of research turned bitter, bitter as wormwood, for the madman could not find the words to represent the story of himself and his colleagues.

The madman, though, continued to massage and mold the body of his data, and to immerse himself in the eating of it. For even when he was studying the actions and thoughts of other teachers, he felt as if he was studying himself--he was a part of

other English teachers, and they were a part of him. He was eating his own heart, this Hart, and it was bitter, but he liked the bitterness because it was always his heart he was eating.

And in this bitterness, the madman decided that he could not explain his data in a typical thesis. Its form seemed barren to the power of his interviews and his experiences, to the drama of the teaching profession. No single event emerged from the data which could serve as a metaphor for what it meant to be a high school English teacher. That is until the anthropology professor encouraged creativity, and the madman struck on the idea of writing the research as drama.

The idea for the play was, in fact, implied by the data. One interviewee, a teacher at a large city high school, explained, "My students never stop studying Hamlet all semester long. Everything I have them do in the English 30 course relates back to that play." As the research progressed, this comment led to the question, "Of all the literature you teach, which character are you." This question has a powerful meaning for high school English teachers, and most do not have much trouble in providing a character, or they may respond "What an interesting question." For example, in a follow-up interview with another interviewee, who also teaches at a large city school, he identified himself as a Hamlet who enjoyed contemplating how that character would view and approach the modern dilemmas of life. As luck would have it, one Hamlet was completely against Diploma exams, while the other was cautiously supportive of them. If these two teachers were

cast in a play, they could serve as foils for two opposing attitudes toward Diploma exams, juxtaposing their differences and similarities in behaviors and motivations.

And so it came to pass, that the play became the thing wherein the researcher could, like Hamlet, pretend to be mad, but this madness would allow him the license to re-create the tale of two modern Hamlets, two co-researchers. And hopefully, the play could, like Hamlet's "Mousetrap", become the catalyst for causing not only other English teachers but also anyone concerned with the education of today's high school students to stand up and take notice of what the Diploma test was doing to them, to instruction, and to the students.

The First Hamlet. The first Hamlet you will meet is the one who unequivocally opposes Diploma exams. He is approximately 40 years old and began teaching at a city high school in 1974. He also teaches evening and summer English courses at a local community college. He had to take Departmental tests to graduate from high school, and he liked those external tests because he didn't have to pay attention to his classroom teacher. He felt confident that he could pass the exam without the help of the teacher, and he proved it. He now regrets his lack of attention. But I will invite him to tell you the rest of his story:

When I started teaching English 30 and 33, we didn't have provincial tests. I really enjoyed the freedom I had to look at a class, to assess their individual strengths and weaknesses and devise a unit to fit their strengths or correct their weaknesses. For instance, if you had a class that really enjoyed discussion and debate, I felt free to choose to teach a unit on debate. And I would teach language and literature and we would read and discuss and

write, and I would grade. My students and I worked hard.

That is not to say that everyone was happy with my freedom to choose what was taught. I remember a knock on my door from the superintendent in the 70's who wanted all teachers in the school to implement an educational innovation called Objective Based Education, OBE. I resisted the pressure, and as a young teacher was even involved in a fight with my superintendent. I told him OBE reduced teaching to the lowest competency level and did not promote critical thinking. In fact, the whole English department of our school refused to implement the policy. We became known as the rebels of the school, but time has proved us right. Now, no one at elementary or junior high is talking about OBE.

But various interest groups, I suppose it must have been the universities and chamber of commerce groups were not happy with the graduates from our system, and they must have knocked loud and long upon the doors of the politicians. They seemed to say, "It is not our job to teach university students remedial essay writing" or "We want students who can spell when they enter the world of work" or "Newspaper headlines saying 50% of graduating students fail the university competency test" or "What are you doing in schools that your students are producing work of such poor quality." I never felt that students who left my class were inferior, but the public around me seemed to feel that way. Somehow, that public attitude gave politicians the reason they needed to have the Alberta education officials invent Diploma exams. I don't know if this true, since I was never on any organizing committees, but it is what I suppose happened.

Ironically, the Diploma exams came just after teachers and Alberta Education officials had rewritten a new curriculum. I remember being rather excited about teaching the new curriculum, which emphasized integration of reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing, instead of the critical literature approach we had been using. But the Diploma exam emphasizes critical literature, and so I dropped some of the new ideas and lesson plans I had for the new curriculum and went right back to my critical literature lesson plans. Students needed to learn how to read and interpret literature critically in order to pass the exam, and it was my job to teach them how to pass that exam.

As far as other losses, it is the novel for my instruction. Since it optional on the curriculum, I don't feel obliged to teach it.

I do teach to the exam. I have students write more

comparison-contrast essays than I used to have them write. Mind you, that type of essay writing is not a bad learning tool, but now it has almost become the style of writing I emphasize the most at Grade 12. I have enjoyed meeting with other teachers in Edmonton to grade the exams, though; that has opened a dialogue about what is competent writing among English teachers, which has worked quite well. I don't mind the way the written portions of the exam are graded. I find them reasonably fair.

I also use multiple choice questions in evaluating students, an action which I detest. I don't think that multiple choice tests teach students how to think critically or to make their own inferences about literature; they just teach students how to recognize inferences. I don't like them at all, but I feel I have to teach students how to answer them. When I use multiple choice in the classroom, I try to allow students the right to justify their answer, but on the Diploma test, they don't have that privilege.

And there are all sorts of political spin-offs from the exam which I had never expected. English 30 teachers attempt to woo the top students to their class while they discourage the lower students. In larger schools this leads to one English 30 teacher competing against another English 30 teacher. "You would do much better in English 33" is a statement you use in order to sort students out of English 30, and some kids are eventually sorted right out of the system. Also, administrators want only one thing--"All students in our school system will be above the mean." And if you don't score above the mean, then you have to justify why; the implication is that "You are doing something wrong." And parents, the public, and the newspapers--the entire system seems to be repeatedly whispering the same lustful urge, "Our students must score above the mean"; "All our students will be above average."

What all these groups fail to realize is that a mathematical mean forces half the teachers in the province to be above it and half to be below it. It does not measure skill or competency; it simply establishes a floating average, and if you teach in a large high school, you set the average; if you teach in a small school, you have the chance to score above or below. But not everyone in the province can be above.

Which brings me to one of my biggest complaints about the Diploma tests. The multiple choice questions are written in such a way that every test will achieve between a 62 to 65% average. Through field testing, they find out how students will answer a specific question, and if it is too hard they will either throw it out or make it easier,

and if it is too easy, then they will either discard it or make it trickier. This process of developing questions puts students in a Kafka-like situation where they can never win--the test guarantees a 62% to a 65% average. I find that a Catch-22--a nightmare.

But what the Diploma exams really do is challenge my professionalism as a teacher. They indicate to me that the public does not trust what I do in the classroom, and therefore, tests are devised which test not only the abilities of my students but which are really tests of me. But, I don't measure my competence by how my students achieve on Diploma tests--my success and feelings of competence are based on my interactions with students in the classroom.

Thank you, our first Hamlet. I'm sure that all within the sound of your voice have appreciated your comments.

The Second Hamlet. The second Hamlet is older, approximately 50, but he still talks and looks young. He has been the department head of a city high school for the past 10 years, but he resigned that position in June 1986. He is a high school dropout. Returning to school in his early 20's, he completed three years of high school in one. This experience has lead him to believe that students and teachers can use their time much more efficiently than they frequently do. But now, this character is ready to speak for himself:

I have taught in this school for a very long time. I have taught under the old Departmentals, and there is no comparison to those tests and our present tests. Those tests were specific to the content of the course; students were expected to know terms and specific works of literature.

The present Diploma exams are based more on the skills than content. At least the June 1984 Diploma exam was, although some research I am doing is indicating that the most recent Diploma tests may be changing. I am going to continue monitoring that situation, and I am staying in touch with Alberta Education officials on this matter before I make any official statements.

You see I was a member of the ad hoc curriculum committee responsible for developing the new curriculum guide which was published in 1982. I suppose I was invited to serve on that committee because I was sympathetic to changes that would emphasize skills more than content. I looked at language learning as a process of educating the whole person; the fact that I had pushed for the cancellation of the English 13 option at my school, putting all the Grade 10 students in English 10, was one evidence that I was more concerned about students and their development than in streaming students into groups where they could waste their time. I came to these conclusions about curriculum on my own, by the way, not from any theory or professor I had read; it just seemed the right thing to do based on my own experiences with how kids learn. And when the new curriculum was brought in, I told the Alberta Education official that I didn't think I was going to have to change my teaching style much because I was already doing what the new curriculum was advocating.

When it was announced in 1983 that Diploma tests would be administered in 1984, I was invited to meet with Diploma test officials. That committee changed me in several ways. For one thing it introduced me to a consistent way of marking students' essays. I developed a grading scale which every teacher in our school uses, at least they did up until this last year. So, if a student questions a grade I assign in a class, I simply hand him a grading sheet and tell him to "Pick his teacher." Invariably, my grade will be within 1% to 3% percent of any other teacher on staff. I think students deserve that kind of consistency from teachers, and the testing committee helped show me how to get my staff to do that.

My other big push at my school in working with teachers and students is to encourage them to become computer literate. I have been pushing that for years. A lot of my staff took my word for it and went to work on using word processors and spread sheets. Recently, I have located a program called "Right-Write," which checks the grammar and vocabulary of students' essays. I invited my students to type their essays on computer and hand a floppy disk in with their essays, and a good portion of them did. I could then take that floppy disk, put into my computer at home and retrieve a four page computer analysis of a 750 word essay in less than five minutes. And you know, my kids believe what the computer says is wrong with their papers easier than any corrections I might note. I could spend my time reading and commenting on the ideas in the paper. This is my latest idea, you realize, and I think it has great potential, but I don't know if English teachers are as

willing to use it as are the kids.

But getting back to how the testing committee affected me, I was able to argue for a method of testing that was fair to the curriculum--a written section and a multiple choice section. Even in our own department, every final exam a kid writes in this school is half written and half multiple choice. You have some kids who write well but have trouble with multiple choice, but you have some kids who can write multiple choice but do not have two thoughts they can rub together for an essay. If you have them do both every kid gets an even break to show what they are capable of in terms of understanding literature and expressing themselves.

Some people object to multiple choice tests, but I have no problem with multiple choice tests being able to measure students' abilities, as long as questions are constructed in such a way that they emphasize the recognition and interpretation of human values--the June 1984 Diploma exam is an example of such a test. But what I see happening now is that multiple choice questions are emphasizing critical literature terms. That is why I hand out definition work sheets such this. I don't like to teach terms, but since universities look at test scores, as do scholarship committees, I make sure that my students will not be penalized. In fact, I teach my students how to be test wise, but I try not to let it intrude on class time or alter my course outline and lesson plans. Recently, I spent a Saturday showing 14 of my students how they could pass the multiple choice test by just reading the multiple choice questions carefully, not even bothering to read the articles which the questions were based on. I remember having to work hard to convince one girl that it could be done, but after a few Saturdays, she was scoring consistently 75% and up, never reading a selection, just the questions. So, I plan activities which facilitate recognition and understanding of critical literature terms, but to me that is not teaching. I can be Dr. Faustus if I have to be, but I don't like it, and I am hoping that I can influence Alberta Education to return to the plan they used in constructing the June 1984 Diploma test.

One more thing about how the exams may be affecting students, and I hesitate to add this, because I am not sure how widespread it is; I hope it was just a fluke occurrence. This last semester I personally worked with five English 30 students who were seriously contemplating suicide. Mind you, the January sitting for the first part of the Diploma exam comes just two weeks after Christmas holidays, so I'm not sure that the exam can be blamed for all of these kids problems, but it scares me. After working with some of those kids, I was so exhausted that I just had to completely

rest the first few days of the Christmas break. I hope someone will check with other teachers to see if this is a problem which we should all become more concerned about.

The hardest part of the Diploma tests for me, though, is the way administrators and school boards and newspapers are using the results. They are being used to make judgment calls on teachers, and I don't like that. Before I resigned as department head, I spent at least 200 hours on my computer typing in all the Diploma test scores of every student in this school and comparing them to their Grade 10, 11, and 12 English grades and to their scores on the English Cooperative Test, a test which I have administered at the Grade 10 level in order to get an idea of what a kids abilities really are. I was so fatigued from the pressure to document and analyze test scores that my work with students in the classroom was beginning to deteriorate. For example, two years ago was the first time that my students did not score at the top of our school. I decided that I didn't need the garbage of keeping track of all these test scores and the added pressures in our school system to supervise classroom instruction, so I resigned as department head. Of course since I resigned, pressure is now being put on our new department head to raise our average on test scores. As a result, we will be reinstating the English 13 course at our high school next year as a way of streaming students.

For my own welfare I had to get back to simply being a teacher. Perhaps I can explain why by relating an experience that happened to me several years ago. I had assigned students to write an essay on the parallels between Hamlet's time and the present world politics. I got some beautiful essays, thought-provoking essays for me the reader and for the students. And the kids came to terms with human values that they had never dreamed of considering. After I handed the essays back, one girl stayed after class to discuss how the political problems Hamlet faced were like those she and her generation were facing not only in Canada today but in the future world of the 21st Century. Not bad for a 17 year-old. She immediately related Hamlet's dilemmas to her own life and today. That to me is learning; mechanically completing word lists is not. Such moments are more meaningful to me than an "A" on a Diploma test because that girl would watch for the Claudius's of our day and try to cope as Hamlet did. That kid told me that what we had done was meaningful for her and would help her come to terms with the world she was living in. If it weren't for those experiences, I would be out of here. I came for kids; that is what this game is all about--there is nothing else.

