

**WORKING WITHIN TENSIONS: A STUDY OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE
ARTS TEACHERS AT A DUAL-CAMPUS SCHOOL**

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Dedication

SENSEI, the Japanese word for teacher is literally translated as “person born before another,” in other words, a person who has walked before, a person with wisdom, a person who leads through example. My father, who passed away of stomach cancer on June 10, 2016, was one of my first *SENSEI*. Both he and my mother wanted me to be more than they had the opportunity to become. How little did they know that because of the diverse cultures they come from, the use of multiple languages in our home, the respect they had for each other and for people of all backgrounds, and their work ethic to survive and eventually thrive in a new country, they had fostered an environment for me to exceed their expectations and become a teacher. They encouraged me to ask beautiful questions in different languages. They motivated me to always try and do my best and not to worry about the end mark. They taught me that it is okay to look, act, and be different, and to challenge the norm. They showed me that sometimes a person must step out of his or her comfort zone to discover new horizons. It is because of their teachings, their love and support, and their fearlessness, that I am able to write this thesis. *Dziekuje Matka. Arigatou Gozaimasu Otousan.* To both of you, I dedicate this study.

Abstract

Alberta's diploma exams have influenced the landscape of teacher practice since 1983. Over the last eight years, there has been a shift from teaching to the test to a focus on inquiry-based learning and diverse approaches to teaching literacy. However, the diploma exam still exists in its original form, with few modifications. The aim of this study was to investigate how English Language Arts teachers within a dual-campus school navigated the tensions between preparing students for the diploma exam, while embracing elements of inquiry-based learning and broadening definitions of literacy. Data was collected from three high school English Language Arts teachers over one year. It is suggested that years of teacher experience, level of acceptance to implement inquiry-based learning, and engagement in professional learning are determinants of how much a teacher teaches to the test. Implications for Alberta Education, *MFWHSR* (2013), and high-school English Language Arts teachers conclude the study.

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I have been blessed to have had some of the best role models one could ask for. It is because of them, that I decided to pursue a Master's program in the first place. Thank you, Carol Koran, Dr. Carmen Mombourquette, and Morgan Munroe, for encouraging me to become an educational leader. Carol, you are the ultimate definition of a master teacher and instructional leader. I hope you know how much I have appreciated learning from you for close to a quarter of a century! Carmen, you saw in me something all those years ago as a beginning teacher, and I will forever be thankful that you hired me. Your exceptional ability to build capacity in others and sound advice has always motivated me to strive for more, for a richer understanding of what it truly means to be an educator. Lastly, Morgan, you have been one of my biggest supporters in this pursuit. You would see potential in me that I would not see in myself and even though you have retired from teaching, your wise sayings continue to guide me.

Time dedicated to a thesis meant time not spent on other school-related things, which meant knowing that I always had an administrative team and staff who had my back. Thank you to Anthony Vercillo and Carol Koran, and the staff at Catholic Central High School for recognizing when I needed help and for taking work off my plate so I could focus on writing.

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Introduction

The First Wave

Curiosity, coupled with passion and fun, is the truest sense of what the acquisition of knowledge should look like. Like a child who is eager to discover why the black widow is a “lonely girl spider” (as described by my six-year old son) and why dinosaurs do not exist on earth anymore, or like a toddler who will put anything, and everything in his mouth in order to explore the world around him, it is obvious that we are all born with the innate desire to learn. From Old French *curiosete*, meaning “careful attention to detail” and “[a] desire to know or learn” (Harper, 2001), curiosity ignites the desire within each of us to ask beautiful questions. For many years of our youth, we are teeming with curiosity about how the world works and why it works that way. However, for most of us, somewhere along the road of education, that desire to learn, the deep yearning we have for knowledge, the careful attention we have for detail, is substituted with letter grades to measure what we do or do not know. And instead of being rewarded for asking good questions, we are content with having the right answers. We become adults who wonder why children ask so many questions, when we should be asking why they stop.

Such is the placid brown water within which I found myself mucking around as I navigated the educational system. Although I do not remember when my child-like questioning stopped, I do remember the tension that the sudden invasion of the word “test” triggered in my life. Timed two-minute math tests, memorization, and spelling tests crashed over my seven-year-old world. With every test taken, unfamiliar feelings would develop and build – anxiety, fear, stress, failure – and,

occasionally, when the outcome was positive, there was a feeling of relief. This emotional wave would ebb and flow with every form of summative assessment I faced until the completion of an undergraduate degree. When I became a teacher of high school English, it was thus an expected propensity that, like the pull of the moon upon the waves, I would gravitate to creating and administering tests with the same effect as the ones I had encountered. I was so concerned with how my students were performing on the diploma exam and how my results measured up to provincial standards that I forgot to ask why they were being so narrowly assessed – a three-hour time limit to write two compositions followed by another three-hour time limit for reading comprehension and 70 questions (refer to Chapter 3: Alberta’s English 30-1 Diploma Exam for a detailed explanation how the exam is constructed). “Tell me everything you have learned over 10 weeks, in two structured mediums – composition writing and reading comprehension – in a total of six hours” was the underlying message I was unknowingly relaying to my students; instead of attention to the writing process as creative, fun, and personal. My in-class tests and composition assignments began to mirror those that my students would face on the diploma exam and the way I taught centered on preparation for the exam, which was worth a whopping 50% of their final grades. The need I had for my students to perform well on the diploma exam, which was fueled by expectations of parents, my colleagues, and administration, impeded my own professional judgment on what was effective pedagogy and what was valid in terms of testing procedures. Without intending to and for what I thought was in the best interest of students, I had come very close to giving up my own constructs in order to comply with standardized testing. My naivete, at the

time, about assessment (inferences and uses of assessment results), the ease of creating an exam that replicated the diploma exam, and my desire for students to do well on an exam worth 50% of their grade, swayed me to focus on the end goal, a mark of at least 65% or higher on the diploma exam, as the right approach. What I did not realize then was that I was caught between my own teaching autonomy and the external constraints of professional culture, such as “the creation of prescriptive, outcome-based curricula, and systems of accountability through standardized testing” (Phelan, in press, p. 187). Even with Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI) projects rising and falling in the background, loyalty to curriculum and strict adherence to “teaching to the test” kept me at the water’s edge for nine years until a new surge, the latest wave in education of inquiry and innovation, drew me into its oscillating current.

My first shift in perspective came in 2009-2010 with the radical opening of the only dual-campus high school in Alberta (Mombourquette, 2013), which was already unique as it was the only school in Southern Alberta to have successfully operated on the Copernican System (four quarters, rather than two semesters during the school year) for over 15 years. The impetus behind the dual-campus concept was to have a Catholic high school presence on the west side of Lethbridge as there was a new public high school being built that would, potentially, absorb students who lived on the west side, including those who were Catholic. Furthermore, by just building a new stand-alone Catholic high school on the west side, the population of the existing Catholic high school on the south side would be impacted. Thus, for many reasons including broader programming choices, more facility amenities, a larger school

population to draw upon for athletics and fine arts, added to a catholic presence on the west side, the unique dual-campus concept was implemented. The vision of the newly built Campus West was that it would become a “Campus for Innovation and Inquiry”, as it had an E-Learning Space, a collaborative science laboratory, welding bays, and a pre-engineering and robotics laboratory, while Campus East would maintain a focus on fine arts, as it housed the theatre and music room. Both schools, however, would offer core courses in English, social, science, math, and religion.

The two buildings, serving over 900 students in grades ten to twelve, became a pilot school for the Alberta Education High School Flexibility Enhancement Project (now known as *Moving Forward With High School Redesign*). The project essentially examined the question “What would happen if the requirement for 25 hours of face-to-face instruction per high school credit (the Carnegie Unit) was waived?” In other words, instead of focusing on how long it took to master course content, what would happen if the focus shifted to how best to master learning outcomes? What changes in instruction, timetabling, and student engagement and learning would result? What new programming opportunities for inquiry and innovation would arise? What would the teacher-based assessment look like? Would the reality that high school teachers face of teaching to the test in order to prepare students for the diploma exam and, thus, risk the possibility of *curriculum narrowing* (see page 14) be influenced? It became obvious to me from these queries that the time had come to examine the institution of education with a new lens. What would truly happen once the Carnegie Unit was truly removed? After all, it has shaped what it means to educate and be

educated for more than a century (2015. In www.carnegiefoundation.org/resources/publications/carnegie-unit/).

The Second Wave: Personal Context

As I began to ask questions again, I had to be prepared to navigate through contesting waters and make decisions that worked towards searching out the answers to those burning questions, while avoiding the whirlpools that could suck me down; whirlpools of apathy and self-doubt, of monotony and routine, of stand-and-deliver, and teaching to the test. It is easy to fall into the thought of the life of a teacher as being comfortable and even predictable as I became “the learned.” However, I found that it is more challenging and rewarding to become “the learner”, to experience the feeling of gaining knowledge of something new and how that acquisition of knowledge parlays into a revitalization of my teaching practice. After over 10 years of teaching, I decided that it was time to reel away from the continuous whirlpools of redundancy in teaching practice and assessment and dive into the inviting and challenging waves of a graduate program, specifically focusing on a program called “Literacy in the Globalized Classroom”; and, although I had researched many other programs at different post-secondary institutions, this particular program felt right. Why? I was an English Language Arts teacher who loved literature – teaching it, reading it, deconstructing it, and savoring it. I was “global” as my own parents’ backgrounds – Polish and Japanese – allowed me to experience the world differently, through extremely different cultures and languages. I was ready for something new and applicable to my context. Little did I know, however, that after the first summer in 2012 with my cohort and professors, that my entire approach to teaching and

assessing and to learning and leading, as well as my own personal perspectives would all be tossed into turbulent waters. It took no time for me to question whether my teaching was worthy (Brookfield, 1995) and to engage in pedagogical practices that made learning more worthy for my students. Plunging right into applying multimodal approaches to literacy as well as drawing upon theoretical frameworks, my eyes were opened to a broader view of what literacy is and should be. It was not linear or compact and there was not one right answer. It was so much more than writing the perfect paragraph, free from mechanical errors, or being able to regurgitate definitions to literary devices. And that is when I noticed the tension. Not so obvious at first, the tension began as multiple questions: why was I sacrificing everything I knew to be right – the philosophy behind *Inspiring Education* (2010) and *Moving Forward With High School Redesign* (2013), and the knowledge and broader view of literacy I had gained? Why was I striving for proficient or excellent scores on a written component on the diploma exam? Why, within my context, within this unique dual-campus school where most teachers were encouraged to embrace inquiry-based learning and innovative practices, was I still feeling the need for my students to perform well on the diploma exam? Did where I taught matter (Campus East or Campus West) when it came to influencing teaching practice? Was I really doing things fundamentally different or was I still rooting my teaching practice in a test-based pedagogy? And that is when I began to question the bigger picture of how I and other teachers, my own colleagues, work between the tensions of our own professional judgments about curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment and the content and constructs of standardized testing (Alberta's diploma exam). I wondered if others were feeling the same

tempestuous feelings of embracing the waves of inquiry learning and varying approaches to teaching literacy while standing on the foundational landscape of a standardized exam now that a new campus, focused on innovation and inquiry had opened and we were deep in the trenches of *Moving Forward With High School Redesign* (2013). And thus, my research questions of inquiry for the study, supplementary questions, and primary methods and tools began to formulate. They are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1

Research Design

Main question: How do teachers of literacy, who implement inquiry or project-based learning, work to balance their own professional judgments about curriculum, pedagogy and assessment and the content and constructs of standardized testing?	
Supplementary questions	Primary Methods/ Tools
What are the reasons why teachers choose to implement inquiry or project-based learning? Conversely, why do they not?	Individual teacher interviews conducted with English Language Arts teachers.
What is the teacher's working definition or understanding of literacy?	Individual teacher interviews conducted with English Language Arts teachers. Classroom observations. Documents collected regarding assessment. Focus group discussion.
Is teacher-based assessment different from or similar to the diploma exam? Why or why not?	Individual teacher interviews conducted with English Language Arts teachers. Classroom observations. Documents collected regarding assessment.
What challenges are teachers facing as they work through their own professional judgments and the diploma exam? What, if any, tensions exist?	Individual teacher interviews conducted with English Language Arts teachers. Classroom observations. Focus group discussion.

<p>Are teachers giving up their own constructs to comply with standardized testing? Why or why not?</p>	<p>Individual teacher interviews conducted with English Language Arts teachers. Classroom observations. Documents collected regarding assessment. Focus group discussion.</p>
<p>Have the Foundational Principles of Moving Forward With High School Redesign shifted pedagogy in English Language Arts?</p>	<p>Individual teacher interviews conducted with English Language Arts teachers. Classroom observations. Documents collected regarding assessment. Focus group discussion.</p>

The Shift from Self to Other

It is pertinent, at this point, to explain the shift from personal narrative to a more traditional research study. In the Introduction, I felt it was necessary to establish a personal context wherein I outlined my own educational journey – what I had experienced as a student, a teacher, and a graduate student – that lead me to this topic of research of inquiry learning, approaches to literacy, and assessment and standardized testing. Equally important to note is the metaphor of the wave, water, and the shore (or landscape) that permeates the Introduction as it establishes the feeling of motion, of a rolling back and forth between progression and regression, which, observably, depicts the educational initiatives that I have witnessed crash upon the shore momentarily and then ebb away.

As I move into disciplinary and professional contexts and the study of others, the narrative and the metaphors shift. This is important to note as I move from my own context and into the broader areas of research. And even though the specificity of the topic might have stemmed from my own musings and interests, there is a field of

research in which to situate it. To explain this further, consider this image: a person standing on shore, watching the waves roll in, looking out toward the waves. I am that person (personal context). The sandy, but firm, beach is the foundational context of current school structure, including standardized exams, and the water or waves reflect educational initiatives (from Alberta Education, for example), changes, and challenges like *Inspiring Education* (2010), *Moving Forward With High School Redesign* (2013), inquiry-based learning, literacy frameworks, and validity theories. So, what happens when the water hits the shore? Well, there is movement, churning, ebbs, and flows. Sand and water mix, sand is shifted around, and a new wave comes in but the beach looks relatively the same... on the surface, as we can only see so much without digging deeper. This is similar to many changes in education. Waves roll in and make new impressions on the current landscape but, seemingly, they are only surface deep. Thus, one must consider the size of the wave or the kind of water that would leave a more lasting impression – like a tsunami – as well as the deeper, foundational contexts, the composition of the sand, that have existed for many years. Is there a wave powerful enough in education to make monumental landscape changes to school structures and standardized exams or will we continue to see minor, surface changes over time? In order to answer this question, I believe that it is important to study the shoreline, understand the foundation upon which I stand, and observe the various educational waves and their impact on what once was, or if there is any impact at all.

Situating the Research in Disciplinary and Professional Context

Situating the Research in the Key Disciplinary Context

There are three key disciplinary areas that have informed my investigation of these questions as I play the dichotomous role of graduate student and teacher: inquiry-based learning (an applied science approach to learning), theoretical frameworks of literacy (pedagogic practice and cognitive aspects), and validity theory (assessment practice). These disciplinary contexts must be defined and outlined as they continue to inform my perspectives and decisions about curriculum, practice and assessment. They are the waves that gently wash upon the shore.

Inquiry-based and Project-based Learning

From Latin *inquaere*, inquiry is broken into two parts: *in* or “into” + *quaerere* or “ask/ seek” (Harper, 2001). Inquiry, then, can be seen as being put into a mode of asking or seeking and being open to wonder. Thus, inquiry-based learning is “a process where students are involved in their learning, formulate questions, investigate widely and then build new understanding, meanings and knowledge” (Focus on Inquiry, 2004, p. 1). When students have invested themselves into what they are learning and are formulating authentic questions about the world around them and how they see themselves fit within it, inquiry-based learning is at work. The hope for educators is that the process of inquiry-based learning is one that becomes internalized and becomes transferable to everyday life situations and the future; after all, “[t]o prepare [one] for the future life means to give him command of himself” (Dewey, 1897, p. 2).

Project-based learning is not about paper-based, rote memorization and teacher-lead learning; instead, it promotes the idea of learning by doing. Much like inquiry-based learning, it is a dynamic classroom approach. Students actively explore real-world problems and challenges (Greenstein, 2012), acquire deeper knowledge and are regularly challenged to creatively solve those real-world problems (Brookhart, 2013). Thus, problem-solving, collaboration and creativity are at the heart of project-based learning.

Focus on inquiry. Although Inquiry-based learning may seem like the latest trend in education with the emergence of science and inquiry centres, mathlabs and mathematics, and STEM programs – which focus on the disciplines of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics and have gained considerable momentum (Breiner, Harkness, Johnson & Koehler, 2012), it is based on John Dewey’s “Subject-Matter of Education” (1897). A guide to implementing inquiry-based learning became available from Alberta Education for teachers in 2004 called *Focus on Inquiry*. This model was developed to support the work of teachers and students and fittingly aligns with *Inspiring Education* (2010) and *Moving Forward With High School Redesign* (2013).

With this guide in mind and an understanding that inquiry is a tool that enhances “the quest for knowledge and expertise in a discipline” (Cervetti & Pearson, 2012, p. 581), teachers are able to encourage students to “formulate questions, investigate to find answers, build new understandings, meanings and knowledge, and then communicate their learnings to others” (Alberta Learning, 2004, p. 1). Insatiable curiosity and tangible questions creep back into the lives of students and classrooms

and, as a result, “students [become] actively involved in solving authentic (real-life) problems within the context of the curriculum and/ or community [and] these powerful learning experiences engage students deeply” (Alberta Learning, 200, p. 3). Inquiry, then, becomes a “way of answering questions about the natural world” (Cervetti & Pearson, 2012, p. 583) and works hand-in-hand with language and literacy as student narratives and contexts can be used as models to engage in investigation and the inquiry process (Cervetti & Pearson, 2012). Increased student creativity, independence, innovation, problem-solving skills, collaborative and communications skills, and achievement are also some of the many positive by-products of the inquiry process, which is outlined in six phases: 1) planning, 2) retrieving, 3) processing, 4) creating, 5) sharing, and 6) evaluating. It is obvious from the time that a teacher must invest into inquiry-based learning and progressing through the phases that it is not meant to be an “add on” to the curriculum that teachers already feel the need to cover, but rather a fundamental shift in the way to achieve the goals of the Alberta programs of study. By implementing a focus on inquiry, teachers may find that the multiple general learner outcomes within curriculum can be shaved away, leaving behind rigorous and relevant competency-based outcomes. With so many affirming reasons to implement inquiry-based learning, such as its implications in developing engaged thinkers and ethical citizens with entrepreneurial spirits, increasing student engagement as well as providing teachers with the freedom to focus on relevant outcomes, one must wonder why are not all teachers moving in this direction? Perhaps because inquiry-based learning is incongruent with curriculum outcomes as currently stated in the program of studies

but, perhaps, a more important reason is because of the tensions teachers might feel when implementing inquiry-based learning whilst covering existing curriculum requirements in order to prepare their students for a provincial-wide standardized exam. Ultimately, teachers need to feel ready for implementation of inquiry-based learning, which might require a change in mindset, and should consider the following questions, as outlined by the *Focus on Inquiry* guide when considering to take the plunge:

- Will inquiry-based learning increase my students' understanding of the learning outcomes mandated by the curriculum I must cover?
- Will inquiry-based learning increase my students' ability to read, write and reason?
- If I allow students to spend time on inquiry-based learning, what do I remove from my program? How do I make time?
- Which strategies are the most effective in teaching inquiry-based learning?
- What are the biggest obstacles I must overcome to implement inquiry-based learning?
- When is inquiry-based learning worth doing?
- Will inquiry-based learning help me meet the curriculum standards [and the demands of standardized testing]?
- How do I manage an inquiry-based learning activity by myself?
- Will inquiry-based learning improve my students' test scores? (Foreword, p. x)

Given the time to collaborate and reflect, both “reflection in action” and “reflection on action” (Schön, 1987), the space (both physical and professional) to experiment and take risks, the resources to effectively carry out project-based learning and to build a culture of inquiry with the support and guidance from administration, colleagues, parents and surrounding community, educators with a vision for inquiry can confidently move forward despite the potential of competing pressures of project or inquiry-based learning and standardized testing. At this point, it is important to note that although findings with regards to standardized testing and their impact on teaching practice are mixed, some studies have found that “exit exams promote both curriculum alignment and curriculum narrowing, [and] in some cases this narrowing effect was extreme, with instruction being focused explicitly on assessment outcomes (Holme, 2008). In Holme’s (2008) study, the concept of *curriculum narrowing* is evidenced in the responses from school principals in California, wherein all of them reported increased alignment to state standards with a significant reduction of curriculum covered in order to focus on test preparation and content. Furthermore, in a comprehensive review of 46 studies on exit exams and their effects on student achievement, graduation rates, postsecondary outcomes, and school responses (Holme, Richards, Jimerson & Cohen, 2010), *curriculum narrowing* is outlined as the most prevalent school response to exit testing. It can be extrapolated, then, that those teachers who have the task of preparing students for the diploma exam “might be too narrowly focused on the range of outcomes and types of items being measured on the diploma exam” (Slomp, 2017, p. 4) rather than looking to broaden their assessment practices and embrace inquiry-based learning.

Literacy

Literacy, as traditionally defined, is the ability to read and write. By today's standards, however, the definition of literacy has expanded to involve "the knowledge, skills, and abilities that enable individuals to think critically, communicate effectively, deal with change and solve problems in a variety of contexts [and in a variety of multimodal pathways] to achieve their personal goals, develop their knowledge and potential, and participate fully in society" (Parsons & Beauchamp, 2012, p. 6). Much like how inquiry-based learning looks to provide variety and expansion of teaching practice, literacy, when regarded in its broadest sense can promote greater understanding and transferability to other real-life contexts. Being literate, in essence, means having the skills to work in shaping the course of one's life and it involves "reading the word and the world in a variety of contexts" (Parsons & Beauchamp, 2012, p. 2). By my definition, literacy is the knowledge of being human, of knowing how to exist in a world as a social being and living each day with the desire to read the world so as to learn something new. The more one knows about the word and the world (Freire & Macedo, 1987), its stories and its people, their cultures and ways of life, the more understanding one will gain about his or her role in it. Furthermore, literacy is about being able to communicate in multimodal ways (different ways of knowledge representation and meaning making through modes) to know the power of language and how to use words, both spoken and written, as well as body language and gestures, to express one's own thoughts and ideas. There are five theoretical frameworks of literacy upon which I will draw: Sociocultural-historical literacy, Critical literacy, New Literacy studies, New

Technology and literacy, and Multiliteracies. Note that these are not mutually exclusive of each other, but I present them independently first so as to define each before highlighting the relationships among them.

1. *Sociocultural-historical literacy*: where “learning is defined as changing participation in culturally valued activity with more expert others” (Larson & Marsh, 2005, p. 4). Literacy in this framework is not about extracting, but interacting with others and their cultures (Rosenblatt, 1993); it is about social interaction and relationships in authentic forms (authentic learning; Vygotsky, 1978), and challenging personal biases and standards. Pertaining to both historical experiences and experiences of others, sociocultural-historical literacy involves peer interaction, development of relationships, use of authentic texts (artifactual literacy; Cole, 1996), tapping into prior knowledge, and making connections with the wider society and other cultures.
2. *Critical literacy*: is the interrogation of texts in terms of “the power dynamics embedded within and reflected by them, in addition to positioning readers and authors as active agents in text creation and analysis” (Larson & Marsh, 2005, p. 3). Within this framework, literacy unveils power imbalances in society and reconstructs one’s world-view (Janks, 2010); it is about thinking critically, challenging ideologies (Giroux, 1988), committing to social action and working for justice, equality and freedom (Freire & Macedo, 1987).

3. *New Literacy Studies*: offers a theoretic framework that “assumes literacy is critical social practice constructed in everyday interactions across local context. [It] emphasizes literacy as a more complex social practice than mandated curricula and assessments address” (Larson & Marsh, 2005, p. 3). This theoretical framework is about discourse, spoken, written or signed interactions between speakers and listeners within that community and it draws on work in social situations (Gee, 1996; 2001; Gee et al., 1996). The emphasis is on problem solving, innovation and deeper learning.
4. *New technologies and literacy*: this theoretical framework draws on the work of the New London Group (1996) on multiliteracies in which “communicative modes were proliferating and changing due to advances in technology” (Larson & Marsh, 2005, p. 3). This is the literacy that is associated with the explosion of the Internet (digital literacy; Gilster, 1997), new literacies (Lankshear and Knobel, 2003a), media literacy (Buckingham, 2003); multimodality and social semiotics (Kress, 2013) and redefines how student writing is taught and assessed in a digital age (Yancey, 1999).
5. *Multiliteracies* (New London Group, 1996): is not a theoretical tradition but has a distinct framework of its own, involving the role of culture and diversity (Kalantzis, 2003); it is tied to a location, time, and place where communications have specific purposes, powers and limitations (Kalantzis & Cope, 2004). Multiliteracies (use of diverse modes to communicate),

multimodality (diverse modes), multilingualism (several languages), semiotic hybridity (diverse meaning-making through symbols and culture), new medias and digital literacy (communication technologies) are connected within this context.

With the knowledge of these five theoretical frameworks to draw upon, Parsons & Beauchamp’s definition (2012) of “reading the word and the world in a variety of contexts”, and my own evolving definition of what literacy is, I have provided a visual of a literacy (*Figure 1*) construct showing what the different facets of literacy could be.

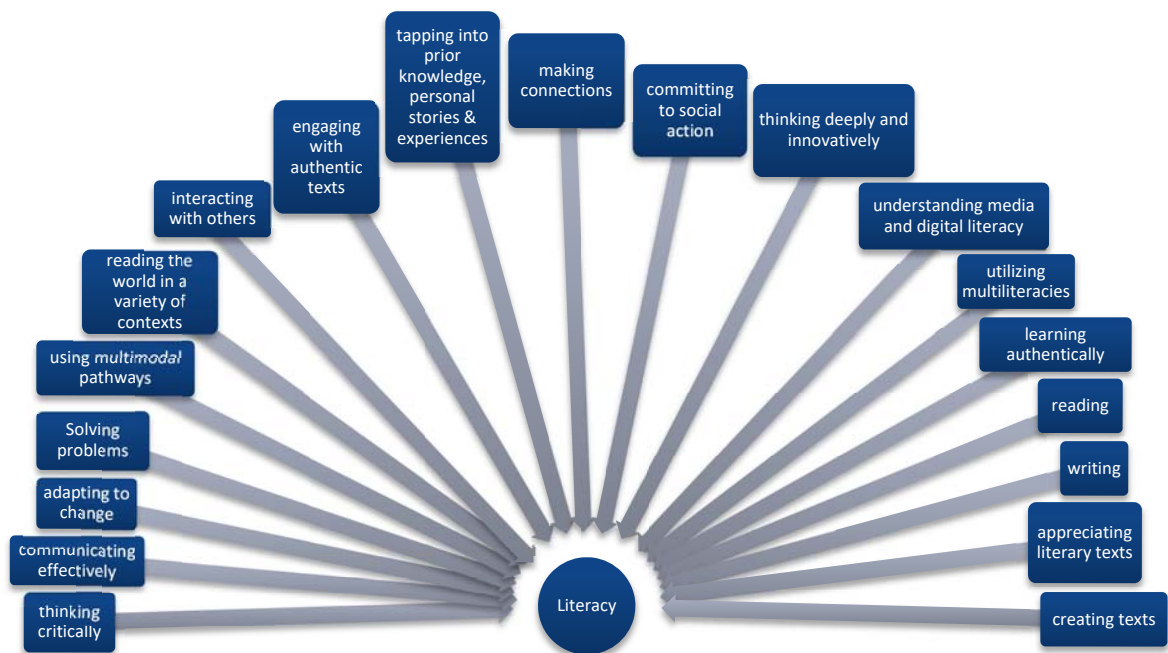


Figure 1. Personal literacy construct. A comprehensive literacy construct based on socio-cultural historical literacy, critical literacy, new literacies, new technologies and literacy and multiliteracy frameworks.

All of these theoretical frameworks work together to expand traditional approaches to literacy education; as Figure 1 suggests, they broaden social goals and cultural practices to real audiences and real purposes (Larson & Marsh, 2005). Additionally, comprehensive understanding of multidisciplinary frameworks, first, equips teachers with a solid foundation of knowledge to draw upon when moving into the area of inquiry-based learning. Authentic literacy practices coupled with inquiry learning methods can cultivate both student and teacher autonomy, as they are exposed to a wide-range of options for learning and teaching.

Through careful and purposeful implementation, experimentation and reflection of the key concepts found within each theoretical framework *and* comprehending what inquiry-based learning might look like in a classroom, it is possible to witness the engagement of *all* students being literate, creative, independent, innovative, collaborative problem-solvers.

Validity

There is one more key discipline to understand the tensions English Language Arts and literacy teachers might feel when implementing inquiry-based learning. It is the result of the equation of knowledge plus practice – assessment. But it is more than just assessment; it is the validity of the assessment. Validity refers to the adequacy and appropriateness of the interpretations and uses of assessment results. In Slomp, Corrigan and Sugimoto's *Framework for Using Consequential Validity Evidence in Evaluating Large-Scale Writing Assessments* (2014), validity has historically been characterized as providing “information [indicating] the degree to which a test is capable of accomplishing certain aims” (American Educational Research Association

& National Council on Measurements Used in Education, 1955, p. 15, cited on p. 277). As such, there are three primary validity concerns, when looking at a test's capability to accomplish stated aims. They are:

1. Construct validity evidence,
2. Content validity evidence, and
3. Consequential validity evidence.

Construct validity evidence. Construct validity refers to the degree to which a test or other measure assesses the underlying theoretical construct it is supposed to measure (i.e. the test is measuring what it is purported to measure). Messick (1989) argues the importance of construct validity as *the central element* to all validity theories and outlines threats to validity, which include construct underrepresentation and construct-irrelevant variance. Construct underrepresentation occurs when a test fails to fully represent the depth and complexity of information or content being tested. Construct-irrelevant variance occurs when factors irrelevant to what is being tested – such as cognitive abilities, literacy or numeracy skills, emotions, prejudices, etc. – influence measurements. To provide an example in context, construct validity would be a test designed to assess basic algebra, knowledge and facts concerning rate, time, and distance but the test questions are phrased in long and complex reading passages. Perhaps, then, reading skills are inadvertently being measured instead of factual knowledge of basic algebra, which is then an issue of construct-irrelevant variance. Likewise, the questions on the same algebra test could consist of trivial content, reflect maldistribution of examination items, and rely on students' rote memorization for factual recall, which is an issue of construct underrepresentation.

Therefore, when addressing construct validity, a teacher should ask him or herself the following questions so as to handle the dominant concerns of whether inferences and uses of assessment results are valid or not: Does my assessment measure the construct I am intending to measure? If not, how can I best define the construct I am trying to measure? Are there aspects of this construct that my assessment is not measuring (construct underrepresentation)? Are there factors outside of this construct that are influencing assessment results (construct irrelevant variance)? (Slomp, Corrigan & Sugimoto, 2014)

Content validity evidence. Content validity addresses the match between test questions and the content or subject area they are intended to assess. Basically, does the test look like a reasonable test for whatever purpose it is being used? Specifically, when looking at content validity evidence, curricular validity must also be considered. Curricular validity is the extent to which the content of the test matches the objectives of a specific curriculum as it is formally described. When tests are used for situations in which a student is likely to either get or lose an advantage, curricular validity takes on particular importance. One need not go further than the English Language Arts diploma exam to ask this question; is it really assessing mastery of the curriculum? Or is this six-hour exam serving another purpose? Moreover, is the diploma exam, and the decision about whether a student receives a high school diploma, a reflection of the curriculum that the student was taught?

Drawing upon the work of Kane (2002), Slomp (2008) provides a resounding “no” to this question: “[a] comparison of the skills measured by the diploma exam and the skills defined within Alberta’s English 30-1 curriculum (Chapter 3) reveals

significant differences between the two” (p. 184). Slomp further explains that it is these differences that “pose potential problems for teachers who must decide what knowledge and skills to focus their instruction on – those required by the curriculum or those measured by the exam” (2008, p. 184). In terms of content validity, then, a teacher should ask him or herself: Does my assessment plan ensure that I have measured all the relevant outcomes (for my lesson, unit or course), providing students with multiple opportunities to demonstrate mastery of those outcomes? Does my program of assessment measure factors (knowledge, skills, attributes, learner characteristics) that are not described in the curriculum outcomes? Does my assessment program measure student learning at a level appropriate to the outcome? (Slomp, Corrigan & Sugimoto, 2014)

Consequential validity evidence. Consequential validity evidence refers to the social consequences of using a particular test for a particular purpose and emerged, therefore, from the social ramifications of assessments. Within this theory, one must focus on the system and the teachers within that system as Messick notes that “developers [of the test] must be held responsible” (cited in Slomp, 2014, p. 278) for the other unintended consequences that could impact the validity of a test result, such as power dynamics and sociopolitical or sociocultural realities (Solano-Forbes, 2011). It is important that a teacher be able to step back within the system and ask these questions of him or herself when examining the social consequences of using a test: Do I have sufficient construct and content validity evidence to justify my interpretation and use of assessment results? To what extent do extraneous content and construct factors distort my picture of student learning I have assembled through

my assessment program? Does the assessment evidence I have collected justify the interpretation of student learning I am making? Does the assessment evidence I have collected support the implications for students that result from my application of assessment results? Are there any negative unintended consequences from my assessment practices that I need to account for? (Slomp, D., personal communication, October 31, 2013).

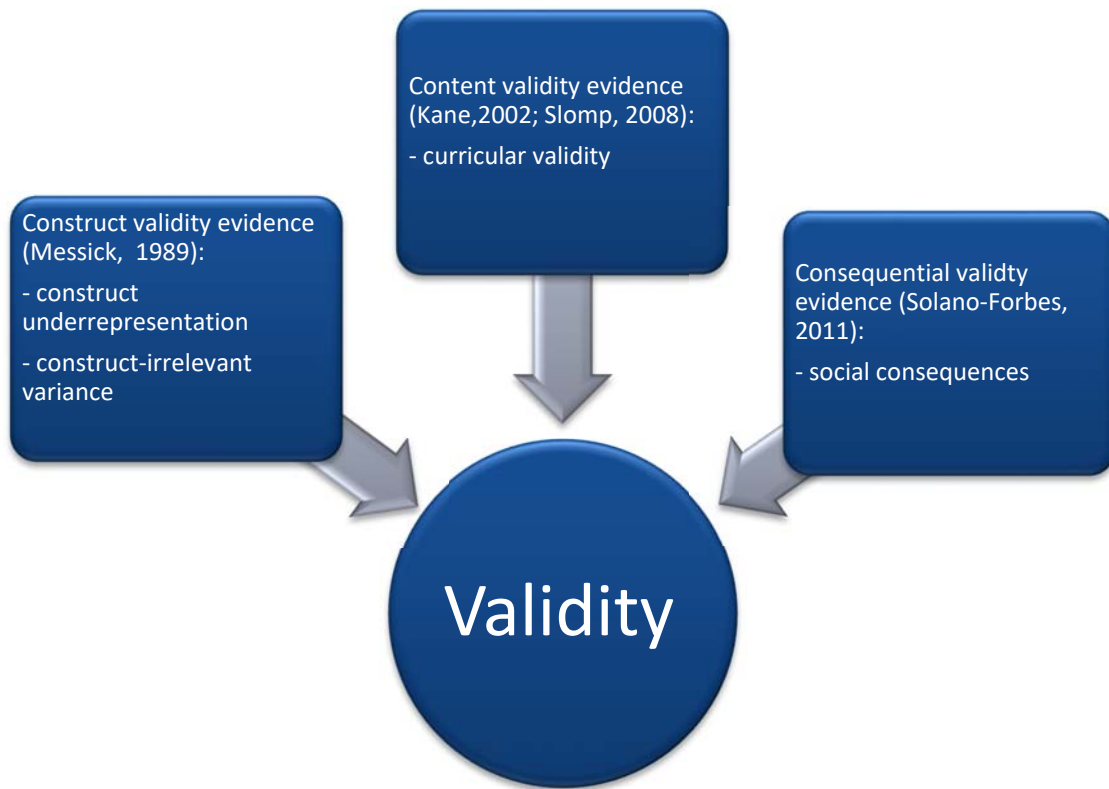


Figure 2. Validity construct. This construct shows the three primary validity concerns when determining the validity of assessment results.