Resolutions

I had not intended to add anything after the play because I thought that any interpretation from me smacked too much of a playwright telling his audience what his work should mean, an action which I detest. Since this project in its written form offers no opportunity for dialogue, however, and since my own methodology advises applying a dream, or phenomenon, to life, I will offer my resolutions for how this work will continue to be useful for me. Such an analysis does not preclude others from differing with what I say or offering alternative interpretations. I hope that what I have done can make some meaningful and unpredictable connections to the lives of others.

Resolution One

"Recognize the complex network of interrelationships within and surrounding each teacher." At one point in my research I tried to make my data fit Shor's (1986) metaphor that the return to mandatory testing is a "culture war," conservatives against liberals. I did find that culture is an issue, and I have tried to explain some of the ways in which Alberta's English 30 and English 33 teachers are a distinct culture. But I did not find Van Orman or Miller using words that showed that they were at war with a conservative enemy. If they were at war with anyone, it was partly with themselves. Van Orman, who is completely against external testing, freely admits that what he teaches is dramatically influenced by Diploma tests. Miller, who claims to naturally practice an integrated curriculum, plans "critical

literature" activities based on the changes he observes in Diploma tests. The contrasting mixture of these teachers' beliefs versus their practices is greatly complicated by overlapping the expectations and political influences of students, administrators, school board officials, test developers, professors, and the public. I could not tie any one of these interrelationships into a tight, tidy package of answers. I cannot say, "Abolish provincial testing," nor can I proclaim "Here is how to construct the perfect test." The theoretical generalizations I developed from reading literature such as Shor's do not match the practical realities which my colleagues described to me. My fieldwork has thus become an oxymoronic touchstone by which I measure educational theories which attempt to explain how testing and curriculum implementation interrelate. The contradictions have become my strength for talking with those who think they know the answers. And in admitting that I can offer no panacean solutions, I have become a little more humble. Instead of calling for broad educational reforms, I think we must look more precisely and humanly at what is happening now at individual schools with individual teachers and their students.

Resolution Two

"Argue against misuses of 'scoring above the mean.'" Some myths may never die, and I believe the "above average" myth is one closely linked with the fiber of the American dream. I find myself watching "The Road to the Final Four" in college basketball, the Superbowl in football, or the Stanley Cup in hockey.

(I am glad I am moving to Edmonton so I can be a member of a city of champions.) After admitting that I am influenced by the myth in other aspects of my life, am I really going to tell students and their parents and the local editor of my town's newspaper that it does not matter how my students score on the provincial exam? Probably not. I will give myself away when I ask one of my former students how they did or when I call up my principal and ask him to show me how my students scored on the last Diploma exam. Miller explains that he does not see any purpose to justifying why students scored as they did on Diploma tests, yet one of the reasons he resigned as department head involved his observation that "I have never taught an English 30 group, until two years ago, that the classes I taught weren't at the top" (p. 7). Van Orman says that he is so "cynical" about the exam that he does not ". . . feel any sense of accomplishment," yet he does "look" at his student performance and has noted that "it has been good" (p. 14). I think that Van Orman, Miller, myself, and other teachers should look, and if the guilty consciences of the three of us are any indication, most teachers do look. The mean, by the way, is only one bit of information sent to teachers by Alberta Education. English teachers receive literally thousands of pieces of data since each student's score on every category of the written and multiple choice tests are statistically analyzed by Alberta Education. Teachers can review how their students achieved on nearly every part of the tests. Misunderstandings occur when school boards, such as my own, pass educational goals

which attempt to correlate test scores to teaching:

The Taber School Division has instructional personnel, educational facilities, and learning resources that, by most measures, are well above average in quality. An academic goal of the Division is to utilize these resources so that student achievement, on all Diploma Examinations, consistently exceeds the Provincial means. (Taber School Division #6, 1986, p. 11)

This over-simplification of one type of data by a body extraneous to the difficulties of teaching in the classroom needs to be challenged. I intend to talk with the trustees of my board and give them a copy of this report in an attempt to educate them. My principal is quite aware of the difficulties involved with analyzing Diploma test results, but I would encourage teachers who are having problems with administrators to sit down and review "all" the data which the province supplies to teachers in an attempt to make them aware that the mean is not the most significant datum. I hope my play will also play an informing role on this issue. Basically, I think the issue of interpreting averages is one which is best left to teachers, especially until school boards and administrators are better able to tell teachers what the capabilities of the students in a specific classroom actually are.

Resolution Three

"Argue for diagnostic testing services for high school English teachers." Horvath and Machura (Spring, 1987) describe the Diagnostic Reading Program which was just recently completed by Alberta Education. Grades 1-6 teachers now have an Alberta developed, pedagogical tool at their fingertips for identifying

their students' strengths and weaknesses. High school language arts teachers need the same kind of help in order to work better with students in their classrooms. With the present dearth of provincial funding, I am not holding my breath for the Student Evaluation Branch of Alberta Education to step in and fill this gap. In the interim, I would personally look at a testing program developed by Gerry Miller at Medicine Hat High School. In one of my post interviews with him, he showed me a computer program he has designed for use with the English Cooperative Test. He correlates students' scores on this criterion-referenced test with the grades students achieve in English 10; then he projects capability percentiles for future student achievement at his high school. It is possible for a student to achieve above 100% of his capabilities according to Miller's formulas, which Miller adjusts by consulting with teachers and reviewing performances in previous years. Miller shows his projections to students and tells them, "According to these test results, you are working up to or beyond your abilities," or he may say, "These test results compared with your grades show me that you are not achieving your potential." When used in this way, test marks can do something for students before they leave the classroom. One of the downfalls with justifying scores on Diploma exams is that most of the students analyzed are not returning to the system. Teachers need more precise information about students before they leave their classrooms, and Miller's testing program is an example of what I want to do in working

with my students. Miller's use of a previously developed standardized test would not be too expensive to implement, and school boards and administrators could help through moral support, scheduling of teachers' and aides' time, and computer assistance.

Resolution Four

"Encourage students to write essays and teachers to evaluate student writing by using computer technology." Again, I owe this resolution to one of my post-interviews with Gerry Miller. He showed me how he was using a program called "Right-Write" to help grade students' essays. He simply invited any students who wanted him to provide them with a computer analysis of their essays to submit an ASCII saved file of their essay. Miller says that a number of his students designed jackets for their floppy disks which they attached to their essays. In less than five minutes, the computer provided a four page analysis of the grammar, punctuation, and word usage of a 750 word essay. Miller noted: "Students tend to believe what the computer tells them is wrong with their essays better than they believe my corrections." Miller spent his time reading his students' essays and commenting on the thought and detail and organization. When we talked about ways to implement this strategy for grading papers, Miller said that he thought students would pick up on it faster than English teachers would. I argued that one of the rationalizations high school English teachers would have for resisting the use of computers in the classrooms was Diploma exams. I

contended:

Why would a math teacher encourage students to use calculators if they were required to use slide rules on their Diploma exams. So why should an English teacher encourage composition on computers, if everyone has to use pens to write their essays on their provincial tests.

If Popham, et. al., (1985) were right in their assessment that well constructed tests can "drive" instruction, and my research clearly shows that the teachers I interviewed all closely watch any developments on the Diploma test, then Alberta Education could psychologically reinforce what Miller did in his classrooms last semester by simply "inviting" students to use computers to complete the writing assignments on the Diploma tests. Obviously, guidelines would have to be developed for how students could use computer programs during a testing situation, but that should not be too difficult considering guidelines already exist for handicapped students to have help reading and even writing Diploma tests. Presently, those students who know how to use word processors are handicapped by the pen requirement on English 30 or English 33 writing tests. While I negotiate with Alberta Education officials about this issue, I intend to become personally fluent with software programs that will allow me to replicate what Miller has already done with his students.

Resolution Five

"Continue the dialogue." This project is work in progress. I videotaped the discussion after my play because I looked upon what happened after the re-presentation of my research as a continuation of the research process. My opinions keep changing

as I continue the work and as I refine my methods for understanding what is happening in high school English classes, why they are occurring, and what can be done. My underlying premise has not changed, however--in order to understand and improve the interrelationships between testing and instruction, the various educational stakeholders need to openly talk with each other.

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APPENDIX A

Teaching High School English With Alberta's Diploma Exams:
An Assessment Through Oral Research

INTERVIEWEE: RONALD VAN ORMAN

INTERVIEWER: Charles Hart

SUBJECT: Teaching High School English with Diploma Tests

DATE: 10 July 1986

PLACE: Lethbridge Community College, Lethbridge, Alberta

H: This is an interview with Ron Van Orman, an English teacher at the Lethbridge Collegiate Institute and The Lethbridge Community College by Charles Hart. The date is 10 July 1986; the time is 9:05 a.m., and the place of the interview is the library of The Lethbridge Community College.

When I say Diploma examinations, what are your first impressions?

V: My first and biggest concern is they are a waste of money. I don't think the idea behind the exam is a terrible one, but the horrendous expense of administering them three times a year seems an awful lot of money for negligible returns.

I feel that one of the major reasons they were instituted was pressure from various interest groups to standardize marks in the province. One of the biggest groups, the universities, were saying, "We don't know what a 75% in English means. It doesn't mean the same thing from the L.C.I (Lethbridge Collegiate Institute) as it does from Sir Winston Churchill High School in Calgary or M. E. Lazerte High School in Edmonton. We have no way of knowing what those marks mean coming out of English or math classrooms." Universities are not the only interest group; parents also wonder if their students are really being taught. I suppose those kinds of things caused the creation of the exam.

I can't calculate the costs, but I'm sure it's in the millions of dollars a year to run these exams. The results have shown, at least so far, that the difference between the teacher awarded mark and the exam mark is within 1% or 2%. It seems a lot of money just to prove that the teacher is giving a legitimate mark to their students. Economic times as they are, I think there are far better uses for the millions of dollars that are spent on these exams.

H: Were you involved in any of the planning to bring back provincial tests?

V: Like others, I was never really on any committee that

made any decisions. When Dave King announced we were going to have Comprehensive finals, that was viewed with a lot of fear, trepidation, and argument. I remember listening to him at a teachers' convention, and someone asked, "Why he was doing this? Why wasn't he going back to the Departmental examination that we previously had." He listed reasons why we would never go back to the 100% Departmental tests, where the examination mark was the student's final grade, because of the kind of pressure that put on students. He added, "We really hesitate to go back to the 50-50 weighting," that they instituted shortly before they abolished Departmental tests completely. They had documented cases of teachers inflating the marks dramatically, so the student mark would turn out fine, no matter what happened on the Departmental exams. He concluded, "We would never do that."

The next thing we heard was Diploma tests were coming. Obviously, they tried to cover that business of inflated marks by publishing the teacher mark as well as the exam mark on the transcript. The teacher couldn't hide an attempt to try and inflate the student mark.

As a cynic, I feel that one of the reasons for the Diploma exam was to evaluate teacher marking because that seems to be what is happening. School boards and principals wait for the results. If your marks are high for a particular class, then they are happy with you. If they're not, they want to know what you've done wrong. It has become a status symbol for school districts and administrators to want to look good on these exams. It has created all sorts of nonprofessional and political kinds of pressures that were not even considered. I don't know whether I thought about them or realized that they would be that important. After three years of running these tests, it is evident that the politics behind it is one of the negative spinoffs that I don't like.

H: Do you mean the politics within the school itself?

V: Yes, the school and school district. A couple of things happened. Because so much pressure is being put on the performance of the class, the principal and the superintendent want their schools to do well. If they don't do well, they have a meeting with you to find out what "we" can do to bring our student marks up. Because of that, all sorts of things are happening. Some teachers are very worried about taking low students into their class because those students are going to affect that class average; they don't want them in the classroom. They make all kinds of effort to try to encourage the top students to be in their classes. We become almost paranoid about what those

tests will do to us, almost more than the students, and that shouldn't be.

I don't think that any principal or superintendent is pressuring teachers directly, but their concern to see that students do well pressures indirectly. In the guise of saying, "What can we do to help to bring up student marks?" there is a reflection that somehow you are not doing your job. Although I'm not trying to imply that any principal ever says, "You are not performing because of exam results," the implication is still there. It is not that I'm concerned about not doing well, but I think that the emphasis gets changed away from education to a political attempt to try to do anything you can to improve the students' marks on the exam, not to improve their education or to prepare them better for the world. That is not the concern. Somehow the student can't help but feel too that the exam becomes the be all and end all for their existence. The whole education system becomes not education but teaching to and for a test.

H: Has this attitude changed your way of teaching?

V: Yes. Inevitably, it has to. I resisted it, but as a teacher, you don't have that much choice because it is part of the student mark. It is part of how a student is evaluated in terms of scholarships. These criteria cause the test to become very important. Even though universities say that it is the blended mark that they take, in any kind of decision that comes close between two students, the mark they are going to consider is the exam mark more than the teacher mark. As a teacher you are concerned about their future too, so you prepare students to do as well as they can on the test.