These facets of validity round out the disciplinary contexts of this study as they provide a more thorough reflection of assessment that is adequate, appropriate, and accurate. Inquiry-based learning, literacy frameworks, and validity theories set the disciplinary context, the firmament of this study. Without them to set the

landscape, the waters of educational reform would look chaotic and as if it were reform without purpose.

Exit assessment and tensionality. In addition to situating the study in key disciplinary contexts of inquiry-based learning, literacy, and validity, it is equally important to acknowledge that when discussing writing as a means of exit assessment, the concept of “tensionality” seemingly emerges. So like a wave that is formed by turbulent layers of water that consists of two phases – the uprush (onshore flow) and backwash (the offshore flow) – causing friction on the shore and sea bed, the waves of inquiry-based learning, broader literacy constructs, and validity theories, which call into question one’s assessment, have caused tension on the landscape of exit assessments. The sand on the beach, or one’s teaching practice and approaches to assessment, then is left behind with different impressions than before. In a massive project, based at the University of London Institute of Education from 1966-1971, under the direction of Britton, the development of writing abilities of 11-18 year-olds was studied. Well over 2000 scripts, in all subjects, from 85 classes at 65 schools, were reviewed. Amongst other significant findings, in the final section entitled “Some Implications” it must be pointed out that there is reference to “polarization” and “narrowing of the curriculum” when it comes to teaching and testing (Britton, 1978, pp. 194-197). It is implied that teaching is not neutral and that there is an impact on teaching practice when the purpose of writing changes - from an “open pattern” of teachers’ autonomy, leading to diversity of practice in earlier years, to a “closed pattern” of teachers’ narrowing of practice due to public examination in later years (Britton, 1978). Moreover, when the perception of the teacher moves from a more

“open view” where learning and writing is seen as “exploration and discovery”, toward a “closed view”, where teaching is instructional and writing is for an external examiner, the narrowing of curriculum and its objectives occurs (Britton, 1978, p. 194).

More recently, on an international platform, Klein (2016) examines how teachers prepare their students for statewide exams by comparing the strategies teachers use in Finland, Ireland, and the Netherlands, using a standardized questionnaire survey with responses from 385 teachers. In this study, high stakes testing research in the USA is drawn upon to set the stage: “High stakes testing (HST) research in the USA suggests that HST has a limited positive impact on the quality of instruction, but can have tremendous side effects on organizational features (e.g., reallocation of educational resources), teacher cognitions (e.g., increased stress), and teaching and learning habits (e.g., teaching to the test).” Of the side effects listed, teacher cognitions and teaching and learning habits are particularly relevant to my study. Once again, the notion of tensionality is evident within the study where the restrictive nature of standardized or statewide exams challenge the internal motivation of teachers and compromise their professional judgement. Findings, such as teachers under the pressure to perform well on a standardized exam “tend to use more controlling, teacher-centered instructional methods” (Ryan & Weinstein, 2009, as cited in Klein, 2016, p. 36) and “teachers who had low individual self-efficacy and felt uncertain regarding the requirements of the statewide exams, were prone to narrow the content taught” (Jager, 2012; Jager et al., 2012, as cited in Klein, 2016, p. 37), provide further evidence that tension exists between teaching practice and exit

assessments. The idea that one can just teach well, despite teaching to the test or exam preparation, is just an illusion. Clearly, the research is showing that exit assessments *do* have an impact on teaching and learning techniques as they become more structured, narrower in scope, and more teacher-centered, all while becoming less inquiry-based and student-driven.

In an attempt to better understand the effects of exit testing policies, an article already referenced in this study (Holme et al, 2010), reviewed 46 unique studies that pertain to four domains of expected influence: student achievement, graduation, postsecondary outcomes, and school response. It is within the last domain outlined in the article – school’s response – that Holme et al. (2010) highlights findings to this notice of tension. In two articles by Vogler (2006 and 2008), results included: 77% of teacher reported spending time on test preparation, 74.3% spent more than 2 months preparing students for tests, and more emphasis was placed on test preparation in high-stakes vs. low-stakes exams. Furthermore, in an article by Holme (2008) evidence of curriculum narrowing by teachers faced with preparing students for the state’s exit exam, supports the idea of tensionality: “Although all of the principals reported increased alignment to state standards in response to the test, some (11%) reported that their teachers were significantly reducing the amount of curriculum covered to focus primarily on tested material. Holme also found that 13% of the principals reported that test preparation strategies were being intentionally integrated into the regular curriculum.” This is yet one more study that defines the impact that exit assessments have on teaching practice, while also providing evidence of school responses “that protect the survival of the organization [of exit assessments] at the

expense of student learning” (Holme et al., 2010. p. 521). Finding a balance between teaching to the test and, thus, increasing the possibility of curriculum narrowing, is the reality that high school teachers face. It is a global phenomenon.

Here, in Alberta, the landscape of tension is similar to research conducted on a global scale. In 2008, Slomp examined three grade 12 academic English Language Arts teachers, revealing factors shaping the exam’s impact on teachers’ pedagogical choices. Even more revealing, the study also found that the exam caused teachers to narrow their teaching of writing in relation to the writing process (of planning, drafting, revising, editing, and polishing), assignment design (which replicates the diploma exam’s structure), and marking schemes (which is derived from the diploma exam rubric). It is within this (un)intentional “aligning” with the diploma exam (the process, the design, and the marking schemes) that the tensions begin to swell, as teachers are challenged to navigate this shore with the shore of inquiry-based learning and broader approaches to teaching literacy. Slomp, Graves, & Broad (2014) suggest that one reason for the tension is the emphasis placed on the outcome of the diploma exam as an entrance into postsecondary:

Alberta’s grade 12 English exam (Eng 30-1) acts as a bridge between the high school and the university. It functions as a high school graduation requirement in Alberta, with student scores on this exam constituting 50% of the final course grade. This exam also fulfills an entrance requirement for students who are applying to Alberta postsecondary institutions. Students must report their diploma exam scores on their university applications and these scores guide admissions decisions. So a large amount of power in the grading structure, the

college admissions process, and the wider school culture, drives English Language Arts teachers to devote significant time and energy to preparing their students to take the standardized writing test (p.544).

One final study that solidifies that exit assessments and the creation of tensionality typically go hand-in-hand, despite weightings assigned to class-based marks and weightings assigned to the diploma exam is Slomp, Marynowski, Holec, & Ratcliff (2018). This study found that exit exams had a profound impact on teacher practice, leading to narrowing of planning and assessment practices and that teaching to the test is common practice in Alberta. More specific to English Language Arts teachers, the narrowing of curriculum is further reflected in the fact that only two of the six major outcomes are actually measured on the diploma exam: reading and writing, while speaking, listening, viewing, and representing are completely neglected. Whether teachers like it or not, agree with it or not, teaching to the test or exam preparation has been a part of the pedagogical and assessment landscape from research dating back to Britton (1966-1971) to present, and research on the grand world-wide scale to a more local context of the province of Alberta.

Situating the Research Professionally Within My Local and Provincial Contexts

Equally important to understand where I am coming from and where I am headed to with this study of disciplinary contexts, are my own local and provincial contexts, the shore upon which I stand. My school was selected as one of the first 16 schools across this province to partake in phase 1 of the *High School Flexibility Enhancement Pilot Project* in 2009. At the time, the pilot project was handed down to us by division office and felt like one more “new initiative” that we had to focus our

efforts on. However, after seeing the opportunities to enhance programming choices, to increase opportunities for credit attainment, to be creative and flexible with the timetable, and to overall redesign the traditional concept of high school, the guiding principles of the *High School Flexibility Enhancement Pilot Project* (2009), renamed *Moving Forward With High School Redesign* (2013) were embraced. For me, this entire initiative has shifted my mindset to a focus on student-centered learning and the “why” behind the way I teach and, ultimately, the way I assess. It is also essential to showcase the tension that is created for teachers by outlining the Alberta English 30-1 diploma exam. These two contexts provide the extremes wherein the strain and tension exist as teachers are pulled in two different directions: creating rigorous and relevant learning opportunities where learning is a lived experience (where learning comes from experience) and preparing students for a standardized exam that has not changed for over thirty years.

Inspiring Education

Inspiring Education (2010) begins with a vision of what the educated Albertan of 2030 will look like: an engaged thinker who thinks critically and makes discoveries, an ethical citizen who builds relationships and demonstrates respect and empathy; and an entrepreneurial spirit who creates opportunities and achieves goals through hard work, as well as explores ideas and challenges the status quo (2010). But what will the teacher of the educated Albertan of 2030 look like? The report states:

In a system that is more learner-centered and competency-based, Albertans see the role of teacher changing from that of a knowledge authority to an

architect of learning – one who plans, designs and oversees learning activities. The teacher would consider interests, passions, talents and natural curiosities of the learner. He or she would inspire, motivate and plant the seeds for life-long learning.... Learners in particular told us that teachers need to be innovative, passionate and positive about teaching (p. 7).

The two prophesied images of teacher and student complement each other as learning occurs when students and teachers interact; which is similar to the traits of inquiry-based learning, where “the teacher and students interact more frequently and more actively than during traditional teaching (Alberta Learning, 2004, p. 4). Teachers plant the seeds for life-long learning for students to, in turn, germinate, take root, grow and flower. The message to educators is simple enough: broaden the way we teach so that students can flourish. However, how do we even begin to do so when we are restricted by traditional and limited measurements of excellence that cause teachers to “narrow curriculum” and inhibit their discovery-making process? Clearly, we need to identify new and additional ways of measuring success from this broader perspective. Brookhart (2011), who has examined teachers’ grading practices and opened up much needed conversations about grading reformation, further suggests that educators need to “question traditional grading practices that were developed to sort students into learners and nonlearners” (p.9) and to move the conversation toward the principle that grades should be about “what students *learn*” and not about “what student *earn*” (p. 12). If the role and conversations of a teacher are changing to accommodate for the Albertan of 2030, then so too must assessment procedures

change in order to measure diverse core competencies and align with a competency-based system (2010, p. 8).

Moving Forward With High School Redesign

The Carnegie Unit is briefly described in *Inspiring Education* (2010) as a “measure of the amount of time a learner has studied a subject” and the provoking statement is made to “move away from the one size fits all [unit] and move into the individual needs and learning styles and challenges of each individual” (p. 25). *Moving Forward With High School Redesign* (2013) brings to life the vision and the policy shifts, a new and more determined wave, articulated in *Inspiring Education* (2010) and builds on the learnings of the High School Flexibility Enhancement Project wherein the limitations of the Carnegie Unit were removed. There are nine Foundational Principles Guiding High School Redesign:

1. Mastery Learning
2. Rigorous¹ and Relevant Curriculum
3. Personalization
4. Flexible Learning Environments
5. Educator Roles and Professional Development
6. Meaningful Relationships
7. Home and Community Involvement
8. Assessment
9. Welcoming, Caring, Respectful and Safe

¹ The spelling of “rigorous” as per outlined in *Moving Forward With High School Redesign* (2013)

And although all nine principles are interconnected, my focus on assessment practices and its impact on teacher professional judgment and inquiry-based learning in language and literacy reside within five of these principles: Mastery Learning, Rigorous and Relevant Curriculum, Personalization, and Assessment and their influence on Educator Roles.

Mastery learning. Mastery learning is not a new concept, nor has it been a forgotten one. According to DeWeese & Randolph (2011), in a paper entitled *Effective Use of Correctives in Mastery Learning*, there are copious amounts of literature on learning strategies since Bloom initially developed the concept of “learning for mastery” in 1968 (p. 4). Bloom (1968) defines mastery learning as “a strategy of assessment and differentiation that addresses the needs of individual students so they can receive almost the same quality of instruction as provided by an individual tutor (Bloom, as cited in DeWeese & Randolph, 2011, p. 4). Within Bloom’s definition, it is also outlined that both formative and summative assessments are an important part of the instructional process and are used to “determine appropriate feedback, correctives and enrichment for students” (Bloom 1968; Guskey, 1997 as cited in DeWeese & Randolph, 2011, p. 4).

Today, mastery learning, as defined by the *Foundational Principles for High School Redesign* (2013) is “an instructional strategy that results in comprehensive grasp of curriculum as demonstrated through performance-based evaluations” and should “lead to better retention of knowledge learned – it is not simple rote memory and regurgitation” (<https://education.alberta.ca/moving-forward-high-school-redesign/foundational-principles/everyone/video-discussion-guides-and-info-sheets/>).

Assessment, thus, continues to be an essential element in mastery learning as educators go beyond teacher-directed instruction and prepare students for diploma exams; mastery learning is about relevant activities and inquiry-based learning paired with effective assessment to produce a deeper understanding and generate intrinsic motivation within students to successfully master subject material. In turn, the role of a teacher shifts from an omniscient source of knowledge, which can be exceedingly demanding, to that of an active collaborator with students. “Rather than leading from the front, teachers are free to interact on a one-to-one basis with groups [, which] enables teachers to give and receive feedback” (Stanier, 2013, p. 15). In essence, and as Hattie’s (2012) research suggests, the magnitude of impact and student achievement increases when teachers see learning through the eyes of their students, and when students see learning through the eyes of themselves as teachers. He identifies feedback from students to the teacher as having the most significant impact on student learning of any teacher action (Hattie, 2012). Continuous and valid assessment or *progress monitoring assessment* (Guskey, 2010) provides teachers with “high quality corrective instruction designed to remedy whatever learning problems the assessment identified” (Guskey, 2010, p. 55) so that students may demonstrate mastery, experience success and broaden their learning experiences. This monitoring provides teachers with the information they need to design and, in turn, give students corrective instruction to attain mastery learning. More relevant to my purpose, implementation of mastery learning may enable educators to close achievement gaps between teacher-based assessment and standardized testing.

Rigorous and relevant curriculum. An Occasional Paper entitled *Toward a More Relevant Curriculum: Report of a National Seminar* (1970, p. 1) begins with a poetic parody with which many high-school English Language Arts teachers can identify:

And it came to pass throughout the land that those among the young, whose business it was to learn, became dissatisfied and mightily so.

“Shall he who hath not read Hamlet be condemned to eternal damnation?” they asked in their innocence. “Shall the memorization of endless dates and unremitting facts truly erupt in a fountain of golden success? When the classroom bell tolls, doth it sound for me – or thee?”

And the answer was loud – and it was clear: “Seek ye that which is meaningful unto thyself, that thine own life be true.”

The message is distinct: what the “young” consider as relevant should align with what their teachers think is relevant. However, the crucial questions I must ask here are: Can there be a relevant curriculum under a construct of a “quiz-test-exam-mark” system? Will teachers in Alberta ever be able to teach what they and their students want, what their students *need*, without worrying about teaching to the test? Can teachers within a school that ensures teaching materials and assessment strategies which align with both curriculum-as-planned *and* curriculum-as-lived-experience (Aoki, 1986/ 1991/ 2005) and that also ensures that “assignments focus on the application of concepts and skills in a real-world context” still achieve acceptable standards and, possibly, standards of excellence? We know that through wide-ranging inquiry-based teaching methods, broadening definitions of literacy, and development

of real-world situations, teachers can encourage students to ask questions again, interact with the material that has become more relevant to them and to dig deeper into the issues and to make connections. We know that “simply imparting information is no longer the primary function of the school” (*Toward a More Relevant Curriculum*, 1970, pp. 5-6) and that schools must provide the surroundings and preconditions in which students can develop a sense of access to effective and relevant knowledge. Within this principle, thus, the role of the teacher becomes that of a facilitator and coach “inspiring students to use higher-order thinking skills and giving them the type of feedback that allows them to take the learning more into their own hands.” Instead of asking themselves “What do I need to do?”, teachers should be asking themselves “What do my students need to do?” and, as a result, the focus can shift to strategies that create engaging classrooms which, in turn, become much more interesting places for both teachers and students. Grades remain relative, but learning becomes relevant.

Personalization. “Teacher-student relationships are central to personalization. They lie at the heart of a variety of widespread reforms designed to support young people as students and as emerging adults” (Yonezawa, McClure & Jones, 2012, p. 41). *Moving Forward With High School Redesign* is not an exception to this fact as “personalized instruction seeks to understand every student’s unique developmental level, learning style, passions, skills, and foundational knowledge. It is based on ongoing, differentiated assessment, and meaningful relationships between students and staff” (<https://education.alberta.ca/moving-forward-high-school-redesign/foundational-principles/everyone/video-discussion-guides-and-info-sheets/>).

Through greater dialogue between teachers and students and enhanced collaboration between teachers and their own colleagues, relationships are built. Teachers should feel the freedom to move beyond the walls of their classrooms and into open spaces where conversations can move from “what to teach to how to teach”. The kinds of questions that might guide these conversations and professional learning may be: What do you know about this student? What worked for him/her? What do you do to assess your students differently? How can we work together on this project or activity to include and engage more students and to make it successful? Ultimately, by keeping students at the center of everything we do and recognizing that all learning is personal, teachers become less hesitant to become responsive, innovative, and resourceful. Moreover, McClure, Yonezawa and Jones (2010), in a study that focused on the relationships between student-perceived levels of personalization and academic outcomes, state “the more that students felt personalization at their schools, the better students did academically” (p. 10). When teachers take the time to care in informal, improvised and more authentic contexts (Noddings, 1992), not only do students perform better academically, but teachers may feel less pressure to focus on standardized testing and turn their attention to building strong and positive relationships with students.

Assessment. As we look ahead at tomorrow’s learner, we must acknowledge that schools are becoming places of learning rather than places for teaching and testing (Keefe, 2007) or, as Sizer (1984) puts it “places of human scale” (p. 91). Thus, how and why we conduct assessment has a direct impact on student learning, as well as teacher pedagogy. In order to move toward a more parallel alignment between

assessment practices and professional constructs and pedagogical instruction, teachers must identify the “how” and answer the “why” (Slomp, 2008). Essentially, a teacher must reflect on how assessment can be used to inform teaching practice and see it as a “part of the learning process [that] builds student self-confidence, metacognition and self-directed learning” (<https://education.alberta.ca/moving-forward-high-school-redesign/foundational-principles/everyone/video-discussion-guides-and-info-sheets/>).

Through teacher personal reflection, collaboration, and application of authentic grading practices, the goal of moving from topics of grading and summative assessment to topics of formative assessment and assessment *for* learning (where assessment, teaching, and learning informs the other) can be attained (Greenstein, 2012). If teachers can recognize and embrace the concept that assessment can be far more than a final mark, students may, in turn, feel that all work they do is valuable to their learning.

Effect on educator roles. Change is hard, especially when teachers are already taxed with so much to do and with so many roles to play. It is much easier to stay the course and maintain the status quo – be the “sage on the stage” – than to create more work by revamping courses in their entirety. However, being responsive, flexible and adaptable to change, in this case the *Moving Forward With High School Redesign* project, teachers can have more autonomy and not feel like they have to give up their own constructs to comply with standardized testing, or any other measure of teacher or student competencies. In fact, as a co-learner, “the teacher does not abdicate the role of expert... [r]ather [he or she may] move between the role of expert disseminating or gathering knowledge into a more fluid, dynamic relationship

within the institutional context” (Schachter & Rich, 2011, p. 115). Roles shift from leader to that of member and partner and, thus, responsibility for student success is shared. As such, teachers strive to make curriculum personal to them, which, in turn, becomes personal to students, and relevant to their learning. Flexibility of educator roles has an important place in high school redesign and bringing about the shift to that place in the process is a part of a new way of doing things.

Alberta’s English 30-1 Diploma Exam

Firmly fixed upon the shore of this landscape is Alberta’s Grade 12 Diploma Examinations Program, which was established in 1984, over three decades ago and many revised curriculums ago, and has three main purposes:

- to certify the level of individual student achievement in selected Grade 12 courses
- to ensure that province-wide standards of achievement are maintained
- to report individual group results

The program provides examination in selected Grade 12 courses: Biology 30, Chemistry 30, English Language Arts 30-1, English Language Arts 30-2, Français 30, French Language Arts 30-1, Mathematics 30-1, Mathematics 30-2, Physics 30, Science 30, Social Studies 30-1 and Social Studies 30-2 (Alberta Education, 2014).

To receive a high school diploma, students are required to write at least two diploma exams, either English Language Arts 30-1 or English Language Arts 30-2 and either Social Studies 30-1 or Social Studies 30-2 (Alberta Education, 2014).

Students may choose to write other diploma exams based on necessary Alberta

Education diploma requirements², and/ or post-secondary entrance requirements.

From a provincial standpoint, emphasis is placed on the humanities and a student's ability to read print texts, interpret and formulate ideas and write in response to the texts provided in the exam.

In response to the demands of these diploma exams, teachers work with what knowledge or allowances they are given by Alberta Education, which is quite often limited. For instance, an English Language Arts 30-1 teacher can only speculate on what kind of topic will be given for students to write upon and must prepare his or her students with an armory of literature that might (or might not) work with the given topic. Additionally, in the past, the prompts or questions were linked thematically on the English Language 30-1 Part A. However, as of 2013 this changed, and students were given two topics that were seemingly different in diction, although still vaguely thematically linked. Preparation for the diploma exam, therefore, is a guessing game as a teacher could only hope that he or she, perhaps through some sort of process of elimination and/or deduction, had managed to cover or teach to the right topics.

If inquiry and project-based approaches to teaching writing has a particular methodology and potential outcomes, then teaching to the test or writing for the exam has its own methods and outcomes as well. As already outlined, in order to attain a high school diploma, students in Alberta must complete an English at the 30-level (either English 30-1, which is the academic English, or English 30-2, the non-academic English). For the purpose of this study, I will focus on the English 30-1 for

² Alberta Education Diploma requirements can be accessed here:
<https://education.alberta.ca/graduation-requirements-credentials-credits/high-school-diploma/?searchMode=3>

multiple reasons, including: a) my own experiences and struggles with teaching this course for 15 years, b) the exhaustive conversations I have had with colleagues regarding the mismatch between how we want to teach writing through a broad literacy frameworks or inquiry-based learning and how restricted we feel because of the impending demands of the diploma exam, c) the need to know of the various approaches that teachers have in dealing with life-long writing that expands over various contexts and disciplines versus writing for the exam, d) an interest in the attitudes and perceptions English Language Arts teachers have regarding their own pedagogical choices, and e) a true concern regarding the authenticity of the diploma exam as a valid interpretation of assessment results and the impact it is having on teaching practices.

The English 30-1 exam is composed of two parts: Part A – the written response component – and Part B – the reading comprehension component. Both Part A and Part B are designed to take up to a maximum of three hours to complete for a total of six hours for the entire exam, which, depending on the quarter can spread over two days or be one week apart from each other. According to Slomp (2007), the “writing component of Alberta Education’s English 30-1 diploma exam is representative of the current predominant model of large-scale, high-stakes writing assessment” (p. 118). The entire exam was, up until the 2015-2016 school year, worth fifty percent of a student’s final mark. The other fifty percent was based on the work done over the course of the class (assignments, tests, projects, compositions, etc.), subject to the teacher’s discretion. Of the fifty percent that the exam was worth, Part A and Part B were valued equally at twenty-five percent. In a more recent study

conducted by Melnyk (2012), she reinforces that the design of the exam, time frame, and weighting, which carry “the same amount as [sic] as the entire English Language Arts 30-1 course” are major contributors to the “high-stakes exam scenario” (p. 4). Indisputably, students and their teachers have a lot of pressure put upon their shoulders to prepare and perform well on the Alberta English Language Arts 30-1 diploma exam.

A slight release of pressure came in 2015-2016 when Alberta Education changed the weightings of the diploma exam and final course mark to 30% (diploma exam) and 70% (class-based). In a Diploma Exam Weighting FAQ section on Alberta Education’s website, an explanation of this change in weighting is offered: “While Alberta’s current diploma exams assess a significant number of outcomes in the provincial programs of study, they do not assess them all. 70/30 weighing puts more emphasis on classroom work and the school-awarded mark. Teachers work closely with students on a daily basis on the full range of learning outcomes in the provincial programs of study over a longer period of time. The 70/30 weighting reflects this, rather than relying so heavily on exams lasting only a few hours”

(<https://education.alberta.ca/writing-diploma-exams/diploma-exam-weighting/everyone/diploma-exam-weighting-faq/>). This statement from Alberta Education acknowledges three important points, relevant to this study: 1. Not all outcomes from the programs of study are assessed; 2. The work that teachers do in classrooms more accurately reflect achievement of learning outcomes; and 3. The diploma exam only provides a snap-shot of “a few hours” of what students are capable of and, thus, what teachers are able to prepare them for.

To understand what is expected of the students on the diploma exam, it is important to consider each part of the exam. There are two written assignments to Part A: the *Personal Response to Texts Assignment*, which is worth forty percent of the total written mark and the *Critical/ Analytical Response to Literary Texts Assignment*, which is worth sixty percent of the total written mark. Slomp (2007) explains that “The *Personal Response to Texts Assignment* is designed to stimulate student thinking for the *Critical/ Analytical Response to Literary Texts Assignment*” (p. 119). However, because more weighting is placed on the *Critical/ Analytical Response to Literary Texts Assignment* it is quite often common practice for students to start with “Assignment II” rather than “Assignment I,” which is the *Personal Response to Texts Assignment*. It, therefore, becomes difficult for a student to go beyond a “first-draft” response. Furthermore, even though the exam allows students to respond to the question(s) in any prose form (like personal, critical, or creative) in a manner that is appropriate to the idea(s) they wish to express, the restrictions of the weighting of assignments and time allotment impede the exploration of the topic and form in greater depth than an untimed, unrestricted writing process would.

Part A: The personal response to texts assignment. This assignment is presented as “Assignment I” in Part A of the English 30-1 exam. The suggested time for completion of this assignment is between forty-five and sixty minutes. Students are provided with a variety of unknown texts, typically a poem or creative piece, an excerpt from a novel, short story or work of non-fiction, and a visual, although selection of pieces may differ from exam sitting to exam sitting. It is suggested that before writing, students are to read through all the texts provided and the assignment

(or prompt). During their writing, it is expected that students are to use a prose form and connect one or more of the texts provided in the examination to their own ideas and impressions. Failure to write in prose form, to connect to the given texts or to adhere to the assignment prompt may result in an “insufficient” on the rubric, which is equivalent to a zero percent on the assignment. In terms of further assessment, the *Personal Response to Texts Assignment* is “graded according to two five-point analytic scales” (Slomp, 2007, p. 120). The *Ideas and Impressions* category is focused on the quality of students’ ideas, reflection and exploration of the topic in relation to the prompting texts, as well as how effectively they provide support in relation to their ideas. The *Presentation* category focuses on the effectiveness of voice in relation to the context created by the student in the chosen prose form, stylistic choices (including quality of language and expression) and the students’ creation of tone, and the students’ development of a unifying effect. It is suggested that markers consider the proportion of error in terms of the complexity and length of the response when assessing this section. Melnyk (2012) notes that the *Personal Response to Texts Assignment* is “probably the most democratic assignment on the diploma exam as it allows the students to respond in any forms of prose they wish” (p. 21). This component of the exam allows for more literacy constructs to be measured, such as, tapping into prior knowledge, personal stories and experiences, making connections, and creating texts, which go beyond the constructs of reading and writing (see *Figure 2*).

Part A: The critical/ analytical response to literary texts assignment. This assignment is presented at “Assignment II” in Part A of the English 30-1 exam. The

suggested time for completion of this assignment is between one and a half and two hours. Students are directed not to use the texts provided in the booklet for the *Critical/ Analytical Response to Literary Texts Assignment* but, instead, choose from short stories, novels, plays, screenplays, poetry, films or other literary texts that they have studied in English Language Arts 30-1. They are to consider the works they have studied, choose a literary text (or texts) that is meaningful to them and relevant to the given assignment. Typically, the assignment is worded as follows: “Discuss the idea(s) developed by the text creator in your chosen text about” given topic inserted here. When planning and writing, students are to carefully consider their controlling idea and how they will create a strong unifying effect in their response and develop their ideas and support them with appropriate, and meaningful examples from their choices of literary text(s). It should be noted that literary texts are not present during the exam. The only resource present that students have to utilize are dictionaries and/or thesaurus.

Slomp (2007, pgs. 122-123) concisely summarizes the bed-sheet (a familiar term used by teachers on the marking floor, which refers to the double-sided rubric utilized for the marking of Part A) that is used to assess the assignment:

The assignment is marked using five, five-point analytic scales: a) *Thought and Understanding* is focused on how effectively the students’ ideas relate to the assignment and on the quality of the literary interpretations and understandings; b) *Supporting Evidence* is focused on the selection and quality of evidence and on how well the supporting evidence is employed, developed and synthesized to support the students’ ideas; c) *Form and*

Structure is focused on how well the students' organizational choices result in a coherent, focused, shaped, and concluded discussion and in a unifying effect or a controlling idea that is developed and maintained; d) *Matters of Choice* is focused on how effectively students create voice through their use of diction, syntax, and other stylistic choices; e) *Matters of Correctness* focuses on the students' correct use of sentence construction, usage, grammar, and mechanics.

Once again, it is suggested that that markers consider the proportion of error, which means the amount of errors made in the areas of *Matters of Choice* and *Matters of Correctness* in terms of the complexity and length of the response when assessing this section.

Part B: Reading. It is explained to students in *A Guide for Students* (2014, p. 4) that "*Part B: Reading* has one booklet, containing selections from fiction, nonfiction, poetry, visual texts, Shakespearean drama, and modern drama (including television or radio scripts or screenplays), and a second booklet with 70 multiple-choice questions about these selections. Part B is developed to be completed in two and a half hours, however, [students] may take an additional half hour to complete Part B (for a total of three hours)." Students are not allowed to use dictionaries or reference materials and are encouraged to read the passages in their entirety and consider the questions in the order presented. The questions themselves relate to the content, context, the writer's craft, and the characteristic feature of a genre and are organized into five types: i) initial questions, which alert students to important ideas or details; ii) middle questions, which address specific elements of the selection like

word meanings or figure of speech; iii) last questions, which require the students to consider the reading selection as a whole; iv) linked questions, which call for students to consider specific elements of various reading selections, to consider several reading selections thematically, or to manage ideas and information from different reading selections collectively; and v) evaluation questions, which have boldface type to emphasize what a student must do to select an answer, such as choosing the best possible answer from the alternatives or choosing the one answer that stands out as an exception to the others. Melnyk (2012) voices the opinion that “[t]his portion, by far, is the most autocratic process of the entire English Languages Arts assessment procedure in place” (p. 21). I agree. Forcing students to choose one best-fit answer based on someone else’s interpretation of what the text means is contrary to what most English Language Arts teachers try to cultivate in their classrooms: room for one’s own unique responses to a text. Drawing upon the sociocultural-historical literacy construct and Rosenblatt’s work (1938), Melnyk points out that “it is through these diverse lenses that readers create their own understanding of the text and what the text mean to them” (p. 22). Certainly, there is a discrepancy present here within our own classrooms and the English Language Arts 30-1 diploma exam, between what we know to be comprehensive pedagogy and the way we are assessing our students, as well as what we know about adequate, appropriate, and accurate validity constructs.

Aspects of literacy being measured. According to a traditional and limiting definition of literacy, as the ability to read and to write, the Alberta English 30-1

diploma exam certainly measures these abilities. It is evident that Part A of the exam places value on:

- knowledge about language structure (the structure of ideas, of paragraphs, of sentences),
- knowledge about language as a tool through which one communicates ideas,
- idea formation and support,
- creation of appropriate voice,
- knowledge about diction, syntax and punctuation,
- the ability to generate, organize and effectively present ideas within tightly controlled timeframes,
- the ability to work effectively under pressure,
- a limited form of writing process (planning, drafting and polishing in a 3-hour timeframe); and
- the final product (Slomp, 2007, pgs. 123-124).

Likewise, Part B of the exam values a student's ability to "draw on the understanding, knowledge and skills that [they] have developed as a reader" (Alberta Education, 2014, p. 10). It is stated that their "critical reading and thinking skills – understanding of vocabulary, appreciation of tone and literary and rhetorical devices, understanding of the purpose and effect of a text creator's choices, and appreciation of the human experience and values reflected in the texts – will be assessed at the level of challenge appropriate for graduating English Language Arts 30-1 students" (Alberta Education, 2014, p. 10).

Thus, simply put, the aspects of literacy being measured by the exam are narrowed and inhibit alignment with the values emphasized in *Moving Forward With High School Redesign*, such as broader definitions of literacy and including theoretical elements of literacy such as: sociocultural-historical literacy, critical literacy, new literacy studies, new technologies and literacy, and multiliteracies. Closer examination is required to examine the tension that may or may not be created between teaching to and preparing students for the exam and teaching students how to be literate, in the broadest definition possible, in the twenty-first century.

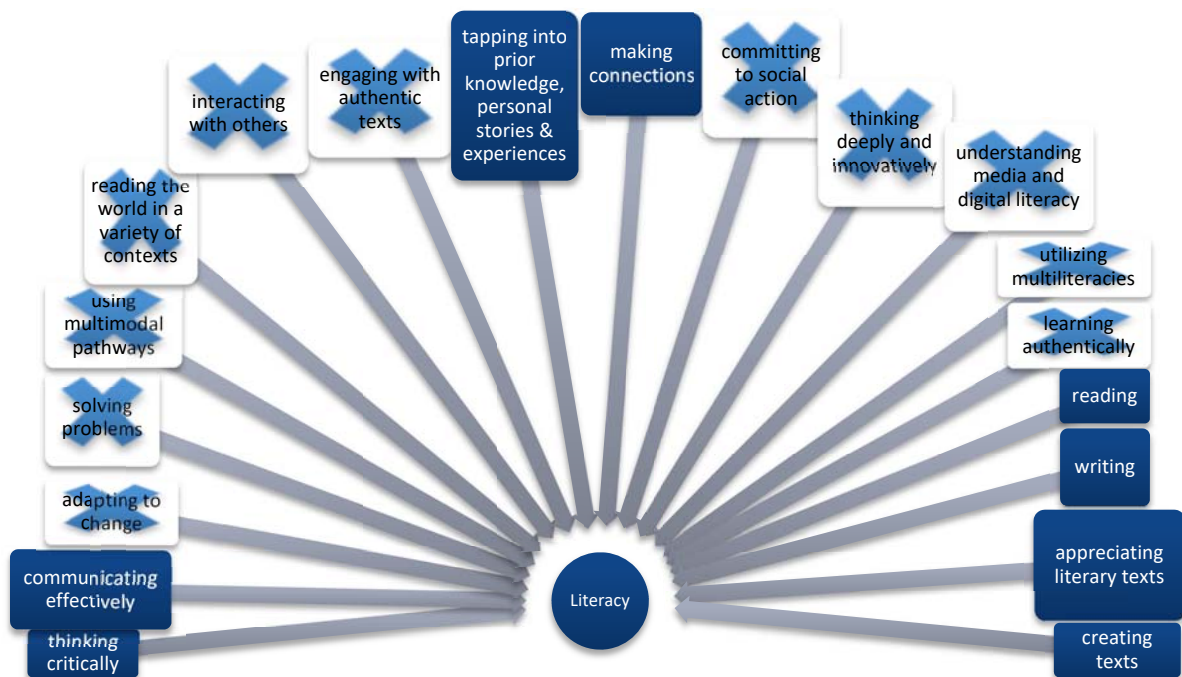


Figure 3. Aspect of the personal literacy construct as not measured by the Alberta Diploma Exam.