For example, in the curriculum it says that the teaching of the novel is optional. Because I don't see the novel doing any good for the exam and I need to allow myself more review time to prepare for the exam, I deleted the novel from my course. This is very standard, in our school at least, although some teachers do it as an option. It was optional, but because of the demands of the test, it disappeared.

That is only one example. The test has a multiple choice component, and so more multiple choice testing is done now. Students are prepared to write multiple choice tests because we give more unit and practice tests that are multiple choice. We never used to, or at least the way I taught the English 30 course never really emphasized multiple choice. I suppose that is not totally bad, but I don't like multiple choice. It has its place, but it teaches a different kind of thinking, learning, and experience than generating your own answers, which other kinds of tests demand.

I find the Diploma tests affect the set up of the year. In this last semester (June 1986) the writing exam came on June 14 and the multiple choice test on June 24. The students had written the one they are most worried about, which is the written portion, by June 14, and they felt the course is over. As a teacher, it is very difficult to do any meaningful teaching after June 14. The test schedule has cut 10 days from the teaching year. You still continue to teach, but you are just about left with review for 10 days. We nearly always try to put in a unit, but it is, at best, haphazard. The students' interest is not there. They have written the first test; they know the teacher marks have to be sent to Alberta Education before June 17 or 18, and they are not being evaluated on the last unit. The interest is gone. It has really shortened the course. It has put more pressure on just reviewing for the test rather than teaching an English class.

- H: Are you using and writing more multiple choice questions to evaluate your classroom instruction?
- V: Yes, the unit tests become multiple choice tests rather than short answer tests. In fact, a lot of the tests have become mostly compilations of past Diploma exams. For short story unit tests, you take short story questions out the 1984 and 1985 Diploma tests and combine them with your own, which is again preparing students for the Diploma exam. Our concern is that we do that, but I don't really like being faced with that dictation, almost, of how you teach.
- H: Lethbridge high schools used to give a city final exam, but it sounds like it is gone.
- V: Totally. It has been boxed up. It hasn't gone through the paper shredder, but it has never been used since the Diploma exams.
- H: Has the exam changed your approach to the teaching of writing?
- V: I don't think it has really done that except that the major essay is always a comparison-contrast essay, which has become the dominant type of essay we give. To that degree, it has. It has meant that we emphasize comparison-contrast and de-emphasize other kinds of writing. The simple critical essay or the creative writing essays have become less significant because we need to make sure that they know how to write a fairly difficult comparison-contrast essay. That is not necessarily bad, because it is a good learning tool to write that kind of an essay. Nonetheless, it does structure you because you feel you have to give three or four examples of that for them to do during the year. That becomes almost the exclusive kind of essay you ask for. Instead of one, usually of differ-

ent types, you give three or four of one because that's what they are going to get on the exam.

The high school teacher is in somewhat of a quandary because he is presumably trying to prepare students for two places. Many matriculation students go to university where they have to write a Competency test. A Competency test is very different than the final exam that they write at the end of high school. There are students who do very well on the written portion of the provincial Diploma exam yet fail the competency test, which seems bizarre. We have examples of students actually getting an "A," over 80%, on the written portion of the Diploma exam and still not passing, or at best a marginal pass, on the university Competency test.

Part of the reason for that is the way the two of them are marked. One of the five grading areas on the major essay of the Diploma exam is matters of convention, which is mechanics. For a student to get two out of five on that particular section of the exam, although we are not supposed to be thinking of this when we actually mark it, would compute to 40% on that particular area. To fail the matters of convention on the Diploma exam means there are several errors in punctuation, mechanics, grammar, and usage that "impede" the clarity of the communication. You get a pass, a 60%, if it simply "reduces" but doesn't "impede," and that is a funny word.

At the university they have eight grading areas. If you are deficient in three of those eight, you fail the exam. Four of those eight are mechanics: sentence errors, spelling, punctuation, and usage errors. Yet for us, all of those are lumped into one of five. A student can be weak in what amounts to half of the areas that the university is looking for and still do very well on our exam because we don't emphasize the same things as the university does.

As teachers we know how Diploma exams are going to be marked. If we penalize students for things that are not on the Diploma test, we are not preparing them for that exam. If you decide, you have to balance it between what the university requires, it leaves you in some kind of a limbo. You are not really sure whether you are being successful or not because the two exams are so different in what they are demanding. You are not sure what you need to emphasize any more.

Generally, what I think is happening is that we are de-emphasizing mechanics or conventions because they are de-emphasized on the marking of the Diploma exam. We are not putting the same kind of pressure on our students to spell correctly and to be mechanically accurate because it is only one sixth of

the major essay. That has created changes in what you emphasize and encourage your students to learn. You try saying, "Although this isn't on the exam. . . ." (laughter) You don't have much success. You can tell them, "It is on the university Competency test; it's good to know it anyway." If you do too much of that, you are splitting your student too. He wants to know what is on which exam, and it creates tension for them as well as for you in the classroom. The two big targets that they are looking for are so different. I feel that somehow it should be the same test. Both places should get together and come up with some kind of an agreement on a test that they both will use.

I remember mentioning that to Alberta Education people in Edmonton, and they said, "That is not our responsibility; it's not our problem. Our problem is to teach what we think fits our curriculum. If the university has a problem, then let them solve it." They didn't seem very sympathetic, and they didn't seem to feel that we need to worry about the students' performance at the university. "We are teaching our curriculum as we have been mandated to do, and we don't have to worry about the university," is easy to say in theory, but it is not that easy to ignore in actual practice as a classroom teacher.

- H: Do you give much less emphasis to the Competency test since not all of your students go to university?
- V: Their performance on the university test has no bearing on whether I have done my job or not. The superintendent or principal are not going to come down and ask me why my students did poorly in the university Competency test. They know all of your kids write the Diploma exam; not all of them go to university. Administrators are not concerned about them any more; that is a different world. They are concerned about student performance on the Diploma tests. They have to be for survival as a professional.
- H: How would you imagine combining the two tests?
- V: It is hard to. I guess it becomes a question of (pause) curriculum emphasis. Obviously, the university feels that different things are more important than whoever has been responsible for putting together the high school curriculum. Until we come to some kind of an agreement on what is important, that can never happen.

I hear all the time from the chamber of commerce, via the newspaper, or from employers that I bring into my English 33 class to talk about resumes, job applications, and the world of work, that the business world wants graduates to have competency in the language. They are tired of secretaries that can't spell and management trainees that don't know how to write a

sentence. They are perfectly convinced that we are not doing our job because they feel that the present graduate is far less competent in basic language. I suspect that the universities' emphasis is a reaction to the world of work. I personally don't feel that is necessarily wrong, but it is not the emphasis of Alberta Education.

An interesting thing has happened. We came out with a new curriculum just before the Diploma exams. The new curriculum de-emphasized literature. It increased the creative writing, the business and the personal writing components. All of these things became more important than they had been in the previous curriculum. Literature was still there, but it was not the be all and the end all of the curriculum as it was before.

Yet the exam is totally literature oriented. I find that eye raising. I had already begun to mold my course to get away from emphasizing literature to teaching skills. But the Diploma examination has a written part that asks how two authors have treated such and such a theme in literature, and all of the multiple choice questions come straight out of literary selections: Shakespeare, modern drama, poetry, and short stories. The intent of the new curriculum was to address the concern that we are being too literature oriented and that we should have more practical material in the English 10-20-30 matriculation program. Yet we test only literature because we seem to be emphasizing the exam in our courses. We have gone away from any meaningful attempt to teach non-literary concepts in English 10-20-30, and I think that is a shame.

H: The new curriculum was actually subverted by the exam?

V: To some people that is what has happened. Alberta Education has a blueprint, and they say it fits the majority of the skill areas, which is true enough. Nonetheless, the emphasis on literature means that it is the only way we are teaching those skills rather than through other ways. If you were to say these kinds of things to Alberta Education, they would answer, "We don't have to use literature." Literature, though, is what they use on that exam, which kind of forces you to do as much as you can to keep your students competent in dealing with literature.

No, you are not forced to stay with literature. You can stay with the curriculum, but you feel that your students will suffer on the exam if you do. You can play God and say, "I think it is more important that my students get this education regardless of what they do on the Diploma exam." That is a dangerous position to have to be in, one that I don't want.

H: When the new curriculum came in, you began to emphasize language. Has the emphasis shifted back to literature?

V: That was a natural one. I just dropped the new things I was doing and went back to the way I was doing literature before, with some changes in emphasis that I have already mentioned. That was an unfortunate thing because I was excited. I noticed reactions. I was new enough in the teaching profession that it struck me as interesting and challenging to change. I noticed that some teachers were not so excited because they were so set in teaching literature units. I was willing and excited about the potential new things. After a year of it, because that was all we had before the exams came in, I dumped the changes. That was kind of sad. (laughter)

English 33, though, is a whole different kind of game because the English 33 Diploma exam is extremely easy. The biggest problem we have in that particular area is that the slightly above average student can end up with a mark between 35% to 50%, or even below 35%, from the classroom teacher and still pass. You have to be virtually lame, blind, and spaced out to fail the English 33 Diploma exam. It is a relatively easy task to get 60% or more on the Diploma exam, and 65% combined with a 35% gives a student a passing 50%. Students know that. Knowing the motivation of our English 33 students, if they can see that they get through if they drift, they will. The teacher end mark and the Diploma exam mark in English 33 has varied by 10% to 12% because of that. The students do not complete assignments because they don't need to pass the teacher's exam.

That has created, for better or for worse, a rather interesting dilemma for the teaching of the non-matriculation route. The student doesn't fear the exam nearly as much as the English 30 student, whose whole career and scholarship possibilities ride on the English 30 exam. The English 30 student is very worried about it, and he wants you to teach to that test. The English 33 student knows the test is easy and is drifting through the course because he is not concerned about a 60% or 70% or 80%. Too many students are concerned about getting a 50% and getting out.

It has created a whole different set of teaching dilemmas for you to try and motivate students in spite of their perception that the Diploma test is going to be their passport to get out of high school, regardless of what they have been doing during the year. That defines a lot of the challenge that is different from English 30 students. I don't find myself teaching to the test in 33. Although I try to prepare them for it, I still try to downplay that exam in their minds and

how easy it is because I want to encourage them to do more in class.

H: Are the types of writing assignments in English 33 tests more functional?

V: They are.

H: Do the written assignments in the Diploma exam affect your instruction of writing?

V: No. They are not too difficult. The functional parts are fine, and I appreciate the nature of the writing assignments, even the cartoon and personal reaction. In some ways it is a better test. Still, the multiple choice is mostly literature, except for one section.

H: Don't literary multiple choice questions force the teaching of literature?

V: Not quite as much. The textbooks are still very literature oriented. The Diploma test questions are of a less critical nature toward literature. While all of the questions are on literature, they are more general and personal feeling types of questions, and fairly literal in a lot of senses. I would say 95% of the English 33 students would do between 50% and 60% on that multiple choice test if they were to take it before they started the course. That exam doesn't put much pressure on them.

H: Do you have English 33 students practice writing reactions to a cartoon? Is a business letter writing unit part of your course?

V: The textbooks we were using had cartoons in them, so it was something we did already. Something I had done before the test came. We do a fairly significant unit in the non-matriculation classes on business letters and preparing a resume that students can use when they leave high school. That is something we did anyway. The English 33 Diploma test doesn't force any changes.

H: The different effects of English 30 and English 33 tests is almost a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, contrast.

V: It is. I find that rather curious. I prefer to teach English 33 because you don't have the same kind of pressure.

You find that it depends on the department a little bit. Our particular department has eight teachers at the L.C.I., and we teach eight English 30 classes. Everybody teaches one. That way everybody is involved. In a lot of departments I know teachers who are requesting not to teach matriculation subjects because of the pressure of being evaluated on student performance. I don't know if it is going to become critical where no one wants to teach those subjects, but I do notice that kind of trend.

H: Did it used to be the trend that the person who taught a matriculation course always taught it?

V: Not in our school. We have always divided it up,

at least in English. I don't know about the other subjects. In one school that is the way it has been. You earned your seniority and the right to teach English 30 or Social 30 or Math 30. Now they don't want to earn that right. (laughter) It used to be more fun to teach matriculation level because the kids are smarter and older and more mature, and you can have more interesting discussions. It is more challenging to you as a person and more interesting, but the pleasures are undermined by the externals of the English 30 Diploma test.

H: Have you been involved with grading both with English 30 and English 33 Diploma tests?

V: Yes.

H: Do you have any reactions to those experiences?

V: Yes. (laughter) I don't mind the marking. I have never done the July marking because I have been involved in teaching summer school. The July session is long, 10 days, and I suspect that would be horrendous. I have done August and January. The August one is very short, and so it is no pressure. The January or February one isn't too bad. By the last day you are getting a little tired, but it runs fairly well.

You find all kinds of interesting things. The descriptors use words like "reduces," "impedes," "competent," or "proficient." Those are so subjective that you end up in your consistency checks having some fairly interesting debates with other teachers on the merits of papers. We have seen how papers range from two to five in each mark on a particular category because of the different perceptions that teachers have of what constitutes "proficient," or whatever the debate happens to be about on a paper. Generally, it is not too bad. The descriptors work out so that a fairly decent percentage of the papers get the same or similar marks from each teacher. It turns out that the holistic marking system works, but as I said earlier, I'm not so sure that it is the right marking procedure because of the university demands. As a system it works reasonably well, and I don't have any really serious qualms about that part of the marking.

It is interesting to see how teachers evaluate differently. Some, usually your older teachers, seem more critical when it comes to conventions and style. The younger teacher, who has not had as much experience with the older curriculum, is usually more emphatic about ideas and not so concerned about form. We see that showing up because it is hard to totally shed the notions that you had for years on what constitutes a good paper. I see some teachers being quite appalled by the holistic marking system because it allows a paper that has a fairly creative idea that is poorly

expressed to pass. Many teachers say, "If he was in my classroom, I would try to work on developing that imagination and intelligent perception and to develop more mechanical and stylistic control over it." The marking system precludes that and allows the paper with a good idea, a creative thought that is not terribly well controlled, to do well. That is a danger in some circles though some people say there is no problem with that. It depends on who you are whether you find that a dilemma. Universities do; the chamber of commerce does. The teaching profession as a whole doesn't seem to find it a dilemma.

I have been involved on the committee this last year that writes multiple choice questions: test item building they call it. I found that a Catch-22--a nightmare--and those are very strong words. At first it was no problem. I enjoyed writing and meeting with committee members and looking at selections and trying to create meaningful multiple choice questions. After we had been working at it for a while, we got back the field tests from previous exams, and our next task was to look at questions that had been field tested. Beside each question they had the computer printout of how the question had worked with the field test. They had certain parameters that the question needed to fit before it was acceptable. We were to look at the questions and see if we could salvage them, if we could change either the stem or some of the responses to make the question fit the parameters that they had set up.

This is what became quite a sad thing. Each question has four choices, and the percentage of top students and low students who answered each of the four choices was given to us from the computer printout. Each of the four choices had to have at least 5% response, and the keyed response had to receive a higher percentage of responses than any of the other three for the question to work. That was essentially the way we had to work. If one of the responses only got 2% or 1% of the responses, we tried to make it trickier so more people would be sucked in, and it had to be a higher percentage of low students answering incorrectly than good students for the test to be discriminating properly.

I don't have any problem with that theory, but as I started looking at that, I thought what we are doing is not really testing anybody's ability. We are trying to build a test that will fit the parameters that we have set out as good before we ever teach anything. They have a mandate to try and make the provincial average be 65%, and they build tests, via field testing, that will reach that goal regardless of what happens in the classroom. You end up not being able to

teach for concepts because the questions aren't testing concepts so much as they are trying to distinguish between top and low students. You are trying to build a test that will trick the low students while the smart students will be able to figure out the trap that you built. It seems so Kafka-like to me, so contrary to what you really want to do in an education system. I expressed my concerns, and I wasn't invited back next year to that committee, because they didn't appreciate that perception. Maybe that is a false interpretation. Nonetheless that is what happened.

I found it very sad to think about what we are trying to do. If 90% of the students got the test items right, it was a poor question. It wasn't that the students were smart; it was that it was a poor question. We had to make the question such that more people would answer it incorrectly, and especially the low students would answer it incorrectly. The test is built so that you can't succeed. If you are a top student, it is set up so that you can do well, and if you are a weak student, it is set up so that hopefully you won't. A weak student can't suddenly start studying and catch fire and do well, because the exam tests built-in ability that is developed over 12 years. A weak student can get lucky and answer a few questions right, but that is it. He is stuck in the low section by the form of the exam. It is scary, to think that we have created that kind of test as the final arbiter of twelve years of education.

H: By the same token, there is not much that any student can do to prepare for that test.

V: Nothing. That is one of the reasons why I said students are aware that the course is over once they have completed the written portion of the Diploma exam. They have to study for that. They have to remember the selections they have learned and all of the things that you have taught them. They work hard for that test. They have written enough multiple choice tests and have seen past Diploma exams to know that there is nothing they can prepare for. The course is over for them. The test is easy or hard, depending on how well they do on multiple choice, but they can't do anything about it, and they know that. All they can do is try to get a good night's sleep and be as alert as they can for that test and hope that what they're doing is the right. That is another reason why it makes me sad to think we are spending millions of dollars on this test every year that really is predetermined and preset and goes nowhere. It doesn't do anything that everybody in the world knows it is going to do before it starts.

Yet administrators and principals want you to

be way higher than the average, and it is built in that you can't be. If you happen to have a really bright class, from a small school, you might be well above, but if you happen to have a weak class the next semester, you are going to be well below. If you are in a big school in Edmonton or Calgary, you set the average. You can't be off the average, no matter how much you do, because you set it. The bigger the school, the more closely you have to fit the average because you make the average.

I suppose administrators must see that too, but somehow they are going to be exempt from it. If you do well in a big school system, you bring the average up. The only people who have any chance of being very much different, either higher or lower, is a small school, and good classes cycle. All teachers know that. You will have a good crop of grade 12's one year and a very weak one the next year or two. The personality patterns just seem to emerge. Administrators don't take that into consideration very often either. If they would look at your average over four years, when you have had your highs and your lows, then they could maybe see something, but they try to do it semester by semester. That is wrong.

The test is built so that it is going to do what Alberta Education wants it to do regardless of what you teach. That is not necessarily true in a more content oriented course like mathematics, but English is a skills test. Students are learning from 1 to 12, and there is just nothing new in the curriculum that is going to change things dramatically when you teach it. It is going to happen anyway.

H: Were you teaching when they abolished Departmental exams in 1973?

V: No, I started in 1975-1976.

H: How did you feel coming into that system with no tests?

V: I personally liked it. I felt eager then; I feel perhaps more competent now. I still feel that teachers as professionals are to try to teach students what we feel is important. We have guidelines: we have a curriculum to follow. Still, I liked the idea of being able to look at a class, and after a few days all teachers can tell what kind of kids they are. You could adapt your course to fit your own kids for that particular semester with what you saw as their strengths and weaknesses, playing on both of them.

The exam kind of forces you to build on the exam, whether that is their strengths or their weaknesses. If it is their strength, then you emphasize it. If it is their weakness, you try to build it up. It doesn't give you the freedom to say, "These guys are really great here. Let's exploit that particular idea. They

are great at debate or discussion; let's teach a course centered around that and let them learn those kinds of things." The initiative is taken away from you to make your own decision as a professional. That erodes, in my estimation, what a professional is. The exam becomes the decision-making body, not you.

H: You mentioned two words. When you came in, you were "eager," and I think that is the way most teachers feel, but you feel more "competent" now. Has the Diploma examination had an effect on that view of your competence?

V: I don't think it has. I look at my student performance, and it has been good, but I am afraid that I am so cynical about the exam that I don't feel any sense of accomplishment. I can't feel good enough about the fact that my students did 2% or 3% or 4% above the provincial average as any reason for patting myself on the back. I don't feel that I can do that because I don't think the test tests anything of significance. It does not reinforce anything except the fact I already knew what I was doing. I won't feel bad if I find a class that does below the provincial average for some reason, unless, when I examine it, I find that I didn't teach something I should have. Then I will feel bad because the test outguessed me. That is terrible, not because I was a terrible teacher; it was just that I was outguessed, which I find sad. I don't think that the exam has helped me feel more competent.

It has made me feel more like a tradesman, rather than a professional. I am simply going through the required motions of giving so many tests so my students can do well on this particular test. The challenge of facing the class and saying, "What should I do with this group of kids?" is almost gone. It is still present if you look at it positively and say, "How can I adapt this class?" Instead, it is the idea that I have to do well on this exam. It is not nearly as open, as much fun, to teach an English 30 class as it was. That is why people are not wanting to teach it. It has lost its flavor. The most popular course in our school now is English 20, which is the next one down, because there is no pressure. You can do the kinds of things you want to do as a teacher that you don't feel you can do now with English 30, at least not to the same degree. Ultimately, from everything I have said, I don't see anything really positive coming out of the Diploma exams.

H: As a student in Alberta, you had to take the old Departmental exams. What do you remember about them?

V: As a student, I liked the Departmentals. I thought they were great because I was a terrible student in that I was very arrogant. I thought I knew everything,

and I didn't have to do anything. I knew the test counted 100%; I didn't have to listen to the teacher. I could get copies of the old examinations and prepare myself, and I was quite prepared to write them to prove that I knew what I was doing better than anyone. That is a sad thing. I wasn't old enough to realize how sad that was, how immature, and how destructive that had been to me. It wasn't until I got to university that I realized how much I had cheated myself by not paying attention and learning from my teachers. I knew that the exam was what was important, and I could get it my own way.

I wouldn't be surprised that there are students who do the same sort of thing now. They can't do it quite the same way because it is a 50-50 weighting. That is an improvement, in that sense, but any kind of external exam takes away from the autonomy of the teacher, not only in the teacher's mind but in the minds of the student.

The adult student, for example at the college where I teach, can opt to receive only the Diploma exam mark. They don't have to do well in the class. They can come and listen, but they don't have any pressure on them to do well in the assignments. If they happen to blow it, that is fine; they just have to learn enough to do well on the Diploma exam. If I give them a 50% and they get 62%, their mark is 62%. They can't reverse it. If they do well in the class, they can't choose to take just the class mark, which suggests that the powers that be feel the exam is more accurate than the teacher. It is interesting that it can't go two ways. Teachers can't feel that their mark has any merit. The exam is still the final arbiter, and it is even more so for the adult student.

The Diploma exam has become Big Brother watching over us. From an outside point of view, maybe teachers need to be looked over. As a teacher inside, I don't feel we do. (laughter)

H: If you had your "druthers," what would do?

V: If I had my "druthers," I would abolish the exam.

H: To end, I would like to thank you for your time.

V: Thank you for letting me talk.

APPENDIX B

TEACHING HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH WITH ALBERTA'S DIPLOMA EXAMS:

AN ASSESSMENT THROUGH ORAL RESEARCH

INTERVIEWEE: GERRY S. MILLER

INTERVIEWER: Charles Hart

SUBJECT: Teaching High School English with Diploma Tests

DATE: 03 February 1987

PLACE: Medicine Hat High School, Medicine Hat, Alberta

H: This is an interview with Gerry Miller, an English teacher at Medicine Hat High School, who resigned as Department Head on June 1986. Charles Hart is the interviewer, and the date is February 3, 1987.

What experiences have you had with the Diploma examinations?

M: I was involved in studying the initial blueprint for the first exam in September of 1983. I have worked on field testing, item building, item revision. I have had a look at all stages of the development of the exam, right from the outset. My experience goes back to when John Wood was responsible for the Comprehensive exam, where we worked in terms of building the marking schemes for the written responses, which were, by and large, carried over into the Diploma examinations, with some modifications to suit the nature of that exam.

H: What do you recall about your experiences in setting up the exam?

M: I suppose attempting to maintain and account for the human element in the exam process. That meant fighting to keep the exam away from the zeal of lit critics (test developers and teachers who want to emphasize terminology used in the critical, formal interpretation of literature; they approach the teaching literature as if it were nothing more than pure, adamistic analysis). I think we initially won; however, I am not sure that battle hasn't been lost. That is the thing I remember most about setting this whole thing in motion--attempting to establish a blueprint that met the needs of the curriculum and to dispel some old thinking about what exams should be.

The nature of the January 1984 exam was different from anything Alberta had seen prior to that. One does not have to look far, just go back to the old Departmentals. There is no comparison between the old Departmentals and that January 1984 examination.

H: What do you remember about Departmentals?

M: They were totally term specific. To a large degree,

they did not really show whether a kid understood a selection or understood what he was reading. If my analysis is correct, a major part of those examinations was if students could identify literary concepts.

H: Was it a multiple choice exam?

M: Yes, except they included some essay questions, and occasionally, they would run some blank space questions, fill-in-the-blank questions.

I made a point of finding some old copies of those before we went into developing a blueprint for the Diploma tests because I had to know where we had been and look at that exam in terms of the old curriculum. Then, I looked at our exam in terms of our new curriculum. That is primarily where the big fight evolved. A lot of people were involved at the testing end whose testing experience did not go much beyond the old exam, and they saw that as the epitome of examinations, as if it were the panacea.

H: Did the curriculum people want a term-specific test?

M: You have to appreciate that we are involved with two different groups here. I was a member of the curriculum ad hoc committee. Once we had our blueprint roughed, we called testing personnel to come and look at it, and that is where the disagreements set in. I think they had some concerns about not testing some of the strands of the new curriculum. Viewing, speaking, and listening were not testable in the exam situation that we presently have. Testing just the reading and writing was too narrow a scope for the curriculum, and they were saying how can we write a test on two of five strands.

H: How did the curriculum committee argue against that?

M: You are taking me a long way back. I do not remember precisely what our arguments were. I felt that there were really some grave differences in this whole thing, but I think it became a case of curriculum saying, "Testing does not dictate. Testing must meet curriculum's needs. Curriculum does not meet testing's needs." I think that was the bottom line that it came to.

Again, why I was extremely suspicious and why I still monitor very closely the design of that exam is because I did not come away with the feeling that testing was all that prepared to stay by our blueprint. I am not prepared now to commit myself whether they deliberately set out to sabotage that first blueprint or whether it was accidental. I do not know; I am not prepared to comment.

H: At that time, did you feel the opposition came from such people as John Wood, who was the head of Student Evaluation.