From the contrast between what literacy is (or should be), as informed by theoretical frameworks and which aspects of literacy are measured (or not measured) by Alberta's diploma exam, one can see from *Figure 2* that there is an obvious

discrepancy between the two with many of the facets of literacy not being focused upon. Due to the narrowing of curriculum that occurs on a diploma exam and the fact that only two strands – reading and writing - of the six outcomes of English Language Arts are measured on the exam, it is fair to state that the aspects being measured are more aligned to the traditional skills of reading, writing, critical thinking and communicating effectively. As already mentioned, it is only through the *Personal Response to Texts Assignment* that other more creative skills are measured, such as personal story telling, making connections and appreciating and creating texts. Constructs that are evidently not measured include those that require interacting with others and engaging with authentic learning and texts (Vygotsky, 1978), creating an understanding of a text based one's own personalities and experiences (Rosenblatt, 1938), adapting to change and committing to social action (Freire & Macedo, 1987), accessing or using multimodal pathways (Kress, 2013), developing multiliteracies and reading the world in a variety of ways (New London Group, 1996), and deeper thinking and innovation (Gee, 1996). What is interesting to note here are three points: 1) assessing in this manner isolates an individual to perform in an almost formulaic manner; 2) besides, perhaps, the use of a keyboard for word-processing, there is no engagement with multimodal pathways for a student to express him or herself and, thus, the assessment is restrictive; and 3) this form of assessment allows for very little innovation. Moreover, the construct-facets that are **not** measured by the English Language Arts 30-1 diploma exam share an affinity with the philosophies outlined in *Inspiring Education* (2010) and *Moving Forward With High School Redesign* (2013), which, once again, brings me to my main research question: how do teachers of

literacy work between the tensions of their own professional judgments, the messages about teaching and learning they receive through initiatives like *Moving Forward With High School Redesign* (2013) and *Focus on Inquiry* (2004), the assessments their students must complete, and the contents and constructs of standardized testing?

Working within the Tensions: Where the Water Meets the Shore

Changes or trends in education – in pedagogical practice, in curriculum and in assessment – can be thought of as “overlapping waves, with one wave feeding into another but without completely displacing waves that came before” (Yancey, 1999, p. 483), which suggests an indefinite feeling of progress. Yet, as waves lap at the shore, it can be observed that there are ones that have a tendency to move things forward and those that do not. Such is the context that teachers who are currently working within the tensions of *Inspiring Education* (2010), *Moving Forward With High School Redesign* (2013), and inquiry-based learning versus Alberta Education’s high school diploma exams find themselves in. Self-examination of *currere* (Pinar, 2004/2012), the relationship between past, present and future practice and educational experiences is an integral component of an educator’s response to change or the latest wave and, ultimately, shapes an individual’s self-understanding of new ways of thinking about education. Teachers who are forward-thinking will constantly find themselves in a pedagogic situation where they are “living with tensionality – a tensionality that emerges, in part from indwelling in a zone between two curriculum worlds: the worlds of curriculum-as-planned and curriculum-as-lived-experiences” (Aoki, 1986/1991, p. 159). However, it is important to note that it is within tensionality or indwelling aright (living within a tension) between curriculum-as-

planned and curriculum-as-lived experience that “good thoughts and actions arise when properly tensioned chords are struck” (Aoki, 1986/1991, p. 162). Now is the time to strike as the current state of Alberta’s educational landscape is transforming and the call for teachers to shift their mindsets to make learning a powerful experience for students is louder than ever before.

For me, in personal, disciplinary and, professional contexts, I have walked miles upon a shoreline watching the educational waves ebb and flow, and at times, have allowed a powerful swell to crash over me, hopeful that when the tide does go back out, I and the shoreline have been transformed. Yet, I am often left disheartened to discover that although minor details have shifted, the bigger picture has remained the same: evidence of minor curriculum revisions and continuous changes to pedagogy yet the same standardized forms of assessment. Will this new wave of inquiry-based and project-based learning, the Foundational Principles Guiding *High School Redesign* and the focus on *Inspiring Education* (2010) truly allow educators to fully embrace change without creating tension between our professional judgments and adhering to the narrowing of curriculum and assessment that comes with standardized testing?

Methodology

Defining qualitative research. Qualitative inquiry can be described as being curious, asking questions, drawing answers from human behavior and making meaning from humanistic virtues. To engage in the act of “searching closely” or seeking out a quality or property of nature defines what qualitative research is about. Qualitative research is a “complex historical field” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3)

that can be explained in terms of the observer's location and relation to the data which surrounds him or her:

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3)

The situated activity, then, becomes significant for the observer as it provides him or her with a context from which to describe the circumstances that surround that which he or she is closely examining or searching out. From this position, the observer has the ability to turn data collected – case study, personal experience, introspection, life story, interview, conversations, recordings, artifacts, cultural texts and productions, documents, observations and historical and visual texts – into meaning, into a narrative that allows others to see the world in a different way. This is why qualitative research was the form of methodology I chose. For the purpose of this study, I wanted to study English Language Arts 30-1 teachers in their natural settings – a dual-campus, quarter-system school in its eighth year of the *High School Flexibility Project* (2010), now known as *Moving Forward With High School Redesign* (2013) –

and, through a variety of collected data, I wanted make meaning of said data to identify the sources of tension for these teachers between inquiry-based learning and teaching to the test. Meaning-making then becomes useful as it can shape action or inaction (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 197), as well as provide insight into specific aspects of the human condition. Therefore, following this line of thought, qualitative research is “the world of lived experience, for this is where individual belief and action intersect with culture” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 8). As such, it is a “living pedagogy” (Aoki, 2003, p. 425), where the researcher must place him or herself in the space between searching and researching, between teaching and learning, between listening and interpreting. Through the use of a “Lancanian anecdote”, curriculum scholar Ted Aoki explains that for every teacher researcher the “discursive site – a site of the to and fro of language is discourse” (2003, p. 425) and dwelling in between. Consequentially, through successful engagement or situating of the self in qualitative research, the discourse represents a “presence of the essence of reality” (Aoki, 2003, p. 427). Hence, what is “real”, what is useful, and what has meaning (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 197) become the central interests of the qualitative researcher.

The qualitative researcher. Who is the teacher researcher? Who is the self that researches? I felt the need to define the “who” as he or she becomes just as important as the situated activity or the discursive site – the “where” – and the discourse or the “what.” Guba and Lincoln (1989) identify this process as reflexivity or “the process of reflecting critically on the self as researcher, the “human instrument” (p. 210). As mentioned, as I defined qualitative research, the one who is

doing the dwelling in between – between searching and researching, between inquiring and responding, between teaching and learning, between listening and interpreting – has individual beliefs that must be reconciled with the meanings and interpretations that phenomena and people bring to him or her. At the very least, I was a participant researcher, situated in the same context, the same school, with a similar background to those at the center of this research study. When I first began the study, I had been an associate principal for two years, and I team-taught one English Language Arts 30-1 course a year. And although I had moved from the role of classroom teacher to the role of an administrator, I did not supervise any certificated teaching staff. I oversaw the educational assistants. I assigned them to the teachers with whom they would work and to the students for whom they were to provide support. As such, I felt that even though I was familiar with many aspects of the school and had long-standing relationships with the staff, I would not be influencing those whose practices and beliefs were being studied.

Denzin and Lincoln (2005; 2011) metaphorically describe a qualitative researcher as a *bricoleur* and quilt-maker; in essence, someone who assembles and constructs a structure of ideas using whatever comes to hand. Thus, their work is defined as an extension of themselves (Harper, 1987, as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 4) and may be represented through different approaches, such as interpretive, narrative, theoretical, political, methodical, and critical (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 4 & 6). This metaphor mimicked the wave and shore metaphor pervasive throughout this study as I wondered if I were the only person standing on the shores of educational change whilst feeling the pressures of having to navigate between the

tension of inquiry-based learning and teaching to the test. Were there others feeling these tensions? How were they navigating them? Like the quilt-maker, I was ready to extend the field of study beyond myself. Knowing that there were many perspectives and approaches, as qualitative researcher, I had to work carefully to focus my inquiry so as to “seek answers to questions that stress *how* social experience is created and given meaning” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 10). And although my personal biography, including class, gender, race, culture and ethnicity of the researcher will play a role in the act of research, it is my job to “enter the research process from the inside” and show flexibility in adopting “particular views of [those who are] studied” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 21), while “coming to know the self within the processes of research itself” (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 210).

Assumptions that inform qualitative research. For a qualitative researcher, unfortunately, the world of lived experience and of meaning- making from phenomena, social experiences and the people associated with these, has been deeply and historically scrutinized. Often referred to as field journalists or “soft” scientists, qualitative researchers transcend this identity by agreeing and adhering to the underlying philosophical assumptions that allow them to study their own world views while shaping the direction of their research. Creswell (2012) describes these assumptions and frames them into interpretive frameworks so qualitative researchers can understand their significance to their own research. There are four philosophical assumptions:

- Ontological – the study of nature of being or reality (Creswell, 2007). This assumption involves researchers embracing multiple realities and reporting

on these multiple realities by exploring multiple forms of evidence from different individuals' perspectives and experiences. Schwandt, Lincoln & Guba (2007) explains ontology as “the worldviews and assumptions in which researchers operate in their search for new knowledge” (p. 190, as cited in Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011, p. 102), while Latsis, Lawson and Martins (2007) extend the definition of ontology to “the study of things that exist and the study of what exists” (as cited in Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011, p. 102). Ontology of research, then, examines both concrete entities like assignments and field notes, as well as abstract entities like intrinsic factors that guide and influence one's pedagogy. The ontology of qualitative research will force me to look deeply into defining what one's teaching practice is, what governs this practice, and how I am interpreting it.

- Epistemological – the study that investigates the origin, nature, methods, and limits of human knowledge. In other words, what is the relationship between the researcher and that being researched? (Creswell, 2007). This assumption focuses on how researchers know what they know as they get as close as possible to the participants being studied and gather subjective evidence from research conducted in the field. Epistemology, thus, is “the process of thinking. The relationship between what we know and what we see. The truths we seek and believe as researchers” (Bernal, 2002; Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Lynham & Webb-Johnson, 2008; Pallas, 2001). In the field of qualitative research specific to my topic, epistemological positioning

requires me to question how I know about one's approaches to teaching and if there is tensionality that exists or just something that is experienced.

- Axiological – the philosophy dealing with values and ethics. Values can be understood as what researchers seek as important products within inquiry research (Guba & Lincoln, 2005); while ethics is the interaction and relationship between the researcher and the subject as well as the effect inquiry research has on populations (Schwandt, Lincoln, & Guba, 2007). This assumption allows researchers to make known their values in the study and actively reports their values and biases as well as the value-laden nature of information gathered from the field. This philosophical assumption reminds me of the morals and values that I must be cognizant of as a researcher, like whether or not I agree with standardized testing and teaching to the test. As axiology is the study of value, I will need to examine my own values and biases and how they could possibly influence my findings.
- Methodological – the study of principles and rules of organization and the methods used in the process of research (Creswell, 2007). Schwandt, Lincoln, & Guba (2007) further define methodology as “the process of how we seek out new knowledge. The principles of our inquiry and how inquiry should proceed” (p. 190). This assumption shows how the researcher's experiences are shaped by the collecting and analyzing of the data. The methodology that best fits this study is qualitative in nature as I explore how teachers of English Language Arts navigate the tensions

between inquiry-based learning and standardized testing. In recording and studying their views on this issue, as a researcher, I am also providing them a voice.

Thus, it is within these assumptions that my understanding of qualitative research is derived and formed, as well as how I work toward searching for new knowledge within a familiar context. As a participant researcher who is also in a leadership role at the school (associate principal), I must acknowledge that my relationship and proximity to the participants, while gathering evidence about their perspectives and experiences, values, and assumptions, might have shaped the data I collected and impacted my findings. Additionally, it is important to note that this study did receive ethics approval as I was not in a position of coercive authority over the participants.

Moreover, in order to recognize where I am positioning myself in the context of this research, I must acknowledge the norms that might shape my perception such as religion, gender, race, position/ title, and experience. I was born and raised in Lethbridge, the oldest daughter of three children, to parents who immigrated to Canada from Poland and Japan. As a Canadian-born English Language Learner, I have always loved learning and speaking multiple languages. Thus, as I grew older, I fell in love with the idea of becoming an English Language Arts teacher, although English was one of the subjects in which I had to work really hard to do well in. I have been a high school English Language Arts teacher for close to 19 years in the Roman Catholic separate school division in Southern Alberta. In 2013, I became an associate principal in the same high school I had taught English Language Arts in for 13 years. While in my position as associate principal, I still taught/ team taught

English 30-1 for one quarter every year. In describing these paradigms that may or may not be of influence to this research, I am positioning myself within this qualitative research.

Qualitative case study. Because of the familiar yet unique context within which I find myself immersed in and drawing upon – the only dual-campus school in Alberta (Mombourquette, 2013) that operates on the Copernican system and is heavily involved with *Moving Forward With High School Redesign* and Inquiry – as well as the external interest I have in the mismatch between Alberta’s high school English Language Arts curriculum and the diploma exam, this case study can be seen as an *instrumental case study* (Stake, 2005/2013) because the motivation is to “provide insight into an issue” (p. 445) of the possible tension between teacher professional judgments about curriculum, pedagogy and assessment and the content and constructs of standardized testing and to “redraw a generalization” (p. 445) about teaching to the test. By identifying the aforementioned purpose of the study in advance, as well as the frameworks of inquiry and literacy, and the theories of validity, I felt that an instrumental case study gave me the best opportunity to gain insight and learn from. Additionally, it is significant to point out the dual-campus piece as it will provide an ideal “lab” as the concept of “one school, two buildings” (Mombourquette, 2013) allows for factors such as the administration team and their expectations, school policy and routines, timetabling, etc. to be controlled; which is another characteristic of an instrumental case study. However, the difference between the approaches in programming of the two schools may potentially, play a role in examining the tension that exists between teacher professional judgment and

standardized testing. Additionally, Stake (2005/2013) explains that in instrumental case study, the case is of secondary interest as it “plays a supportive role, and it facilitates our understanding of something else” (p. 445), which, in this case, might be the validity of the Alberta English Language Arts diploma exam and its impact on teachers who are immersed in an innovative teaching environment (on Campus West). As such, this particular context will still be examined in depth, “its context scrutinized and its ordinary activities detailed” (Stake, 2005/2013, p. 445) but the main goal is to examine the tensions that may exist between a teacher’s autonomy and/or professional judgment and the diploma exam. By studying teachers of literacy – their instructional pedagogy, approach to curriculum, forms of assessment and diploma exam preparation – in their natural settings, while having the opportunity to interview them, my hope is to make sense of and interpret, (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) the reasons for the tensions that might exist, the methods that teachers use to work through these tensions and the challenges that arise as a result, as well as the final impact on the teacher’s professional judgment. Evidently, thus, three individual case studies of three different teachers, will inform the findings of this research.

Establishing the participants of the case study. In order to thoroughly examine this case and “to probe its particularity” (Stake, 2005/2013, p. 447), data was gathered on: the nature of the case and the dynamics of its specific context as well as other contexts or lenses such as social, political and cultural, its historical background, its physical setting and those personnel through whom the case can be known.

The English Language Arts team, within a large high school of approximately 800 students that serves an urban/rural population and currently heavily engaged with the *Moving Forward With High School Redesign* project, consists of three full-time high school teachers of English, one part-time English and part-time drama teacher, one associate principal who team-teaches one English class and the principal who team-teaches one English class. I have chosen two full-time high school teachers of literacy and one principal who team-teaches one English class as the participants of this study. They were selected because they will all be teaching English 30-1 in the first two quarters of the 2015-2016 school year, which is the timeline proposed for data collection of this study. The schedules of these teachers and experience with teaching on each campus vary: the two teachers have taught on both campuses (one will teach on Campus West in quarter one and the other will teach on Campus East quarter two) and the principal will be teaching exclusively on Campus East and, thus, will not be immersed into the process of inquiry-based or project-based learning, which is the focus on Campus West. However, the principal is very aware of the focus of inquiry and innovation as she was part of the process of giving Campus West its identity. It is important to understand the characteristics of each campus and the impetus behind creating a dual-campus model as it might play a significant role in this study, specifically, in the participants' teaching philosophy and approaches to assessment. For instance, the features may restrict or support the implementation of inquiry-based learning activities; similarly, the specific foci of each campus may or may not influence the outcome of this study. Table 2 provides a snapshot of what characterizes each campus, of the dual-campus school.

Table 2

Characteristics of Each Campus of the Dual-Campus School

Characteristics of Each Campus	Campus East	Campus West
Location	South side of city next to an elementary school, junior high school, and another public high school	West side of the city and attached to a public library, as well as another public high school
Years of operation	Since 1967 – over 50 years	Since 2010 – 8 years
Features (specific to the building)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -a state-of-the art fine arts theatre – “The Eggplant.” -two music rooms -a Sports Medicine lab -two computer labs plus a fully operational library with a librarian -three science labs that are separate classrooms -a study hall with auditorium seating -access to junior high, which houses the construction tech lab - career center -First Nations, Metis, and Inuit grad coach room - access to an outreach center 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -large gathering space -an E-Learning space with three conjoining science labs - a robotics lab - a pre-engineering lab - a “double-sized” gymnasium - access to a public library - access to an outdoor wetlands area - access to multisport arenas (curling rink and two ice rinks at the moment, with a water park, running track, and community-use rooms to come) and sports fields
Specific focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -all grade levels and streams of programming from Knowledge and Employability to honors -fine arts -Work Experience and Registered Apprenticeship Program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - all grade levels - academic streams (-2, -1, and honors) - Inquiry and Innovation program - interdisciplinary, cross-collaborative work - pre-engineering - athletic academies

The three participants of this research study are colleagues of mine. I have known Marie the longest, over 20 years now, and worked closely with her in teacher-mentor,

team-teaching, and administrative capacities. Tara and I taught next door to each other for about four years, before the opening of Campus West; I have known her for 12 years. Mark has only been teaching at the dual-campus school for a year prior to the onset of this study. A few other aspects of each participant include:

- “Mark” has been teaching high school English for 16 years, but is relatively new to the school (this is his third year). The dual-campus, quarter system, and inquiry-learning approach are aspects that he is still adjusting to. He has, however, served as a member of the English 30-1 and 30-2 diploma exam provincial marking team. He taught on both Campus West and Campus East last school year and will be teaching on both campuses again this upcoming school year. He is teaching English 30-1 on Campus West in quarter one, which runs from September to November and in quarter two, which runs from November to January.
- “Tara” is the English Language Arts department head and has been for the last five years. She has much experience serving as a member of the English 30-1 provincial marking team and has 12 years of teaching experience, ten of which have been at this school. She frequently travels between the two campuses and will be on both campuses again this upcoming school year. She is teaching English 30-1 (an Honors and Enrichment class) in quarter three, which runs from January to April, and an English 30-1 in quarter four, which runs from April to June.
- “Marie” is the current principal (and has been for four years) but has been teaching English Language Arts for 32 years and has partaken in many

diploma exam marking sessions over her career. She team-teaches one English 30-1 class a year, typically on Campus East. Like Mark, she is teaching English 30-1 in quarter two, which runs from November to January.

Table 3

Summary of Participants

Teacher	Years of Teaching Experience	Years of Dual-Campus Teaching Experience	Location of English 30-1 classes in 2015-2016	Has marked diploma exams (Yes/ No)
Mark	16	3	Quarter 1 – West Quarter 2 - East	Yes
Tara	12,	8 (since dual-campus opened)	Quarter 3 – East Quarter 4 - West	Yes
Marie	32	8 (since dual-campus opened)	Quarter 2 - East	Yes

As one can see from Table 3, these participants represent a range of experience with teaching at the 30-level, particularly English 30-1, and have various levels of familiarity with the diploma exam, much like the participants of Slomp’s study in 2008. It is important to note the familiarity that these teachers have with the diploma exam (ie: marking of) as this might influence their own approach(es) to assessment in their classes. Additionally, it is important to recognize that their schedules and locations vary, with most having some experience with Campus West while one has none at all, although she is the principal and was central to the identity created for Campus West. Their range of experience and contexts, comfort levels with the “Foundational Principles Guiding High School Redesign” (2013), familiarity with the diploma exam, both in helping their students prepare for it and experience with

assessing it, in addition to their exposure to Campus West and the focus on inquiry are important to this study because:

1. of the focus on the diploma exam's impact on how these teachers teach writing;
2. of the impact that inquiry/project-based learning and the "Foundational Principles Guiding High School Redesign" have on their teaching practice; and
3. of contextual factors (yet to be identified) that impact professional judgment and pedagogical choices.

Stake (2005/2013) suggests that the simplest rule for method in qualitative casework is "[placing] your best intellect into the thick of what is going on" (p. 449). Hence, the study's design will focus on doing just that – investigate discourse and actions, collect and validate data from multiple sources including evidence collected from teachers (documents and verbal) and within classrooms through observation, and extensively reflect upon what has been collected, recorded and observed. It is through this design, thus, that qualitative study is evident in that the researcher spends "extended time on site, personally in contact with activities and operations of the cases, reflecting, and revising descriptions and meanings of what is going on" (Stake, 2005/2013, p. 450). Specifically, time on site would be over the course of one year and over two campuses; and, personally in contact with activities and operations of the cases would include individual interviews, classroom observations, collection of handouts, assignments, and tests, and focus group discussion. It is through these interactions with teachers, in their activities and operations, that I explored the idea

that, if given the flexibility to whittle down general learner outcomes to competency-based outcomes in the English 30-1 and English 30-2 curriculum, as well as the freedom to not teach to the test, as is the case on Campus West with its focus on inquiry and project-based learning, would a teacher's method and practice of teaching and assessment differ? In other words, are we seeing differences in teacher practice between campuses? Why? What are factors or reasons shaping the differences? And if so, what challenges would teachers face as they worked through the tension between their own professional judgments and the impending expectations of the Alberta diploma exam? Lastly, if tensionality exists, what are the reasons behind these teachers giving up their own constructs to comply or not comply with standardized testing?

Data collection. Because my ultimate goal was to investigate and evaluate the multiple ways that English Language Arts 30-1 teachers cope with teaching in the midst of a unique inquiry and innovative model while facing a standardized test, as constructed by Alberta Education, I felt that the best way to collect data would be through individual interviews with each of the teachers, classroom observations, an analysis of the writing-focused documents, handouts, assignments and tests each teacher used in his or her grade 12 English 30-1 course, and focus group discussion, wherein there is a thematic focus and analysis of questions that arise from interviews and the teacher reflection journals. I drew upon multiple sources of data so as to increase the authenticity of my representation of the case (Stake, 2005/2013).

Individual interviews. I conducted two interviews with each teacher. The interviews I conducted were a) a structured or formal question and answer format

and, b) a generative dialogue was conversational. To start, I wanted to get a general sense of where the teacher's mind-set was regarding inquiry-based learning and conduct an interview focusing solely based on inquiry. In the more structured or formal question interview, I asked the questions as outlined in the *Focus on Inquiry* (2004) guide I have listed below (Foreword, p. x) and recorded their responses. This interview took 30 minutes. Then I conducted a second generative dialogue interview to gather background information of the teacher's pedagogical approaches and opinions regarding the diploma exam prior to and after a specific lesson taught. My structured interview questions included:

1. a. What is your working definition or understanding of literacy?
b. Of project-based learning or inquiry?
2. a. In what ways does the campus you teach on influence what or alter how you teach?
b. How has your campus context influenced your own teaching practice?
3. a. How familiar are you with the Foundational Guiding Principles of High School Redesign?
b. How have your pedagogical choices been influenced by these principles?
4. Can you describe any similarities and differences in your English 30-1, English 20-1 and English 10-1 courses?
5. What, if any impact, has the Alberta English 30-1 diploma exam had on the way you teach? Provide specific examples.

6. a. Provide your analysis of the current construct/ structure of the Alberta diploma exam.
b. What is your opinion of the current construct/ structure of the Alberta diploma exam?
7. a. What is the nature of the pressure, if any, to have your students perform well on the diploma exam?
b. If so, where is this pressure coming from?
8. What kind of tensions might exist between your own personal judgments about curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, and the content and constructs of standardized testing?
9. a. In what ways have you worked through the tensions that you have identified? Provide specific strategies or ways of coping.
b. In what ways have you found a balance?
10. a. Select a recent unit and describe how you teach literacy.
b. To what extent did the diploma exam shape your design and delivery of this unit
c. Were there concepts/ approaches to writing cut from the unit?

The second set of interviews took 30 minutes as well, and were conducted as generative dialogue, where I asked questions specific to the lessons I would be observing, which focused on diploma exam preparation. In the pre-lesson conversation, I looked for how the teacher felt about the lesson prepared and what sort of concerns the teacher may or may not have with “teaching to the test.” I also inquired about integration of multimodal techniques for engagement and personal

touches he or she adds to lighten the impact of the heavily-weighted diploma exam. In the post-lesson interview, it was important to examine how the teacher viewed the “success” of the lesson: were objectives obtained and how? What sacrifices, if any, did the teacher have to make to ensure that the expectations of the diploma exam have been met? If no sacrifices in personal approaches to teaching literacy or pedagogy were made, and a teacher’s personal autonomy and integrity to his or her beliefs about teaching literacy were maintained, how did the teacher manage to do so? The interviews (one formal and one of a more generative nature) were vital to establishing how teachers within this context flux of High School Redesign, and inquiry and innovation move forward alongside the hold that the diploma exam has on their teaching practices. I took notes for both sets of interviews with each teacher as, then, I could immediately review the notes and ask any further clarifying questions required and I thought that taking notes would save the time it would take to transcribe the conversation.

Classroom observations. During my visits to the classrooms, two visits per teacher per quarter, I wanted to observe teachers in their day to day teaching. I relied on the teacher’s quarter calendar in order to select the dates for observation, and pre- and post- conversations. With reference to their quarter calendars, the three teachers in this study and I scheduled agreed-upon and specific times for observation. Within my observations, I had hoped to get a good sense of teacher practice so that I could understand any tensions they must work within and what strategies they have developed to cope within those tensions. As I observed, I paid attention to evidence of the literacy constructs identified in *Figure 1*, and approaches to inquiry or project-

based learning as well as the various forms of formative assessment and summative assessments, specifically references to the diploma exam. In terms of recording my observations, I took extensive field notes in a journal that I later transcribed into a word-processed document, reviewed and analyzed. These field notes were recorded in chronological order. However, I also paid particular attention to the two sources of tension: how teachers navigate between personal pedagogical choices, such as the implementation of life writing techniques or writing that is not diploma exam related, and how teachers address the expectations of the diploma exam. Any other themes that arose during observations were listed on a page separate from the observation notes in my journal. All transcription of field notes were submitted to the teachers of this study for review and comment. Each teacher had the opportunity to change any information he or she did not agree with in the transcriptions before I moved into the coding of any themes.

Collection and analysis of documents, handouts, assignments and tests. By collecting documents such as course outlines and information handouts/digital presentation tools like PowerPoint (specifically those pertaining to how to approach various types of writing), as well as examining any writing assignments, their rubrics and tests given throughout the quarter, I was able to discern where emphasis is placed in terms of attention to teaching to the diploma exam and assessment of diploma-type writing. Moreover, in collecting such documentation in conjunction with classroom observations, I was further able to get a sense of how teachers coped with developing and delivering lessons rooted in their own approaches to pedagogy, inquiry-based learning, and assessment practices. Although many factors played into my findings,

and the collection of this data was descriptive, not evaluative, I was most curious of the factors that might have been shaping a teacher's pedagogy within a context where inquiry approaches were encouraged and the *Foundational Principles of High School Redesign* had become fundamental elements to how the school is run. Were these three teachers of English Language Arts finding ways to circumvent the demands and expectations of the diploma exam?. Moreover, was there a possibility of finding a balance, of "indwelling in a zone between two curriculum worlds" (Aoki, 1986/1991/2005, p. 159)?

Focus group discussion. As individual interviews were conducted, common themes and reoccurring questions arose, such as: approaches to inquiry or project-based learning, adherence to and implementation of the philosophies behind *High School Redesign*, various literacy constructs, pedagogical issues, formative and summative assessment tools and opinions and attitudes towards the English Language Arts 30-1 diploma exam. Thus, I felt that the best way to discuss commonalities and, potentially, delve a bit deeper into teaching practices was to speak with all three participants together in a group. In sharing these ideas and discussing the issues the teachers are facing, it was my hope that this discussion would lend itself toward discussions about "the how" or strategies that teachers use to live within the tensions, if any. In pre-planning for the focus group discussion by identifying some of the aforementioned themes and/or concerns and queries, I took steps toward outlining the larger more prevalent themes, as well as identifying commonalities and differences, when it came time for data analysis.

I have included a summary of the methods of data collection, the description or purpose, potential strengths and weaknesses of the method, the information or potential themes I paid attention to and the schedule of data collection in Table 4 below.

Table 4

Data Collection

Data Collection Method & number of pages populated (if applicable)	Description of/ Purpose(s)	Strengths	Weaknesses	Information this method allows me to collect/ What I will pay attention to	Schedule of data collection
Individual Interviews – recorded through note-taking – questions were e-mailed to individuals in advance, as well. All three provided written responses to the questions posed – there was a total of 21 pages collected between e-mail correspondence and transcription	Core data 30 mins. each 1. Structured Q & A format - twice 2. Generative Dialogue Structured Q & A – first time on inquiry, second time using interview questions	Background information Sense of pedagogical beliefs, values and approaches Personal opinions Opportunity for reflection	Very personal Scheduling time to meet	Pedagogical approaches Concepts of and approaches to literacy Approaches to inquiry or project-based learning Concepts of and approaches to assessment Identification of tensionality	One interview at the beginning of the quarter and one interview at the end for two quarters per teacher: quarter 1 – Mark – 2 interviews: September & November, 2015 quarter 2 – Mark – generative dialogue/ check in: January, 2016

					<p>quarter 2 – Marie – 2 interviews: November, 2015 & January, 2016</p> <p>quarter 3 – Tara – 2 interviews: January, 2016 & April, 2016</p> <p>quarter 4 – Tara – generative dialogue/ check in: June, 2016</p>
<p>Classroom Observation - recorded through note-taking and use of audio recording device - there was a total of 20 pages of field notes from my journal and transcribed notes from the audio-recording</p>	<p>Seeing beliefs, values and approaches in practice</p> <p>Supplementary information to the interviews</p>	<p>Teacher practice in action</p>	<p>May not find what I am looking for in one observation</p> <p>Observation while taking field notes</p>	<p>Approaches to teaching literacy and writing (evidence of literacy constructs)</p> <p>Evidence of inquiry or project-based learning</p> <p>Approaches to teaching in preparation for the diploma exam (evidence of validity constructs)</p>	<p>Two observations per teacher per quarter – dates to be selected from teacher’s course calendar:</p> <p>Mark – 4 observations: between September, 2015 to January, 2016</p> <p>Marie – 2 observations: between November, 2015 to January, 2016</p>

					Tara – 4 observations: between January, 2016 to June, 2016
Document analysis – collected over the course of the quarter – 255 pages of course outlines, handouts, Power point lessons, assignments , and tests	Collection of course outlines, information handouts, digital presentation tool documents, writing assignments and rubrics, and tests Supplementary information to the interviews	Documentation of context	Used in conjunction with classroom observations – may miss full context	Literacy constructs Validity constructs Evidence of tensionality and strategies to “indwelling” or coping	Ongoing
Focus Group Discussion – recorded through note-taking – there were three pages of notes – the duration of the focus group was one hour in length	An opportunity to address common themes and reoccurring questions	Common themes identified Personal opinions Opportunity for reflection	Less directed once theme of discussion is established so conversations might go in different directions than planned	Possible themes: approaches to inquiry or project-based learning, adherence and implementation of the philosophies behind High School Redesign, literacy constructs, pedagogical issues, formative and summative assessment tools, and opinions and attitudes toward the ELA 30-1 diploma exam	One focus group discussion at the end of study in April, 2016

				Evidence of tensionality and strategies to “indwelling” or coping	
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Data analysis. Interview sessions and the focus group discussion were recorded via note-taking and analyzed for identification of themes immediately after each conversation/ discussion had occurred. Once this process had occurred, participants were kept informed of the data that had been recorded via note-taking. Because it was important to protect the integrity of the participant, each teacher had the opportunity to alter, modify or remove any of the comments he or she had contributed to the conversations, any documents that were collected, as well as any information that had been recorded by the researcher during classroom observations. It was crucial for participants to sign off on how the data had been recorded, processed and used because doing so was a validation of the methodology. Moreover, to ensure that the situational contexts (interviews, focus group discussion, and observations) were narrated appropriately so as to be applied as useful data, a personal research journal was also kept to in order organize details such as date, time, place, setting, conditions, circumstances, etc. of the interview sessions and the focus group discussion. As a way of staying on top of the data, profile pages were created for each of the participants involved in the study, ensuring that the right information was associated to the right participant. Because of the multiple methods of data collection, I planned on and used multiple manual rounds of coding to identify codes,

then categories (and sub-categories (if they existed), then, finally, themes or concepts (Saldana, 2009).

Prior to coding, as data came in, I took the opportunity to “pre-code” by circling, highlighting, and coloring areas in the data that stood out to me (as these pieces of data could inform the focus of the study) – “those “codable moments worthy of attention” (Boyatzis, 1998, as cited in Saldana, 2009, p. 16). After that, using a preliminary jottings method (Saldana, 2009) – where I wrote any preliminary words or phrases for codes on my field notes, compilation of interviews, and handouts - I identified possible ideas for analytic consideration while the study was in progress (Saldana, 2009). I made notes in the margins of the data collected. These initial jottings from the raw data, allowed me to identify possible preliminary codes, and then larger or more frequent codes that became final codes, and eventually themes, such as facets or constructs of literacy, focus on inquiry, alignment with *Foundational Guiding Principles of High School Redesign* (2013), reasons for compliance to the constructs of the Alberta diploma exam and, most significant to this study, methods or strategies of working within the tensions that might exist between a teacher’s professional judgments and standardized testing. It was pertinent that I identified relationships among each teacher’s responses (variables) and compared and contrasted these responses in order to identify any other outcomes and, thus, I believed that the focus discussion groups would lend themselves to my primary source of data analysis.