M: It came at about the same time as the big shuffle with John Wood and Frank Horvath, who assumed John's

position while John was still there. So, this is supposition on my part, but I think that one of the reasons John Wood was scuttled, and I do feel that John Wood was scuttled, was because he was an advocate of the new curriculum.

I do not think that all of the people who worked for him were in agreement with that new curriculum. I do not know where his resistance might have come from. You have hit a fairly contentious issue because I have worked with John a lot, and I liked John, and I could not understand why what happened did happen. But that is another issue.

H: Can you recall any experiences with John that would show that he was for testing the curriculum and not having the test drive the curriculum?

M: I think the very nature of the Comprehensive exam, for which he was responsible, reflected that very thing. To a large degree, so were the Achievement exams, for which he was responsible. There is not that much difference, in my estimation, between the Comprehensive examination (1983) and the Diploma examination of January 1984.

H: Did you have any part in organizing or developing either the Comprehensive or Achievement exams?

M: Yes. I was involved with John in the designing of the marking criteria. There are hours and hours of wrestling with those criteria in terms of what would give kids a fair shake--what would keep everyone marking the same mark for the same piece of writing. John's ultimate aim was that 43 people should be able to mark one piece of writing, and all of them should arrive at the same figure.

All the hassle about the 5-point scale is when I disagreed with John. I can recall his statement; he said, "If we move it to a 10-point scale, we just double the chance for error, or differences." I really felt that they should split. If you did not want to go to a 10-point scale, go 1.5, 2.5, 3.5, 4.5. But he said, "You just double the chances for discrepancies." And it is true.

I did most of my work in terms of the marking scales for written work. I cannot remember what committees I was on or how I became involved. I remember John once came here and met with some people, and we met three times or four times in Lethbridge before that initial Comprehensive examination hit us. As I recall, we were working primarily on those marking scales and getting those so they would work reasonably well, which they did.

H: Did John devise the writing scale or was it set up through committee?

M: John brought the germ. He said this is what I see, and

from that we began to build on it. He convinced everybody that the 5-point scale was better than the 10-point, because you had half the chance for error. That is like the argument that the guy with the wooden leg has only half as much trouble with athlete's foot as anybody else. (laughter)

He brought his list, and his list was considerably longer than the one we finally decided to go with. He said, "These are the things I see as global. Can we consolidate some of those? Can we cut some out?" That is what we worked on. We finally came down to the five categories, which you are familiar with, and they are still in use on the Diploma examination: matters of convention, matters of choice, organization, thought and detail, and total impression.

H: Did John have anything to do with the multiple choice sections of Achievement or Comprehensive tests?

M: I was never involved with the multiple choice. My involvement was strictly with the marking scales, and they changed slightly to accommodate the Comprehensives. The general criteria did not change, but some of the descriptors had to change to suit the writing assignments, which they are still doing by the way.

I try to mark once a year, and I find that they usually change the descriptors to suit the topic. That part of it is growing better, except that the ratings are leaning even more to the lit crit. For example, the critical response this last time (January 1987) was a poem that contained a beautiful sustained metaphor, but kids were asked to respond in terms of "How does metaphor contribute to the poem's meaning," which is a pure lit crit question. Even the first personal response question tended to be very much a lit crit type of question. Of course, the major essay, which is a comparative essay of two outside works with the one provided in the test, is a pure lit crit question. I have never tried to account for that part in my graph. If I included that, it would make the proportions very small on meanings and human relationships and values. The greater part of the writing is lit crit type writing. Just by the very nature of the writing exam, we are looking at almost 50% of the exam being lit crit, or approaching 50% of the mark. That includes what is lit crit in the multiple choice, and I don't remember what the figure was last June, but I believe it was somewhere around 40% with lit crit kinds of questions. So, the exam is moving up to our left.

H: It is moving away from what you as a member of the curriculum committee had argued for?

M: Yes. That is my interpretation of what is happening. It is moving away from our initial perceptions of what the curriculum should dictate as an exam.

- H: Are those changes affecting you as a teacher?
- M: Definitely. I would be a fool to say no.
- H: Do you design activities that are more lit crit?
- M: Yes sir. I am not going to sell my kids short because the bottom line is somebody is going to read the mark each kid achieves on the exam, so I will do what I have to do. I can be a Dr. Faustus if I have to. It is not what I like to do. It is not the way I like to teach literature, but if that is what I have to do, I will put my kids through the hoop.
- H: Can you think of any examples of things you do differently now?
- M: For example, I spent probably 50 to 60 hours on this (searching through file cabinet and pulling out a 27 page vocabulary review exercise for English 30 students). Immediately following my earlier perceptions of what was happening with the Diploma exam, I constructed this kind of thing. Now that does not only represent something that I have spent a great deal of time on, but it represents a lot of time that a my kids are spending on something that is a pure lit crit exercise.
- H: The emphasis on this type of work is on terms?
- M: Yes. Totally. If you just flip to the back, there is an exercise that is pure lit crit, but if the exam is going that direction, then my kids have to be able to handle that.
- H: You have crossword puzzles which check students' understanding of terms and an exercise which asks students to give examples of terms from the literature they are reading in your class.
- M: Yes, and explaining an example in their own terms is not a pure definition assignment. I have not quite succumbed to that. I do not want my kids to memorize definitions. I want them to be able to look at a selection and derive their own. That is what this handout is set to do, but it is a pure lit crit exercise, and I make no bones about that.
- My essay topics are tending to change to prepare students for what they will meet on that exam. I don't very often hit the extended essay, which I once taught, because, when the smoke all clears, they have to be able to respond in three short pieces of writing. I know that sells the kids short, but it is not going to sell them as short as having a low English 30 grade. I am after the top possible grade every kid can achieve. That is what the universities look at.
- H: You used to emphasize the extended essay?
- M: Always. Constantly.
- H: How do you define an extended essay?
- M: For example, even at the English 20 level, I remember one topic I used, and I never use my topics twice. I

use my topics only once and then discard them. Families are large. I have to admit that I like to do the thinking to generate new topics. It is not just trying to stay ahead of kids borrowing essays and begging plagiarism. I strongly feel that if you get plagiarized, you begged it and should get it. Either your topic is a Mickey Mouse topic, or you have used it so long that there are too many essays running around.

I can recall one essay topic in Grade 11 that I used, long before Diploma exams: "It appears that a parallel exists between Nazi Germany in 1933-39 and Golding's Lord of the Flies. Discuss." I got some beautiful, thought-provoking essays. They were thought-provoking essays for me as a reader, and I know they were thought-provoking as hell for the kid who was writing them. The kid came to terms with probably something that he or she had not dreamed of coming to terms with at age 16 or 17. Marvelous pieces of writing.

H: Those topics would concentrate more on the human values?

M: Yes, they precipitated those. One kid, who was a bright little lady, no question about that, after she had her essay returned, said, "Can I stay and talk to you after class?"

I replied, "By all means, I don't know why you ask."

She stayed and said, "I want to ask you a question. You don't have to answer, but I have to ask you the question. Is there some parallel between what I just discovered in Golding's Lord of the Flies and Nazi Germany 1933-39 and Canada present-day?" (pause) Not bad for a 17 year-old. She immediately turned that into her own life and today. She was seeing some nice parallels.

That to me is learning. That (pointing to the vocabulary handout) is not. I still am convinced that my kids in those days probably had a better grasp on what makes a piece of literature work than they might today. Because with the exam, you become very mechanical, and you can't escape it. You can't escape it for a whole lot of reasons.

I don't know what your board is doing with the results of these exams, but I know what a lot of boards are doing with them.

H: What is happening?

M: I think they are using them as judgment calls.

H: On the teacher?

M: Uh huh. You must do an analysis to justify why your kids performed at the level they performed. Sometimes pure demographics dictate how a group will perform.

You could stand on your head; you could be a clown, and you could not convince them to do much. We get those groups, but don't expect boards to consider that.

H: How many teachers would you have teaching English 30?

M: Sometimes four, and sometimes three.

H: Do results come back for each individual teacher or are they grouped as a department?

M: The ones we get are grouped as a department.

H: So the pressure would probably come down on the Department Head, initially, and then go back to the teachers?

M: One of the reasons I am no longer Department Head.

H: There is an increasing amount of pressure on the teachers under you and on you as Department Head?

M: Yes. Also, because I was devoting a great deal of time to some of those things, I was failing my kids. I did not think that was fair. I did not feel there was enough of me to do both jobs well, so one of them had to go.

When I made the decision, I had just come through our first major analysis of Diploma results, and I covered two years. Just computer time alone, I would say that I would be extremely modest to say that I pumped 180 to 200 hours into the analysis. You know how Alberta Education distributes the marks, 12 marks per student? I had every one of those marks; I converted them to percentiles; I did all of that. There isn't a kid who has ever written the exam in this school who is not on file in my computer. That took a long, long time. I came through that, and I suddenly began to realize that when I sit until two o'clock in the morning at my computer doing this garbage, and I call it garbage, then I am not the same guy when I hit my classroom that next morning. That was borne out in my results, by the way. It became obvious in the results of my kids. I have taught a long time in this school, and I have never taught an English 30 group ever, until two years ago, that the classes I taught weren't at the top. It just never happened, and it was beginning to happen. I don't think that is expending my time profitably because I came for kids; I didn't come for some of this other stuff.

H: You would live for such moments as the moment you described when the girl came after class?

M: That is what this game is all about. There is nothing else, is there? I don't think there is. No. I mean that was worth more to me than a kid achieving an "A" because that kid told me that what we had done was meaningful for her life at that moment and would be for the rest of her life. She would watch for the Jack Merridews and the Adolf Hitlers. I think that is important when you live in a society like ours. If I

thought otherwise, I would be living different. I think that is part of my responsibility as a teacher. Heaven forbid that I would want to be a Keegstra, but I think we have to present material that will help the kids come to terms with why they live in the society they live and not in some other society. Oh yes, those are the things that keep me teaching. If it weren't for those things happening, I'd go.

H: I now want to go back to the curriculum committees. How did you get involved with them?

M: I was invited to become a member of the ad hoc curriculum committee in 1982. Our responsibilities when I became a member were inservicing and doing a fair bit of work in new selections for approval. We also became heavily involved the whole review of English language arts material in terms of tolerance and understanding. Our committee reviewed every piece of literature and every textbook that was on approval.

Where did we move to after that? We were involved in another hefty escapade of developing the new Reading 10 program. We got started in that before this tolerance and understanding hit, so we had to shelve that and go with tolerance and understanding, which took us six or seven months. Then we went back to Reading 10. We just recently completed that Reading 10 program, which has been approved by the Minister.

H: The 1982 curriculum seemed to make some dramatic changes from previous high school curriculums. Were those already in place when you came in?

M: Yes. Although I have to admit that I was in agreement with a lot of what was happening, and that may well have precipitated my invitation. I don't think they could probably afford to bring someone on to that committee at that point who was opposed to what the curriculum was saying we should be teaching.

H: That was based primarily on what Jimmy Britton had done in England?

M: Yes.

H: Were your sympathies for the new curriculum derived from your reading or from things you had done in the classroom?

M: It is really interesting. When they approved the new curriculum, and as we began inservicing it, I can remember sitting with Bernie Gommeringer (Regional Language Arts Representative of Alberta Education) and saying, "Bernie, I keep looking at this as a new curriculum, and I keep thinking about what I am going to have to change, but I don't know of anything I will have to change." Essentially my approach had always been the new way. I had been able to cover, perhaps not as thoroughly, the lit crit parts of the old curriculum. My kids understood all the components of a

piece of literature when we finished.

I think we are now having to go back to the old style. For example, I believe there were four questions on this January 1987 exam--which doesn't sound like a hell of a lot, but when you only have 80 to work with, that is substantial--where if the kid did not have the precise term at his fingertips, he could not answer the stupid question. I would have to go back and look at the exam once more; I was not looking at it from the perspective of how difficult the concepts were that they wanted the kids to be very precise about, or how finely. Were they asking the kids to split between personification and pathetic fallacy, which is a split I would not expect any Grade Twelve student to ever derive? I think that is just splitting the hair too finely for that age group. Those responses were totally term specific. The distractors were just straight terms: synecdoche, metaphor, hyperbole. Now that means that they have to have a good grip on the term, not just an understanding of how hyperbole functions in the selection and what it contributes.

I still argue that it is more important that a youngster can see in every selection an element of hyperbole, because that is, in fact, how an author makes us see what he sees. If that weren't there, we would not see. If he put exactly as it is in life, he would not have to write because it is there in life. Those are the important things that kids should see, and my kids always understood hyperbole in those terms. Now, it comes down to being term specific, which I don't like.

H: Another issue, has your work with John Wood on the grading of the essays influenced your instruction and grading of essays in your classroom?

M: I would have to say it did, but I would think that was probably to the kids benefit. If I have to pinpoint my major piece of learning as a result of working with John, it was that often we double jeopardize kids when we mark. That marking scale of John's did not allow you any double jeopardy on a kid. Just because you were ticked off with the conventions did not mean you could hammer hell on the style, because if the thoughts were there you had to give him credit for them. Or if he lacked a little bit of thought but could make sentences flow and could string sentences together well and had good command of the language, you had to give him credit for that. Those are all different aspects of writing, and a kid should be given credit for those aspects that he can handle. I don't think that I was doing that as much as I should have before I became involved with John.

H: Did that involvement require you to change your

classroom grading scales?

M: Yes, it did very much. As a matter of fact, it didn't take me more than two months to begin working out a marking scheme that I felt would be fairer to kids, and that was before I was Department Head. I told my Department Head I was doing it, and he said, "Go ahead." When I had it finished, it was one that was adopted for the whole school.

Which has also been another contentious issue with me. I believe that at least within a school, and provincially too, no matter who would mark an essay, it should come fairly near the same mark. But I have found so often that with a school this size that grades were fluctuating so much because we did not have any sound criteria from which to mark: maybe a guy wore a colored shirt that you didn't like that day. That marking sheet for me was a good deal.

H: Did you use a 10-point holistic scale or a 5?

M: No. Actually I converted each category into percentages. For example, we run 15 % conventions, 35% thought and detail, 25% matters of choice, and 25 % organization. We get a raw number in each one of those categories, and we have descriptors. I could show you a sheet. I have one here (pulling a grading sheet from the file cabinet). I think this is one of the initial ones. We keep modifying this, by the way.

H: Since as a staff you keep modifying, the dialogue continues on how to grade?

M: Yes. Also, one of my initial acts when I became Department Head was if we agreed what is a viable marking sheet, then everyone will mark by it. We do run consistency checks among ourselves constantly. It worked to our advantage before I quit as Department Head. We have not done it since I have not been Department Head because I used to mandate that occasionally. We were at a point last year where a youngster would protest a mark in my class, and I had no reservations. I would jerk my mark sheet off and say, "Take it. Choose your teacher." We were seldom more than 3% different, absolutely not. So, it certainly did that for me, and it did some good things for my staff when I was Department Head. It brings marking essays to some objectivity that is not always there. I would have to speak positively of the scoring guides that were used.

H: When you also talked about the extended essay, are those take-home writing assignments?

M: Yes. I still have take-home essays. My English 30's, last semester had two extended essays. Each student submitted nine pieces of writing to me, and five of those were take-home, four were in class. I understand that a lot of people are doing almost all their work

in class. I cannot quite do that because there still has to be an opportunity for a kid to present that sustained thought to you. I think that is still an important learning process--to sustain the thought and pondering in a long piece of writing, a longer piece of writing than you are capable of producing in an 80 minute period. I still hang in there. I sometimes wonder why.

I don't think they benefit on the Diploma exam; where they benefit on that one is when they hit college or university, because that is a skill that you must have acquired before you get there. The kid who is capable of a sustained thought is penalized on the Diploma exam because of the time constraint. Some people just are not that quick on their feet. Sometimes you and I are not. (laughter) It depends on the day. We all have our days where you could not think your way out of the most simple situation. If you have the youngster who is a really good sustained thinker, he does not have that opportunity to display that. I do not know how you can ever work around that in the exam situation.

Another concern is that there is not quite enough compassion on the part of markers when they mark that Diploma exam. A year ago in January (1986) I group led (served as a group leader for Diploma exam marking). I was becoming just slightly annoyed and trying not to show it. It is not a situation where if you are annoyed that you want to show it. I finally stopped everybody and forced them to write at the top of every sheet of their scoring guides in huge letters, "UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES." People forget that these kids are generating all of those thoughts, all of those words, all of those sentences, all of those paragraphs, in 2 1/2 hours, and they have to switch gears three times. It is not an easy task. Sometimes we jeopardize some of our brighter kids.

- M: If you had your choice, if the exam was not there, would you do more out-of-class writing, or would you still have the balance that you described?
- H: I would probably move to just straight out-of-class, but I have to teach in-class writing for students to survive in the pressure cooker. Again, if I do not teach them that, then I am selling them short because the first step that they have to get is to pass that exam.
- H: Before exams came back, did you have in-class essays?
- M: A couple a year, but the rest were all out-of-class.
- H: Do the Competency tests of the universities affect your instructional planning?
- M: No, because no one has ever made it clear to me what they are testing. I do not know what it is. No

one has ever shown their card to me: Lethbridge, Calgary, or Edmonton. Our own college here has one. I have never been privy to any of them.

H: With Competency tests you have experienced a lack of communication and feedback. What about the political pressure? If your kids did not pass that test, is that influential?

M: It does not come back politically, but it is the one thing that does come back on one's conscience. I have some serious questions because of feedback I get from my kids. I really question what they are testing or what they are looking for. I have my suspicions. I know that I have had some kids that can write, and who write well, but the universities think they are not competent writers. My suspicions are that they are looking for a straight elementary paragraph or short essay: "See Spot run."

H: Which is an entirely different expectation?

M: Yes. I do not believe that they look for very much thought, if any. I have some pretty good mechanistic writers who do not have two thoughts to rub together, if I can mix my metaphor. (laughter)

We get feedback through students who come back to talk to us. I had one student with me not more than two weeks ago. If I looked for a few minutes, I could give you a sample of her writing. This kid submitted an essay to an alcoholic foundation competition. She did not win the thing, but she received good mention. A kid who could see; her entire selection was allegorical. Not many kids eighteen years old could handle allegory. I could not, I don't think; I have never tried, but I would really hesitate about diving into an allegory. She was not. She personified every type of alcohol you could imagine and did it so well. Her title: "A Rye Tale." (laughter) Beautiful, but she is the kid who was told by the University of Lethbridge, "You cannot write."

H: In your discussion with her, what did you tell her?

M: I looked at her, and I honestly had that shocked look. She looked at me and said, "Don't worry about it. I know I can write." (laughter)

We do get some of those reports. Sometimes they are on key, but sometimes they are somehow picking off kids who we know have the ability the skills. I wonder what they are looking for in those cases. Brenda was the kind of kid who would write an incomplete sentence deliberately for the effect, and I don't think anyone at the university level, when these kids hit them the first year, is prepared to accept that a kid has that level of expertise and skill. She is a prime example. We are talking about a kid who is probably one of my strongest writers two years ago. It is not that I do

not think about it, but I do not know what the hell to do. Like I said, no one has ever shown me their card.

H: I had a girl who did the same thing, a good writer. In fact she got an "A" on the Diploma exam. She failed the Competency test. Feeling guilty about it, I went up to her and said, "What should I do for other kids?"

She said, "Tell them not to take the test until they have been at the university for a year. I was so scared when I went into a new place." She took it before she ever entered university. She continued, "By the time I got comfortable with the environment and knew what professors were expecting, I could pass."

I asked the lady at The University of Lethbridge who is in charge of the Competency tests what she thought of my student's advice? She said, "Officially, I cannot say that it right, but I think your student hit it right on the head." (laughter) I felt the same kind of guilt in that respect.

I wanted to follow up on an idea in the committees that you have been involved with. Is it a positive experience for a teacher to have those experiences on committees?

M: Yes, except the one drawback is that for every day you are away on committee work, it costs you two to recover. That is the only drawback. I suppose for myself the gains are all pluses. I do not mind the work. I can still put in some long days and some long hours, but I do believe that sometimes when you are involved in committee work that you do sacrifice your kids. I sat on two committees for a while. I was on the testing committee, the revision committee, and the ad hoc curriculum committee. Occasionally, I was called out of my classroom four days a month, sometimes five, and that was not being fair to my kids. I do not know if there is any way around that. For me, it was an extremely positive experience. I gained a lot; I grew a lot; I learned a lot. I felt that committee work was being attended to. By this, I mean our input was considered, and many of the things that happened, happened as a result of a great deal of discussion in committee. Things were taken forward, and they were attended to. You see those changes happening. No, I have no remorse for myself for the time I spent on committees, but I know I did sacrifice the students by doing it. That would be the only caution I would extend to anyone in becoming involved in committee work.

H: Do you think Alberta Education is doing less listening?

M: Your question is a little premature for me. I would guess, and I say guess, that by and large you will see committee work discontinued completely. I think this last budget cut absolutely scuttled any committee

work. I think what you will find them doing is contracting a lot of work, and I am not sure that is good because you tend to get a slant on work when that happens. For example, our ad hoc curriculum committee had a person from Barrhead, one from Kitscotty (near Vermillion), two from Calgary, one from Edmonton, myself, and Bernie (an Alberta Education representative). There was representation from all around the province. When they contract, they contract to a particular school board to develop a program or some aspect of a program, and I think what you will get is a particular philosophy that is ascribed to by that group. That seems to me the way it is going to go.

H: Money will be a key for what will happen with the exams?

M: Yes. As soon as they go to contracting, to a large degree, you work on your own time. With committee work, you are faced with transportation costs, hotel costs, substitute costs, and all of those things. It is expensive. There is no question about it, but I am not sure that everything can be measured in dollars and cents. Presently, that is what we are doing.

I thought they might even look on the \$7 million that they use on the administration of Diploma exams. I expected that might come down the line for us, but apparently it is not. I shot a couple of feelers when I was up marking, just to see what kind of response it had.

H: Do you have any feeling on whether they would dramatically change the exams?

M: I suppose it depends to a large degree on the type of mandate that our present minister is prepared to give testing. Our gal has never shown her courage very much either. Her predecessor was at the forefront constantly. Betkowski has never made a public statement in terms of where she stands in relation to testing or to any large degree what her stand is on education. King let us know on day one where he stood. This one has not. So it would be sheer speculation on my part.

H: Would it be a political decision?

M: Yes, entirely political. I think at the outset that the whole Diploma exam was a political decision. If I have any suspicions about the Diploma exam, it is because it was political. If it was a pedagogical decision, I can live with those.

H: Speaking of pedagogy, what would you have chosen? Would you prefer not to have the exam or to have it?

M: Somewhere, we have to place some trust in the profession we have created. Maybe that requires a little tighter monitoring of what is happening to make it work that way. I think at the outset that Diploma exams, Achievement exams, and Comprehensive exams came

because of a lack of trust of the profession. That came out rather indirectly. I know our own MLA said that when the Comprehensive exams were coming that it was a test of teachers.

H: If there was enough trust of the profession, would it be better not to have the exams?

M: Oh yes. I fritter away a lot of time right now preparing my kids to write an exam.

H: Do you have any idea on how we could as a profession be monitored more tightly with a sense of trust?

M: You are hitting a super contentious issue. (laughter) I have already told you that I have resigned as Department Head, and that is another one of the reasons. My concerns were too much with kids to be a Department Head. I do not care what you do as long as you serve the kids well.

H: So that commitment to the kids would be your pedagogy?

M: You bet. Take the kids away from this place, and I am gone tomorrow. I do not need any of the rest of this frustration. I enjoy my classroom, and that is where I want to be. I taught four 80 minute periods last semester, and I enjoyed that more than my last year as Department Head where I taught 2 1/2 classes. At least the rewards are there. You see kids grow. You see kids, who are presumably not able to think, doing some mighty fine things, even an English 23 group. That was the first time I taught English 23 since the new curriculum hit, and I have to admit I enjoy those buggers immensely. They were a fun group of kids, and they were prepared to think, and they did think, even to the point of being able to discuss irony in a selection and how it developed. They just kept setting you back in your chair and letting you know, "We can think, and we will. Just give us the opportunity." It made my whole year. It made the decision I agonized over in June (1986) worthwhile. You can see these kids, who in many cases have been convinced that they are unable to think, come through and say, "Hey, we can think. We'll show you we can think. Give us an opportunity."

H: Have you found any pressure to not teach English 30, with teachers wanting to teach English 23 or English 20, because of the scrutiny?

M: I have thought a great deal about that. You bet. I would lie to you if I said I had not thought of that. I think I have thought of it for two causes. One is the pressure that is there when that Diploma test is there. You cannot ignore that it is there, and particularly when you harbor suspicions of the purposes that the "stats" (statistics) will serve. If I suspected for a moment that boards were looking at those stats to look at the strengths of teachers, so

they would be able to come back to them and say, "Damn, you guys are doing a hell of a job." I have yet to hear of a board that looks at those stats from that angle. I still believe the old cliché, "You catch a hell of a lot more flies with honey than with vinegar." I think now they are being used for "trying to catch flies with vinegar."

I think they have an extremely demoralizing effect, particularly on young teachers. I have my battle scars from my past, and it does not affect me that badly. But I do sympathize for beginning teachers. Stop and put yourself back. Go back to your first English 30 class and consider facing that group with this, the Diploma exam, and tell me if you would have willingly accepted that English 30 class. You would have been as reluctant as hell to say, "Yes, I will teach an English 30."

That was another problem I was facing in this building. My philosophy is that everybody teaches all the way through. I will bring a new teacher in, and we will start at the lowest grade, if that is where they want to start, but we will bump them up. At the end of four years you had better have been the whole game, because I still believe that a teacher who has taught at grades nine, ten, eleven and twelve is a better grade nine teacher on the return because she knows that last hoop. At the beginning when I started as Department Head, I was having no trouble. I was able to pace people in three years through our whole program. At the end of three years, they had taught everything we had to teach in language arts. The last two years it has been tough. You really had to squeeze, and you almost had to go around, not quite with an iron fist because I could not do that, but you were putting some forceful persuasion in there to get people to come all the way through. I have a gal who has been teaching here for four years and has never been beyond English 20. I think she is just frightened spitless of that Diploma exam at the English 30 level. She was not as frightened of the English 33; she accepted that quite readily. We have one guy who has taught for 14 years, and finally, last year when I was Department Head, I convinced him to try an English 33. I know I would have had him in it earlier had it not been for the Diploma exam. I think he was just frightened.