From final codes, where certain words were identified as important to the analysis, major themes were derived. Miscellaneous codes (codes that cropped up and

were jotted down, but occurred less frequently) from the raw data, such as challenges of teaching English Language Arts 30-1 and of preparing students for the diploma exam, attitudes toward the diploma exam, and any personal and contextual features and ideologies identified by the teachers that impact their teaching, fears about not having students perform well on a standardized test and where these fears are coming from, and concerns about aspects of High School Redesign and/or inquiry were then combed through in another round of coding for any noticeable patterns or protruding themes. I continued this repetitive and meticulous process over again – manual pre-coding using preliminary jottings of any new raw data, identification of codes (both reoccurring and new) – until aforementioned themes were established.

Qualitative research recognizes that one cannot separate the researcher from the research so it is critical that the data was handled without any presupposed outcomes. Thus, I consulted an external reviewer, Dr. David Slomp, the supervisor of my study, to evaluate coding decisions. In taking this approach, I acknowledged the potential for biases in the collecting, processing and analyzing of data. Dr. Slomp's input helped to validate my coding decisions and direction I would take to further my analysis. Once I had identified or coded for major codes, and possible sub-codes, I structured my interpretation of the results into key themes

One of the recommendations made by committee members, after some coding had been done and themes became more prevalent, was to look at what each participant was individually contributing to the overall purpose of the study, before comparing and/or contrasting themes across the board. Thus, to keep the integrity of each participant and his or her ideas and the findings within each, I treated them as

individual case studies before delving into what my findings were among all three. As mentioned in the methodology section, what began as a school case study about approaches to inquiry learning and approaches to teaching to the test, became a more thorough individual case study about how teachers navigated any tensions that might exist between inquiry learning and standardized testing *before* coming back to the larger context.

Presenting the Case Studies Profiles

With a vast amount of data collected over the duration of one school year, from three individual case study profiles in the form of individual interviews, six three-hour classroom observations, and classroom documents, handouts, assignments, and tests, it was important to identify the emergent themes coming from each profile and question what I was seeing in each case. Moreover, it was crucial to isolate the cases and question what I would look for, as compared to the other two before questioning what I was noticing across all of them, for the following reasons:

- to provide a clear representation of each case;
- to respect the integrity of the information provided by each case; and
- to ensure that all emergent themes were being identified and not overlooked.

Additionally, by focusing on each of the case study profiles independent of each other, I was able to hone in on the proposed foci of the study, which were:

- pedagogical approaches in general,
- concepts of and approaches to literacy and writing (literacy constructs),
- approaches to inquiry or project-based learning,
- concepts of and approaches to assessment and specific assessment tools,

- evidence of tensionality,
- strategies for indwelling or coping with tensionality,
- approaches to teaching in preparation for the diploma exam (validity constructs),
- personal philosophies/ beliefs,
- evidence of guiding Foundational Principles of High School Redesign, and
- physical impact on pedagogical choices (ie: Campus East and Campus West).

This list guided my analysis of each individual case study.

Use of different data sets. I must clarify that although the data sets – individual interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis– were all coded, analyzed, and used to support each individual case study, there were specific data sets that are more prominently focused upon in the *writing* of the case study profiles. After presenting the case study of the dual-campus school to set the larger context, I will present each case study profile context. While the variety of data sets are applied in each case study profile, I have chosen to focus on a “main” data set for each, which might appear inconsistent between the profiles, but serves to highlight main ideas evident in each. This use of focusing on different data sets for each profile is consistent with the fact that “some codes may appear more frequently in selected types of data than others” (Saldana, 2009, p. 18) during analysis and while contrasting multiple participants. The following table (Table 5) shows the order of appearance of data sets presented in each profile, with 1 indicating the first and 3 indicating the last. It is also noted here that the focus group discussion was not referenced specifically in

any one of the individual case studies but, instead, was utilized as a culminating activity to provide the participants with a platform to express any final thoughts.

Table 5

Order of Data Sets Presented in Each Case Study Profile

	Marie	Tara	Mark
Individual Interviews	3	1	1
Classroom Observations	2	3	2
Documents	1	2	3
Focus Group Discussion	Not presented in case study profile	Not presented in case study profile	Not presented in case study profile

School context: the dual-campus school. At this point, I think it is important to review the context within which the three case study profiles are situated (characteristics of each campus are outlined in Table 2). The school that is the stage of this study is a large centrally-located high school in the separate system within the city that provides instruction from grade 10 to grade 12. It is unique in that it runs two campuses/ buildings but is, indeed, one school – one campus on the west side of the city and the other campus on the south side of the city (although the campus is referred to as “Campus East”), delivers classes on the Copernican or quarter system (of which there are few in Alberta), and is one of the first schools to be selected for the *High School Redesign Pilot Project* (now known as *Moving Forward With High School Redesign*). Because it is the only catholic high school in the city, it must offer **all** of the courses and programs (curricular and co-curricular) that the public high schools offer, including an Honors and Enrichment program, a French Immersion program and other language courses, a Grad Coach program, an Off-Campus and

Registered Apprenticeship Program, an Outreach Centre for alternative learning, a Knowledge and Employability/ High School Certificate of Completion program, a full offering of fine arts programming, and, multiple athletic teams.

A historical background of how the dual-campus concept came to be, its implementation, and philosophy provides further contextual information for the study. More than ten years ago, the city where the dual-campus is located experienced a growth in population, specifically on the west side. As such, it was announced that two new high schools, one public and one separate, would be built. There already existed one separate high school on the south side and the principal, at the time, suggested to the board that it would be best to keep the school as one but over two buildings (dual-campus) to better serve students within the separate school division. Students would have better access to a variety of programs (as the two buildings would each provide all the core courses plus courses specific to its facility like a theatre on Campus East to offer a drama program, and a Pre-Engineering lab on Campus West to offer a Pre-Engineering program). Students would, thus, also have greater diversity of programming choices offered by the two campuses. Additionally, keeping the school together as one (as opposed to becoming two, smaller catholic high schools) would support stronger athletic and fine arts programs as there would be a larger student population to serve. After much researching and visiting of new schools in Southern Alberta, the concept of a dual-campus became reality. However, there were many challenges like transportation, scheduling (both teacher and student timetables), bell times, communication, and teacher collaboration (or the lack thereof). Furthermore, students were not too keen on traveling across the city to the

west side to attend class while their friends were on the south side (or east side). So, something had to be established to draw students to Campus West and that is when the identity for it was created; it became The Centre for Innovation and Inquiry. This identity also changed how the school approached enrichment programming as it moved away from an Advanced Placement (AP) program (which was only delivered in name and not through the actual AP curriculum outcomes) to an Honors and Enrichment program (which enhances and supplements the current Alberta curriculum offered in the Program of Studies). It also provided a new series of courses to be offered on Campus West, which would be enticing to students.

The student body of both campuses consists of approximately 867 students served by 43 teachers and 17 support staff over three separate buildings – Campus East, Campus West, and the Outreach Centre. Each campus has its own identity. Campus East is the bigger, older campus that focuses on fine arts while offering the full gamete of courses. It was first established 50 years ago and houses about 2/3 of the school's student population, as well as a fully-operational theatre for performing arts with technical equipment that allows students to experience theatre beyond a typical high school level, and specialized rooms for music and art. Campus West, also known as the Centre for Innovation and Inquiry is seven years old and houses 1/3 of the school's student population, as well as a high-tech CTS lab facility with a focus on pre-engineering and robotics and a collaborative science lab. Both buildings are well-maintained and welcoming and the staff frequently exchange professional and personal information in the staffroom and hallways. The philosophy of the school is

extended over both campuses as there is an emphasis on “Rigor, Relevance, and Relationships” and the four pillars of faith, academics, fine arts, and athletics.

Knowing the context of the dual-campus sets the background, the landscape, of inquiry-based learning and *Moving Forward With High School Redesign*, which is crucial to *understanding* the individual case studies that exist within.

Case study profile context: Marie. Marie has been teaching for 36 years, a couple of years before the implementation of the diploma exam. She began her teaching career as a junior high English Language Arts teacher and then went on to teach high school English, where she has been for 27 years. Fifteen years ago, Marie became the associate principal and then, four years ago, became principal, all at the same school. Because of the demands of her administrative duties, but her conviction to remain connected to the grassroots of the classroom, Marie began team-teaching with other English Language Arts’ teachers, including the researcher of this study, who also has administrative duties as the associate principal. When Marie was a full-time English Language Arts teacher, she felt the importance of attending the semesterly English 30-1 and 30-2 marking sessions (in January and in June) for Alberta Education. but as the years have passed and Marie’s administrative responsibilities and teaching mastery have grown, Marie has been less inclined to attend. Marie has a master of education degree and has been integral to both the conceptualization of a dual-campus model and the implementation of *Moving Forward With High School Redesign’s* Foundational Principles. She has a keen interest in diversifying instructional and learning strategies, strategies that are rooted in brain research.

One way that Marie stays “connected” to the classroom is that she assigns herself an English Language Arts 30-1 class, usually in the second quarter (which runs November to January) on Campus East. As previously stated, she team-teaches with me. A quarter is approximately 40 teaching days long or about nine weeks; therefore, Marie and I divide the quarter into 20 days each or about four weeks each. There are also days that both of us are in the classroom at the same time or for part of the time because of overlapping content or content that we both wanted to place emphasis on and activities structured around both teachers being present; it should be noted here that both teachers were present during “diploma exam prep” days when specific instruction was given about Part A or Part B of the exam.

Classes on the quarter system are about three hours long with a 10-minute break built in. One important piece to note is that Marie, as the principal of the school, places emphasis on teacher professional development focusing on strategies to engage students in their learning, brain-based teaching, team-building, critical thinking and questioning, and assessment. Every Professional Development Day is anchored in the Foundational Principles of *Moving Forward With High School Redesign* or the school motto and focus of “Rigor, Relevance, Relationships.” Teams of teachers and administrators are encouraged, by Marie, to attend annual, well-known conferences in these focus areas and are expected to present their findings to the staff. The school is known for its focus on professional development and, as a result, innovative strategies within the division and across the province. With this in mind, a three-hour class would not be a three-hour “stand and deliver” class where students are disengaged and off-task. Marie emboldens teachers to implement a

variety of strategies to make the content rigorous and relevant to student learning after every Professional Development Day. Marie and her administrative team, who have a large role to play in the mindset and direction of the staff when it comes to innovative approaches to teaching and assessment model a variety of learning strategies. They model what it looks like to move away from the “stand-and-deliver” and “teaching-to-the-test” approach and provide example of various approaches to literacy or inquiry-based learning. Teachers, then, return to their classes, try out said techniques and strategies (if applicable), and come back to the next professional learning opportunity with feedback. Finally, teachers share what did or did not work, as well as what modifications they made to the strategy to fit their context.

One of the first documents that Marie distributes to her class is the course outline with a quarter calendar. The description of “what English 30-1 is all about” is as follows:

English 30-1 is an advanced level course, involving in-depth analysis of a range of literary forms. Although some emphasis will be placed on comprehension and skill development, it is assumed that these concepts have been acquired in English 10-1 and 20-1. The focus on English 30-1 is on appreciating the ideas presented in literature and discussing and writing about these ideas. Through literature study, we will examine the complexity of human experience, and the methods writers use to communicate insights about human nature and the human condition. This course is designed to present a challenge to students through enriched literary works, independent thought, group and peer collaboration, and self-directed learning.

There is no mention in this description of the diploma exam or how important it is to prepare students for it. Instead, focus is placed on cultivating an appreciation of literature, understanding the writing process, and sharpening inquiry-based skills like

independent thought, group, and peer collaboration, and self-directed learning.

Marie's pedagogical choice to set the tone of innovation and inquiry is further seen in the week's schedule which typically looks like this: Monday to Thursday, which consists of course content, which is varied depending on the unit of study; and Friday (or Flex Friday), which is used for a variety of purposes, such as vocabulary enhancement, Readers' Circle discussions and online blogging on Moodle, commonplace book work, and writing revisions. Flex Fridays allow students the time and room to develop their skills in self-directed and project-based learning. In terms of reference to the diploma exam on the course outline, this is found under the heading "How I will be evaluated?", which outlines each of the components of assessment.

Compositions and Major Projects/Assignments (50%)

- We will assign a variety of written responses over the duration of this course. They will be a mixture of Personal Response to Texts (diploma exam-prep), Critical/ Analytical Response to Literary Texts (diploma exam-prep), and a mixture of narrative, expository, and persuasive writing. You will also complete one full practice Part A. PLEASE NOTE: students will have opportunities to re-write any and/or all pieces of writing throughout the quarter so that they understand the writing process and not just focus on producing a product.
- The commonplace book assignment and Readers' Circle are included in this category.

Unit Tests (30%) – 3 units

- Unit tests will be subjective and objective – application (short and long answer) and reading comprehension.
- Each test is worth 10% each.

Assignments, Vocabulary, and Quizzes (10%)

- This includes vocabulary study and enhancement, vertical line-notes, daily assignments, response questions, group work, quizzes, etc.

Term Work = 70%

Diploma Exam = 30%

*NOTE: Daily exercises in Life-Writing (journal writing) will NOT be assessed by the teacher. Life-writing is meant to help you record memories and experiences, come to decisions or conclusions, make connections to literature, and experiment with different genres and styles. The main goal is for you to hone your writing skills while developing a strong sense of your "voice",

without the pressure of being assessed or creating a final product. It is about writing for the purpose of writing.

Even within this section of the course outline, it is significant to note that Marie provides a balance between the reality of diploma exam preparation (like the 50% weighting of compositions, focus on the two types of writing students will encounter on the exam, inclusion of a reading comprehension component on unit tests, and attention to vocabulary) and personal philosophies and focus on student learning (like exposure to other genres of writing, opportunities for rewrites, the creation of the commonplace book and a Readers' Circle, inclusion of short and long answer questions on unit tests, and diverse methods of assessment). Thus, the impression of balance is an emergent theme from Marie's approaches to preparing students for the diploma exam while ensuring that students understand the importance of writing beyond the diploma exam and for life.

This feeling of equilibrium or "indwelling aright" (Aoki, 1986/1991, p. 162) was also evidenced in the two classroom observations I conducted of Marie's class. I specifically chose to observe a class that appeared to be less diploma exam-specific, focusing on media literacy and film study and one that focused on "How to Write a Personal Response", which was seemingly more diploma exam-specific. The following table has allowed me to focus my attention on specific themes of this research study and whether there were varying approaches evident between the two lessons in observation.

Table 6

Observations of Marie's Two Lessons

Themes of research study evident in observation	Media Literacy and Film Study	How to Write a Personal Response
Pedagogical Approaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasis is on images, messages being conveyed or promoted and societal ideologies and expectations. • Focus on techniques used by text creator, such as color, shape, line, light, composition, camera angle, and camera techniques. • Analysis of values, lifestyles, and points of view represented in the images. • Provide context for students of what is media, what is visual literacy and why it is important to understand how to read an image. • Introduce key cinematographic elements and terminology. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Review context of diploma exam and expectations of a Personal Response to Texts <input type="checkbox"/> Outlined steps one can take when tasked with this assignment <input type="checkbox"/> Used the metaphor of “building a hamburger” and the MEAL acronym <input type="checkbox"/> Encouraged students to play with voice and explore different prose forms such as personal narrative, short story, different types of essays, speech, letter, diary/journal, blog, one-act play, article, editorial, screenplay, memoir, rant, stream-of-consciousness or internal monologue, fable, fairy-tale, and parable <input type="checkbox"/> Emphasized that there is not one, formulaic way to write
Literacy Constructs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical thinking • Using multimodal pathways • Reading the world in a variety of contexts • Engaging with authentic texts • Tapping into prior knowledge, personal stories, and experiences • Making connections • Understanding media and digital literacy • Utilizing multiliteracies • Authentic learning • Appreciating literary texts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Critical thinking <input type="checkbox"/> Communicating effectively <input type="checkbox"/> Reading the world in a variety of contexts <input type="checkbox"/> Engaging with authentic texts <input type="checkbox"/> Tapping into prior knowledge, personal stories, and experiences <input type="checkbox"/> Making connections <input type="checkbox"/> Reading <input type="checkbox"/> Writing <input type="checkbox"/> Appreciating literary texts <input type="checkbox"/> Creating texts
Inquiry Learning	Yes	No
Types of Assessment	Life-writing Think-Pair-Share Paired analysis of ad Group discussion of findings Previous knowledge Turn and Talk Group work deconstruction Application to film	Whiteboard activity Individual analysis of texts Group analysis of texts Previous knowledge Carousel activity Personal response writing

	Exit slips	
Reference to the Diploma Exam	Yes, mentioned that it is acceptable to write on film as a literary text for the Critical Response, so it is important to analyze film much like we analyze written text.	Yes, the whole lesson was constructed because of the type of writing expected of the student on Part A, Assignment I on the diploma exam.
Evidence of Tensionality	No.	Yes, this was a lesson to “pay attention to” as students needed the information for the diploma exam. However, there was also reference to the importance of responding personally to texts and making connections to literature beyond the diploma exam.