H: Is the English 33 exam as difficult?

M: I would have said "No" until this last exam (January 1987), or the second last (June 1986). I would have had some queries after the second last, but I would say "No" after this last exam because it too seems to be moving somewhat in a "lit crit" direction. Not as much as the English 30, but it is there. At one point, and

you and I have written items for English 33, that was the one thing we were told to stay away from. They are creeping in. Take a look at the last exam. They are there. It is just moving more and more into that "lit crit" area. So, you will find the pressure there.

You are going to have trouble with people if boards keep insisting on the amount of time to analyze results and to justify your results. I think people are saying, "To hell with it." I just assumed one guy's English 30 class because we had to drop one class because our enrollment just was not where we thought it would be. He has taught English 30 for six years, only one a year. He is a junior high man, but he liked the high school and would always keep one high school class, usually an English 30. He does a good job with English 30, but after I took his class, we sat down and talked about it. He said, "You know, I am just kind of relieved that it is not there."

H: Is there a reward to the teacher for students doing well on the Diploma exam?

M: You are looking at a situation that is a Lotto 649, in terms of its odds, not quite that stiff. The whole idea of a mean is that precisely half the province will be below that mean. Just a fact of means.

In a setting such as Medicine Hat High School, we have some unique things happening. Number one, we are a unique school; no more unique than L. C. I. (Lethbridge Collegiate Institute), but you look around the province and that is a minority of the high schools. Our whole demographic population is different from the school that is purely an academic high school. You couple that with the idea that for the last five years we have not offered English 13. It taxed my teachers like hell, but it bore some good fruit for kids. Our population was running 42-38% in English 20 maximum, with the rest in English 23. For the last three years we have been 70% and plus in English 20, with the rest in English 23. We had 73% in English 20 last year and 27% in English 23. I will still argue that a kid who comes through with me in the straight academic program is better served in the end. We were doing that, but it does some strange things to means when you do, because of those weak kids whom you were pulling through the knothole. . . .

Our failure rates were always below the provincial failure rates in this school. We never exceeded the provincial failure rate in spite of never closing a door. We even have the door open: a kid can go to English 33 and come right back into English 30. We have never refused a kid in this department. I can remember one class where I had eight students who had been in English 33 and came back in one English 30

class, and seven of them made it through. You have to appreciate when you are allowing that to happen, the weak kids in your English 30 group would be your strong kids in your English 33 group if you streamed them, if you cut them, if you pushed them, or do whatever you have to. That happens when you have English 13 because a kid has no choice. He is funnelled in before he hits high school. Not having English 13 does some funny things: we drop to the middle, and we always gravitate to the mean. Boards seem to have this idea that everybody has to be above the mean. I argue that half of us will be below. As long as I am serving more kids better, then I will live with being below the provincial mean if I am there.

H: So the test has not affected that part of your commitment to the kids?

M: To hell it hasn't. Since I resigned as Department Head, do you know what the move is now--going back to English 13.

H: Personally, you are still committed to the kids?

M: You bet.

H: If a kid in English 23 said, "I think I can make it through English 30," would you say, "Why don't you give it a shot?"

M: Yes. We opened the door. We had it open from English 23 to English 30. A kid had to have pretty good grades to do that, and he had to have his teacher's recommendation, but if he had those two, if he could maintain a good average in English 23 and get his teacher's recommendation, he was straight in to English 30. But that is going by the way. The exams are not serving teachers, and they are not serving students in that way. I think we are losing ground, and damn it, we are here for kids.

H: Do you find that you are using more multiple choice questions in class?

M: Oh yes. That was one of our initial moves. We had been working on a test bank two years prior to the exam hitting. I purchased my own computer. I could not get my board to do it. We wanted to do our test banks and store them and print them the way we wanted to print them. I still liked the old Achievement exam setup where you had excerpt and questions. There was only one machine in the industry when I bought mine that would do that. I did not expect my staff to become involved buying the machine, but I did expect them to become involved in inputting. There was a hell of a lot of inputting because we had been writing like hell for a year before I bought my computer, so we had a real backlog. We input all of that, and then we built for another year. By the way, we built here for four years exactly as we did

in Lethbridge (a process used by Alberta Education test builders): people just submit excerpts that they think will work, the stories, etc., and throw it on the table and say, "Will it work and at what grade level?" If it does, you hit the chalkboard. We did not write the items right up; everybody chose what they wanted to write from the ideas that were on the chalkboard, and they had two days to write their items. We had all of this in place, and we were building like hell for English 30.

Then, whack the Diploma exam came along. Initially, I was happy as hell because that is one exam I don't have to build. Really it was two, because they took English 33 and English 30 from our hands. In that way it was a plus, because it takes a lot of time in developing good test items. Once the Diploma exam was a reality, we immediately consolidated all of our material and rebuilt six prep exams out of all the material. We administer those on a 21 day frequency throughout the year. They are keyed to the development of our courses.

- H: Are you quite satisfied with multiple choice?
- M: If the items are built well, your testing is valid. I fear with the budget cuts quality is going to fall by the wayside. I think they are going to contract.
- H: Which would take away the dialogue between teachers and test developers?
- M: Yes.
- H: Have you ever experienced working with item building committees, where you go back and make the questions somewhat trickier?
- M: I sat on that revision committee for a year. I think we only met three times. I did not have the same feeling about revision making questions trickier.
- H: That was a term I got from another teacher.
- M: No, I did not have that feeling. I worked with Tom (Dunn, of Alberta Education's Student Evaluation Branch), and I think Tom's emphasis was if a question is not working, then take a look at your stem to see if in fact it's asking a question; next, take a look at your distractors. He has a term for it, and it's a long sucker. I just call them "quarter questions," where you can take out two distractors, but you cannot separate the next two. So you may as well flip a coin and say, "If it comes down heads, I am going for A; if it comes down tails, I am going for C." But it was always to generate clarity in the question, not trick. No, I would not agree with that at all.
- H: Was the item building process of writing the test a valuable experience for you as a teacher?
- M: It was extremely valuable to come through and particularly for writing here. Because I was heading a

part of our school's test development, I could pass on a lot of those things that we learned on provincial committees about why questions did not work. In some cases I had permission from Tom to take a sample item that did not work and be able to show these people why it was rejected. It made it possible for me to teach my people here a hell of a lot about test construction that I would not have been able to had I not been on that committee. Really, that revision committee shows you every possible pitfall in writing examinations if you are attending to that. I look back on that, and I have the kind of education in test writing that I do not think you could ever acquire in a formal way. Part of that is simply learning by experience. No, I feel very strongly that the whole revision process is valuable. I would argue strenuously against opposing feelings.

H: Whether there was a Diploma exam or not, you would rely on well written multiple choice?

M: Writing and multiple choice, 50-50. I think any final exam a kid writes should be half written and half multiple choice. If I had to rationalize why, it gives every kid an even break. You have some kids who write well but have trouble with multiple choice, but you have some kids who can write multiple choice but do not write so well. So, everybody gets a fair break. If you do it both ways, you give them two opportunities to show what they are capable of in terms of understanding of literature and expressing themselves. I also believe in the common exam.

H: In your school, you would have a common exam?

M: Yes.

H: Going back to the monitoring idea, one way to monitor teachers would be a common exam for the school?

M: To some degree. Although I do not like to come to that. I think an internal, common exam like that serves as its own monitoring device. We are bloody professionals. I know I always looked at my marks and then gaged them against what the other guy achieved on the same exam. If it came to looking at--"Do I need to do some changing?", "Do I have some strengths I would like to share with someone?"--if it is that kind of thinking. I do not think you can watchdog. Once you start watching, guess what? You can never take your eyes off of them.

H: Somehow, it has to be a balance with discussion and sharing, yet still with a common hoop that everyone has to jump through somewhere.

M: Yes. That comes partly with this kind of thing.

The other thing that I pushed for is a common course outline, common to every grade level (handing a copy of a course outline to the interviewer). We did

that immediately when the new curriculum came up. It was a good time to do it.

H: So this would be the course outline for all of your teachers? Everybody would use this?

M: Yes. Every English 20 student would have a copy.

H: Did every teacher in your department sit down and help design this?

M: Yes. It took hours and hours. It is constantly under revision as well.

H: A lot of dialogue went into this?

M: Yes, and it has been a constant dialogue. Just to come to terms with how every kid was marked in the same way in terms of his final grade (pointing to outline), that page you just passed took some time.

For the greater part, most of my people are on computer, because that was my other big push. If you do not make a move to become computer literate, you are a thing of the past as the teacher. I believe that. A lot of people do not believe that yet, but a lot of people took my word for that and went to work on it. They will take a spreadsheet and just insert those formulas. As a matter of fact, I sat last night and did my class lists and my spreadsheet for my marks. I will not submit a mark to the computer in this school without the kid verifying his mark. That is a little bit of teaching that is involved there--the kid has to know that he is responsible for his own destiny. If he wants a 70%, he knows what he has to do. If he knows a way that he can calculate his mark, then he has no reason to come back to me and say, "I did not know I was just going to get a 62%." He can calculate his mark simultaneously, at any point in the course, and it will agree with what I will give him had I to do it. I think that kind of consistency has to be there to give the kids a fair shake.

H: Do you have specific objectives for each lesson that would go beyond this as well?

M: (Looking in his file cabinet and pulling out a large three ring binder which is filled with lesson plans.) There is one page that is not in here, because I have it down being duplicated, but that is my course syllabus for English 30. I am the only one who is running it this way. I put Hamlet at the middle, with all the sub-themes, main ideas, out on spokes. These either agree with those ideas or are in sharp contrast. I started Shakespeare on September 4, and I finished on January 7.

H: You start with Hamlet, but a number of different works keep coming in.

M: Yes. If you just look at some of the selections, if you are familiar with them, you will know why they are there.

- H: "Young Goodman Brown," "The Road Not Taken," on making a decision.
- M: It goes right through to the end. In terms of prepping, this is my specific objective: a bank of questions that my kids have to deal with, along with my objective and my rationale for every question. That is my entire English 30 program. As I find new selections that I can work in, I will drop one and put a new one in just to have change going.
- H: This has been built over a number of years.
- M: There are a lot of hours in that book.
- H: As you mentioned, for a new English 30 teacher, this would be intimidating. But your department works together, there would be sharing.
- M: There was a fair bit of sharing. The insecure people do not want to. The people who have never come to the realization that this becomes a necessity, not a problem, feel very threatened when someone has something like this. That is where I ran into flak when I started pushing that everyone do this. There are some people who just did not feel comfortable doing it at all. It gave me a lot of problems as Department Head. I also saw those same people wallowing in their own mire, year after year, selling kids extremely short. Kids were essentially having to accomplish two years in one when they hit a course like this one.
- H: How did you arrive at this?
- M: Thought.
- H: And experience?
- M: I started one day. I do not know what precipitated the thought. I drew this stupid wheel and said to someone, "That is Hamlet." They said, "Why?" I said, "Give me tonight, and I will show you in the morning why." Just at that moment, something someone said triggered the thought for me that you could do these spokes in the wheel and make a continuous circle out of the play Hamlet because it is very much a continuous circle. From there, the thought hit me, "Well hell, if I have taken it this far, I am sure that there is a selection that I teach that I can notch to everyone of those." I found one and did one whole way around the wheel. I still have that wheel somewhere that I drew. So I got around the wheel once, and then I said, "Hell, if I made it around the wheel once, I will see if I can make it around again with the rest of the selections." I'll be damned if they all did not drop in somewhere just as beautifully as you could ask for. It is just life.
- H: It is very much a thematic way of organizing.
- M: Yes, but it is thematic around a core. It takes away this whole idea of you do Hamlet in a five week stint, and this is Hamlet. Next, we are doing poetry, and there is no connection between the two. Hamlet is

integrated tightly with the whole year. They never escape Hamlet.

We even manage to pull two novels in. I start with Great Expectations, for two reasons. Hamlet had those great expectations and so does every English 30 student. I love that book because it does those two things for you. I use the Heath Introduction and pull in Oedipus, Death of a Salesman, Theodore Dreiser's An American Tragedy, and Hamlet.

One of the essays the kids write is putting some perspective on what has happened to tragedy. They walk away with a good understanding of what has happened to tragedy, and the bright kids will tell you why. The bright kids very quickly see that Shakespeare had a box office. The guys before him did not. So, he started to cater. It is amazing when you turn kids loose on that kind of thing what they can see. Sometimes they shock the hell out of you, and sometimes they think of things which you wish you had.

H: It sounds like you have not been affected by the novel being optional.

M: No. I do not do that much in class with it, but everything we are doing ties out to it. The kids make the connections. On Great Expectations I might give them two weeks to work that because we are doing a whole lot of other things simultaneously. Just because they are doing a novel does not mean that we stop what we are doing. I will give them four or five 15 minute times, saying, "All right, what questions do we have about Great Expectations? Do you have any trouble connecting with what is happening in the play? Do you have any trouble connecting with the other selections we are doing?" When you have 32 kids excited about what you are doing, you do not have to talk very much. They roll the time. All the ideas come, and away you go. That is the end of your novel. To do more would simply be belaboring a point.

I make myself available, usually for a while every evening after school, for those kids who are just a little reluctant to speak up. I say to them, "Come at that time if you are not all that confident speaking in the group." They come, and if I can get them singly, I can usually convince them to speak in a group. They develop some confidence when they can go one on one with you. If they can give you one little bit of a grain of an idea to work from, you can say, "Oh, great. That was a good idea. Where did you get that from?" Sometimes that is the only start they need because then they know if they have been able to impress me, they know they can impress their peers out in the desks out there.

H: Now, I want to go way back. Can you give me any idea

what it was like teaching under the Departmentals?
M: I came in on the tail end of that system. Teaching strategies were rather ingrained and rigid. My recollection of those times were teach what you think is going to be on the exam. I know the last 21 days of every year were just working through old exams. You did not have any choice; that was the way it was done.

I haven't succumbed to that. The only thing I can do in lieu of that kind of thing is keep on file in my room one class set of every Diploma test that has been given. Last semester, I had two extremely fine English 30 groups. One day, inadvertently, someone said to me, "Can I come in tomorrow?" That happened to be a Saturday, and the kid just caught himself a little short on where he was in the week.

I said, "Good heavens kid, if you will come in tomorrow, I will."

He said, "Really?"

I said, "Yes, I'm not sure I would like to come in for just one of you, but if that were necessary, I would do that. Go and talk to the rest of them and see how many of them are prepared to come." By the time he came back to me later that day, he had 14 kids who would come in on the Saturday, and that was a Friday afternoon that I spoke with him. I went out Saturday for three hours, and that is what we did. We worked through old Diploma exams. We did some crunch things. We went through the old essays that they had written. Some Saturdays they wrote; some Saturdays they brainstormed how they would attack a topic. We spent our Saturdays doing that, totally out of class time. I did not take away from this (pointing to the course syllabus) at all. But I had a good group of kids who were prepared to do it. There are not many groups, I don't think, whom you could convince to come in on a Saturday. The lowest number I had was seven on a Saturday morning, and I had as high as 14. They were good Saturdays.

Part of what I want to do on those Saturdays is spend time teaching them some strategies for reading a multiple choice exam. I will tell you where I twigged on the major strategy, and the kids agree with me that it works and works like hell. I sat and wrote the January 1985 exam on a \$10 bet, but I wrote it without the reading selections. Just carefully look at all the questions; learn the general theme of that selection and the general interpretation that was imposed. . . . (Tape ran out on recorder and had to be turned over.)

I took 45 minutes to write the 80 questions, never read a selection, and I scored a 92%. That told me something that had never occurred to me before--that it

was possible. I have met some kids who are capable of doing that. The thing that I find with kids is that they cannot sustain their concentration over 80 questions, but they can if I only give them a module. One Saturday all I gave them was the questions and said, "You are writing the exam." That was the first time I introduced that idea.

They said, "We can't write it. We don't have anything to read."

I said, "You have 80 questions to read. Now let's go. It works." One kid was extremely adamant that she could not possibly score well. To convince her, I gave her a blank answer sheet, and I wrote an 80 question exam, writing in what I thought would be correct responses. I turned my answer sheet upside down on her desk and said, "You write the exam. You don't even have the questions now." She did, and she had 35%. We have proven in our groups that you don't need any questions or any selections, and you should be able to score around 30%. That is why it always fries my mind when a kid gets lower than 30% on the Diploma exam. The kid does not understand. . . . (laughter) From there, that kid started being able to write a bare bones 50% just answering the questions. Toward the end, she was scoring consistently 75% and up, never reading a selection, just the questions.

H: How did you develop your reading strategies?

M: One big thing twigged me. I can tell you what students are doing now, because I know what I was doing when I was writing multiple choice exams and fairing poorly on them. I was reading that stupid selection first, imposing my interpretation on it, and then come hell or high water there is always an answer in the distractors that will agree with your stupid interpretation. That is the one students go for, instead of looking at the questions and saying, "All right, what kind of stance is this guy taking who wrote this test? What is his interpretation of the selection?" Then go with that.

H: So, read the question first?

M: Yes. Read all the questions first because if you read all of them, very often, one question will answer two others. There are two modules on the January 1987 exam where that is clear cut. One of my kids came to me, after I arrived back from Edmonton, and said, "You know, one question on the exam answered three other questions on that module. Once you had that one, you had those other three questions. You could only answer them one way." She is convinced that she aced that module. So, I am preparing kids for the exam.

H: As a student did you take Departmental tests?

M: No. My experience is so different that I can't even explain it to you. I was out of school when I was

14, returned when I was 27, and did my matric (matriculation) and my degree.

H: You did your matriculation at age 27?

M: Yes. In one year. I did grades 9, 10, 11, and 12 in one year. That was a tough year, but it was a good year.

H: Did you have to take a test?

M: Yes. Final exams.

H: Were those Departmentals?

M: No. It was a university administered examination. Regina campus offered a seven month education program on a whole year basis. Whether you were accepted into the program was based on a seminar and a battery of idiot tests. I do not know what they were measuring, and I do not care to even know. It was one of the most frustrating days I spent, so I cannot speak to that at all.

I think my experience is probably why I attempted to do education somewhat differently from people who have gone from public school to junior high, to high school, to university, back to teach school. I have some funny experience out there. I am a licensed mechanic by trade, which I did when I was 16 going on 17. I had my T. Q. B. (Technical Board Qualifications certificate) by the time I was 19 or 20. I did that for a while, worked on the oil rigs for a while, went to work on the farm in 1964. I would not encourage anyone else to do it that way, although I would not do my own any other way.

H: Did you drop out?

M: No. My dad was a farmer, and I was destined to be a farmer who did not need education. We are talking 1952, 1953. Education in agriculture was not nearly as sophisticated then as it is today. We are talking about a time when we were just moving out of horses and into mechanized farming, much less computerized farming and all the other things we accept. My dad just could not see any reason for me to continue. I would be a farmer. I am not sure if I honestly remember how badly I balked at that. I would like to think that I balked like hell, but I somehow think I didn't.

H: To come back in one year, you must have come back with a vengeance.

M: Yes. Like I said, it was a tough year. It explains one of the reasons why a lot of administrators and other teachers see me as hard-nosed. I admit that I am hard-nosed, but I am a compassionate hard-nose. One of the reasons I am is because I cannot understand how a kid can fritter away three years and not be successful. To me, it is purely a lack of applying himself. When it is possible to achieve the same end in seven months that these kids are given three years for, and

we are spending in the neighborhood of \$10,000 for it, then, I get a little hard-nosed.

I do not apologize for that by the way. This education is a high cost endeavor, and I do not think that students are always as honest about how high cost it is. I do not believe that any kid has the right to blow \$6,000 in one grade level. Now if it is ability, then I am compassionate. But you know as well as I that in most cases it is not ability that is holding them back. It is an attitude thing that is holding them back. So, my view is somewhat different than many teachers, and I think that is because many teachers have never been outside the school. Sometimes, I do not think they ever see what is really out there. It is a tough sucker. (laughter)

H: I will finish up with one more question. What do you think should happen with Diploma exams?

M: I can say that I was genuinely pleased with the January 1984 Diploma exam. I would be pleased as punch if they would settle for that. I have been on the negative through this whole interview, and I do not mean to be that because there are some positives in it. I have been through the scoring guide, and I think that has been positive.

But I think there is another plus. As a teacher the Diploma exam immediately puts me on a different footing with my kids. When that Diploma exam came, it became they and I against that stupid exam, which is a different leg than we had stood on before. For years it was, to a large degree, the kid pitted against you. They always had that feeling that you write the exam; you are the miserable sucker that puts all those stupid questions in there. The Diploma test immediately threw that around. I suppose that is a case "if someone hands you a lemon and you open up a lemonade stand." I saw that as a distinct advantage. I saw a quick switch in attitudes in the kids, particularly the conscientious kids. They immediately recognized that you had something to offer them. I think that is coming more and more to the fore. I am sensing that my groups are prepared to work as a team. It is partly because that Diploma exam is there, and that is not bad. That is a good effect, you know.

H: If you had your choice, would you stay with the Diploma exam because of that psychological change which influences both the teacher and the student?

M: Yes. That is partly how it goes.

I cannot tolerate it being the be all and the end all without any due consideration for all of the circumstances that are involved in that mean. The silly thing about it is that you can do anything you want with statistics and make them say whatever you

please. I really differ with what somebody pleases them to say.

H: Teaching is somehow more than any statistic.

M: As soon as you do that you are ignoring the human element. I worry about how we get failed. I do not want any of my kids to fail. The fact that I am at a 55% mean when the provincial mean is 62% is not important if I have been able to pull 32 kids out of 32 kids through the knothole. That is far more important to me than having a 67% mean and letting the bottom six drop by the wayside, and that is happening. You do not go the race track and bet on the bob-tail nag. You put your money on the one that is going to pull you through.

On the whole, because of some of the emphasis that is being put on the statistics of the exam, kids are being sold short. If it had to be discontinued, it would have to be because of what people are doing with it, not because of what it is. I have no argument with the test per se, except if you gage yourself against it. I do not think that we need people who are extraneous to all of the circumstances passing some judgment based on that data.

H: That comes back to that theme of the professional, what we as professionals do, and how we as professionals use that exam.

M: Yes.

H: I had better let you go. It is nearly 6:30 p. m.

M: We have had an interesting chat.

H: Yes. I liked it. Thank you very much.

M: Very good. I hope I have offered you at least some insights in terms from where I am standing.

H: Definitely.

M: It is something I have thought a lot about.

H: I can tell.

APPENDIX C

Outline For Initial Interviews

I. Teaching English 30 or 33 since 1983. (THE PRESENT REALITIES AND DEFINITION OF PEDAGOGY)

- A. What were your impressions of the Diploma testing program when it was announced in 1983?
- B. How have your attitudes toward the Diploma tests changed now that you have had three years of working with them?
- C. How are the Diploma examinations better or worse than the provincial tests of 1973 and before?
- D. How have the test development committees and grading committees affected you?

1. No involvement or effects?
2. Increased stress?
3. Increased income?
4. Collegial relationships?
5. Professional development?

E. How have Diploma tests affected your instruction?

1. Have you dropped any creative units or projects which you used to teach? If so, what are they?
2. Have you changed your style of teaching literature, poetry, short story, or drama?
3. How do you approach units on writing essays?
4. Do you use the provincial format in grading your own essays? Why or why not?
5. How do you prepare students for Diploma tests?

II. Teaching English 30 or 33 from 1973-1983. (THE PAST)

A. What are your recollections of the abolishment of examinations in 1973, if any?

1. Did you have any warning that this would occur?
 - a. ATA?
 - b. ASTA?
 - c. Newspapers?
 - d. Worth Report?

2. How did it affect you or your students that year?

B. How did you develop your curriculum for these courses after the cancellation of examinations? Did you make any changes?

1. Textbooks?
2. Curriculum guides?
3. Creative projects or units?

- a. Slide-tape presentations?
 - b. Poetry projects?.
 - c. Creative writing?
 - d. Video projects?
 - e. Free reading projects?
- C. How was your grading of essays, literature units, final grades affected?
- D. What are your memories of the achievement examinations in 1978, 1980, and 1982?
1. Did you help grade achievement examinations?
 2. Did you use achievement tests in calculating your final grades?
 3. How meaningful were these tests for students?
 4. How meaningful were these tests for you as a teacher?
- E. How were you affected by Comprehensive Examinations?
1. Were you involved in developing these tests?
 2. Were you involved in grading them?
 3. What was your attitude toward a test that would determine the entire grade for all of your students?
 4. What concerns, if any, did you express about the Comprehensives to any of the Department of Education officers who were visiting teachers' conventions at that time?
- III. Teaching English 30 or 33 before and until 1973. (PAST)
- A. How did you develop your curriculum for these courses?
1. Textbooks?
 2. Curriculum guides?
 3. Creative projects or units?
 4. Preparation for tests?
- B. What were your impressions of the provincial tests for Grade 12 English?
1. Were you ever involved in developing tests?
 2. Did you ever help grade provincial tests?
 3. What do you recall about the format of the tests?
 4. Were the tests fair? Why or why not?
- C. How did you prepare students for external testing?
1. Were you allowed to have copies of previous exams?
 2. Did you have students practice taking examinations?

- a. If so, how did you manage this without a photocopying machine?
- b. Was practice with tests only at the end of the year or throughout the year?

IV. Background information. (THE PAST)

- A. How were you evaluated as a student in elementary or secondary schools?
 1. If you were required to pass external tests, what kind(s) of tests were they, and how did you feel about them?
 2. If not, what memories do you have about how teachers evaluated your abilities?
- B. How did you decide to become a teacher?
- C. How effectively did your university courses prepare you for actually teaching and evaluating students?
 1. Student teaching experiences?
 2. Important classes?
 3. Memorable professors?
- D. What schools and age groups have you taught over the years?
- E. When did you begin teaching English 30 or English 33?
 1. How were you selected to teach these courses?
 2. What help, if any, did you have in setting up an English 30 or English 33 course?

V. Projections. (THE FUTURE)

- A. Should provincial testing continue?
 1. What changes should be made to the present system?
 2. Should provincial testing be abandoned again?
- B. What do you think will actually happen in the future?
 1. Budget cutbacks which weaken the tests?
 2. Changing formats?
 3. Public support or opposition?
 4. Teacher support or opposition?