Although it was obvious that the media literacy lesson was less focused on diploma exam preparation and the “How to Write a Personal Response” lesson was more deliberately geared toward diploma exam preparation and driven by the diploma exam, it is important to note that Marie navigated both without teaching directly to the test and found ways – through her pedagogical choices, diverse knowledge of literacy constructs, and multiple assessment strategies – to blend the two so that the lessons being learned were essential for *both* the diploma exam *and* for life. Now, if we are truly looking for avoidance of the narrowing of curriculum and teaching to test, the question that still remains here is: if the personal response was not a diploma exam question, would Marie still teach it? Or would this assignment be substituted by something very much like it or very much unlike it?

In Marie’s interview notes, submitted to me in writing in March 2016, as Marie preferred to write out her responses to the questions posed rather than set aside a time for a face-to-face interview, one can deduce that Marie’s literacy construct goes beyond the definition of “the ability to read and write” toward a broader definition of “interpret[ing] visual and written language of a particular form, [which] includes the ability to deconstruct the writing or visual to determine meaning, and an

understanding of nuances of language and figurative expressions” (personal communication, April 5, 2016). This definition echoes Parsons & Beauchamp’s definition of “reading [and understanding] the world in a variety of contexts” (2012, p. 2) and aligns with critical literacy (Larson & March, 2005), new literacies (Gee, 1996; 2001; Gee et al., 1996), and multiliteracy (New London Group, 1996) frameworks. Furthermore, she recognizes that she has “adapted [her] evaluation practices to align more with the Principles [of High School Redesign], including allowing students more opportunities to make up and redo assignments as [she] has a much more aware and broader knowledge of formative assessment.” She also admits that her “[teaching] has become much more student and project-driven, with much more cooperative learning” and that she does “much less “teacher-talk” and expects students to generate questions, to seek answers and to drive the learning process.” She even questions the validity of the diploma exam and explains how she navigates through the tensionality:

My concern with the diploma exam as it currently stands is that I really don’t know what the purpose is anymore. Is it to provide a common benchmark for all Alberta students? My experience with marking [diploma exams] tells me that this is no longer realistic as it is apparent that teachers are teaching directly to the exam. As a result, it’s really a test of how well teachers can coach students for a particular approach. There is more and more evidence of “canned” responses that are simply tweaked to fit the particular topic. There is also the question, as always of validity of marking. As a result, we tend to ensure that “familiar” literature is taught so that should a student use something “unfamiliar” on the exam, he or she will not run the risk of being marked more harshly – or more conservatively as a result. Why does the multiple-choice portion even exist? What are we testing? How does this fit with 21st Century learning or the focus on students demonstrating learning through a variety of methods? ... It all comes down to this. Why are we testing? Do the universities want this kind of common ground? Is it a way to “test” teachers? Is it way to ensure standards are being met? The more I teach, the less I see evaluation as a key part of the learning process (not to be confused with assessment – which IS a key aspect of the learning process). At the end of the day, evaluation is all about reporting to someone. I’m just not sure what the point of the diploma exam reports are anymore [so] I remind myself that the diploma exam is not, in my opinion, a valid assessment of my work as a teacher nor my student’s learning. It is a one-shot, standardized reporting tool that, in my opinion, is outdated and anachronistic. I ensure that my students are prepared, by providing them with tasks that are directed toward

doing well on the exam while at the same time giving them a true literary experience (such as the commonplace book). Since I really do view the test [diploma exam] as a “hoop to jump through” I don’t allow it to create too much stress for me.

Quite evidently, Marie’s ability to work between the tensions of teaching to the test or teaching the curriculum-as-planned (Aoki, 1986/1991) and being innovative and promoting inquiry-based learning, without stress or concern about how her students will perform on the diploma exam, comes with years of experience and exposure to a wide variety of tools (sound pedagogical approaches and teaching and assessment strategies). Also, it is defined through Marie’s case study profile that the more willing one is to recognize the English 30-1 diploma exam for what it is – “a one-shot, standardized reporting tool” – and venture beyond the secure shores of large-scale provincial testing, while opening him/herself up to the possibilities of the ample, innovative waters that allow students to understand the richness of the writing process and literary connections, the less tension there is.

Case study profile context: Tara. Tara started her teaching career in September 2002, in a high school located in a city in southeast Alberta for one year, before moving to Lethbridge to teach at a local public high school for one year and then coming to the school of this study in the fall of 2004. She completed a five-year combined Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Education degree, majoring in English Language Arts. At the time of data collection, Tara was contemplating a Master’s program but had not yet decided on which one to pursue. For the past 13 years, Tara has only taught English Language Arts at all grade levels and streams, with the exception of the English -4 stream (Knowledge & Employability course) and the English Language Learner courses. Being an avid writer who has published some of her own work on a personal blog, Tara initiated a school-blog – a digital school

newspaper of sorts – where students who are interested in honing their own writing skills could do so while receiving feedback and guidance from Tara. Most recently, Tara started a High School Book Club wherein fellow educators are brought together for one-hour recorded episodes, which are then published on iTunes and on social media as a podcast, to talk about literary print and non-print texts (like Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* (1949), Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1982), and Peter Weir’s *Dead Poets Society* (1989), to name a few). It should be noted that Tara has a passion for life-writing and places a great deal of emphasis on modelling the importance of regular, daily journaling/ blogging to her students and colleagues. Conversely, it should be noted that Tara ensures that she is part of the semesterly diploma exam marking sessions for Alberta Education. With these two points in mind, Tara presents insight as to why a tension might exist between personal teaching beliefs and the diploma exam: personal preferences and choices to teach or not teach to the test.

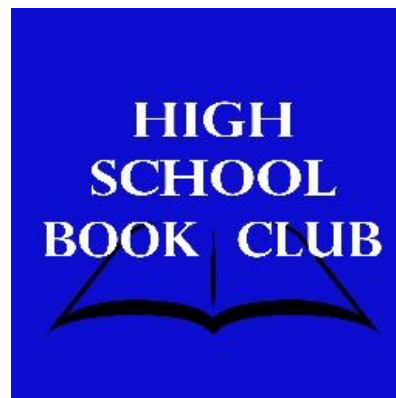


Figure 4, 5, & 6. Student-blog graphic, page one of Tara's new journal, and the High School Book Club pod-cast graphic. All of these images reflect Tara's interests in the writing process (her own and her students') and in sharing thoughts on literary works.

In one of Tara's roles as lead teacher of the English Department, which consists of three full-time English Language Arts teachers, two part-time English Language Arts teachers (one also teaches drama, while the other also teaches new media), and two administrators who team-teach one English 30-1 course (Marie and the researcher of this study). A lead teacher is voted upon by each department and is usually a more-experienced teacher who draws upon his or her teaching experience to serve as expert resources, mentors or counselors for new and developing teachers. Amongst a variety of duties such as ensuring that inventory is taken and books are available and attending lead teacher meetings and reporting back to the department, the lead teacher must ensure that the vision of the department is in alignment with the vision of the school. Tara's English Department meetings are collaborative, collegial, and productive, wherein teachers receive important information from administration and other departments, while also addressing challenges or concerns, sharing teaching strategies, and developing their own goals. Naturally, Tara's personal points of focus and expertise – innovative writing strategies and inquiry-learning and knowledge of the diploma exam – influence the attitude of the teachers in the department to value *both*. It seems that the more immersed, engaged or exposed a teacher is to both mindsets of preparing students for the diploma exam and emphasizing, appreciating,

and modelling writing for life, the easier it becomes to cut through the tension that these opposing swells create.

In an interview with Tara at the end of April 2016, when asked the question, “What, if any, impact has the Alberta English 30-1 diploma exam had on the way you teach?”, Tara reflects a value placed on the diploma exam:

It shapes the way I teach. I have internalized the 5-scale grading schema (used on the written diploma exam) and use it as my “go-to” rubric for various assignments and tests, including other types of written response, representation projects, etc. I alter the wording in the categories to better fit the context of a specific assignment. Virtually all of my writing **instruction** is within the lens of the two assignments that are on the diploma exam. If the whole exam were suddenly removed from our reality, I would feel lost. What sort of expectation for skill/ competency building do we have for our students if there is no standard? Having totally free choice in course objectives and text is, ironically, paralyzing. I would freeze in “what to teach” if the choice was wide open. The exam at least provides a framework of the skills (and the degrees of competency within those skills) for me and the students to work with.

Here, it is clear that although Tara places personal worth on writing for the sake of writing and engaging in the writing process, she also adheres to the rubric provided by Alberta Education as a valid form of assessment that guides her instruction and provides a framework for her to teach within. While she credits this assessment tool as being valuable, in the same interview, however, Tara expresses concern that “our chosen method of measurement is not accurate, fair, or comprehensive” and “stifles creative thinking” as the focus is about the product. It is evident from Tara’s statements that there is a real sense of confusion, as she views the rubrics as “valid” but, at the same time “not accurate, fair, or comprehensive.”

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**English Language Arts 30-1 Personal Response to Texts Assignment
Scoring Categories and Scoring Criteria for 2015-2016**

FOCUS	IDEAS AND IMPRESSIONS	PRESENTATION
	When marking Ideas and Impressions, the marker should consider the quality of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the student's exploration of the topic in relation to the prompting text(s) the student's ideas and reflection support in relation to the student's ideas and impressions 	When marking Presentation, the marker should consider the effectiveness of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> voice in relation to the context created by the student in the chosen prose form stylistic choices (including quality and correctness of language and expression) and the student's creation of tone the student's development of a unifying and/or aesthetic effect Consider the complexity of the response in terms of its context and length.
Excellent E	The student's exploration of the topic is insightful. Perceptions and/or ideas are confident and discerning. Support is precise and aptly reinforces the student's ideas and impressions.	The voice created by the student is convincing. Stylistic choices are precise and the student's creation of tone is adept. The unifying and/or aesthetic effect is skillfully developed.
Proficient Pf	The student's exploration of the topic is purposeful. Perceptions and/or ideas are thoughtful and considered. Support is specific and strengthens the student's ideas and impressions.	The voice created by the student is distinct. Stylistic choices are specific and the student's creation of tone is competent. The unifying and/or aesthetic effect is capably developed.
Satisfactory S	The student's exploration of the topic is generalized. Perceptions and/or ideas are straightforward and relevant. Support is adequate and clarifies the student's ideas and impressions.	The voice created by the student is apparent. Stylistic choices are adequate and the student's creation of tone is conventional. The unifying and/or aesthetic effect is appropriately developed.
Limited L	The student's exploration of the topic is vague. Perceptions and/or ideas are superficial and/or ambiguous. Support is imprecise and/or ineffectively related to the student's ideas and impressions.	The voice created by the student is unsteady. Stylistic choices are imprecise and the student's creation of tone is inconsistent. The unifying and/or aesthetic effect is inadequately developed.
Poor P	The student's exploration of the topic is minimal. Perceptions and/or ideas are undeveloped and/or irrelevant. Support is lacking and/or unrelated to the student's ideas and impressions.	The voice created by the student is confused. Stylistic choices impede communication and the student's creation of tone is ineffective. A unifying and/or aesthetic effect is haphazard or obscure.
Insufficient INS	Insufficient is a special category. It is not an indicator of quality. Assign insufficient when: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the student has responded using a form other than prose OR the student has written so little that it is not possible to assess Ideas and Impressions OR there is no evidence that the topic presented in the assignment has been addressed OR there is no connection between the text(s) provided in the assignment and the student's response OR there is no evidence of an attempt to fulfil the task presented in the assignment. 	
Cross-Reference to the Program of Studies for Senior High School English Language Arts	2.1 2.2 2.3 4.1	3.1 3.2 4.1 4.2

September 1, 2015

Figure 7. English Language Arts 30-1 rubrics. The Personal Response to Texts Assignment Scoring Categories and Scoring Criteria.

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**English Language Arts 30-1 Critical/Analytical Response to Literary Texts Assignment
Scoring Categories and Scoring Criteria for 2015-2016**

FOCUS	THOUGHT AND UNDERSTANDING	SUPPORTING EVIDENCE	FORM AND STRUCTURE	MATTERS OF CHOICE	MATTERS OF CORRECTNESS
	When marking Thought and Understanding, the marker should consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> how effectively the student's ideas relate to the assignment the quality of the literary interpretations or other understandings of the text related to the topic 	When marking Supporting Evidence, the marker should consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the selection and quality of evidence how well the supporting evidence is employed, developed, and synthesized to support the student's ideas 	When marking Form and Structure, the marker should consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the manner in which the student's knowledge, attitudes, or values are linked to the discussion or response to the assignment the use of a unifying effect to a compelling idea or viewpoint and its development 	When marking Matters of Choice, the marker should consider how effectively the student's choices enhance communication. The marker should consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> style choice of stylistic structures (such as parallelism, balance, metaphor) the extent to which stylistic choices contribute to the creation of a voice 	When marking Matters of Correctness, the marker should consider the correctness of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> sentence construction (completeness, consistency, punctuation, cohesion) usage (correct use of words according to context and meaning) grammar (word inflections, agreement, tense, pronoun reference, consistency of tense) mechanics (punctuation, spelling, capitalization) Consider the proportion of error in terms of the complexity and length of the response.
Excellent E	Ideas are insightful and carefully considered, demonstrating a comprehensive understanding of the literary text(s) and the topic. Literary interpretations are perceptive and convincing.	Support is precise, and aptly chosen to reinforce the student's ideas in a compelling way. A solid connection to the student's ideas is effectively maintained.	A judicious arrangement of ideas and details contributes to a compelling discussion that is developed logically. The unifying effect of controlling ideas is effectively presented and maintained.	Diction is precise. Stylistic structures are effective and sometimes original. Stylistic choices contribute to the creation of a vivid comparison with a compelling voice.	The writing demonstrates confident control of correct sentence construction, usage, grammar, and mechanics. The relative magnitude of error is negligible considering the complexity of the response and the circumstances.
Proficient Pf	Ideas are thoughtful and considered, demonstrating a competent understanding of the literary text(s) and the topic. Literary interpretations are convincing and credible.	Support is specific, and aptly chosen to reinforce the student's ideas in a credible way. A solid connection to the student's ideas is logically maintained.	A deliberate arrangement of ideas and details contributes to a credible discussion that is developed logically. The unifying effect of controlling ideas is competently presented and maintained.	Diction is specific. Stylistic structures are generally effective. Stylistic choices contribute to the creation of a considered comparison with a credible voice.	The writing demonstrates competent control of correct sentence construction, usage, grammar, and mechanics. Minor errors in complete language structures are understandable considering the circumstances.
Satisfactory S	Ideas are relevant and straightforward, demonstrating a generalized understanding of the literary text(s) and the topic. Literary interpretations are general but plausible.	Support is general, adequate, and appropriately chosen to reinforce the student's ideas in an acceptable way, but occasionally fails to present evidence. A descriptive connection to the student's ideas is subtly maintained.	A straightforward arrangement of ideas and details provides direction for the discussion but is developed superficially. The unifying effect of controlling ideas is generally presented and maintained, however, coherence may falter.	Diction is adequate. Stylistic structures are straightforward, but attempts at complex structures may be awkward. Stylistic choices contribute to the creation of a conventional comparison with an appropriate voice.	The writing demonstrates limited control of correct sentence construction, usage, grammar, and mechanics. There may be occasional errors in control and minor errors, however, the communication remains clear.
Limited L	Ideas are superficial or unconvincing, demonstrating a weak comprehension of the literary text(s) and the topic. Literary interpretations are incomplete and/or flawed.	Support is inadequate, inaccurate, largely a restatement of what was read, and/or inappropriately chosen in relation to the student's ideas and their facts presentation. A weak connection to the student's ideas is maintained.	A disoriented but superficial arrangement of ideas and details provides some direction for the discussion that is underdeveloped. A unifying effect of controlling ideas is incoherently presented.	Diction is imprecise and/or inappropriate. Stylistic structures are frequently awkward and/or ineffective. Inadequate stylistic choices contribute to the creation of a vague comparison with an unconvincing voice.	The writing demonstrates limited control of correct sentence construction, usage, grammar, and mechanics. The range of errors hinders the clarity of communication.
Poor P	Ideas are largely absent or irrelevant, and/or do not develop the topic. Little comprehension of the literary text(s) is demonstrated.	Support is irrelevant, unorganized, lacks variety, and/or is placed, false, or no connection to the student's ideas is evident.	A haphazard arrangement of ideas and details provides little or no direction for the discussion, and development is lacking or obscure. A unifying effect of controlling ideas is absent.	Diction is ungeneralized and/or inaccurate. Stylistic structures are unconvincing or unhelpful. A lack of language choices contributes to the creation of a confused comparison with an ineffective voice.	The writing demonstrates lack of control of correct sentence construction, usage, grammar, and mechanics. Frequent errors hinder communication.
Insufficient INS	Insufficient is a special category. It is not an indicator of quality. Assign insufficient when: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the student has written so little that it is not possible to assess Thought and Understanding and/or Supporting Evidence OR no reference has been made to literature studied OR the only literary reference present is to the text(s) provided in the first assignment OR there is no evidence of an attempt to fulfil the task presented in the assignment. 				
Cross-Reference to the Program of Studies for Senior High School English Language Arts	2.1 2.2 4.1 4.2	2.2 3.1 4.1 4.2	2.2 3.1 4.1 4.2	4.2	4.2

September 1, 2015

Figure 8. English Language Arts 30-1 rubrics. The Critical/ Analytical Response to Literary Texts Assignment Scoring Categories and Scoring Criteria.

Tara recognizes that there are undoubtedly tensions that exist in her approaches to teaching because of what she knows to be good, innovative practice – such as engaging in critical thinking, questioning, and reflecting, cultivating creative-thought, and promoting diversity – and what she knows about the expectations placed on students on the diploma exam – comprehending meaning, evaluating usage of rhetorical devices, and producing written texts in three major forms (personal, creative, or analytical). The logical question to ask at this point is: what coping mechanisms or strategies does Tara utilize to deal with or dwell within this tensionality?

First, teacher mindset and setting a tone of an awareness of the diploma exam, but not as THE focus, plays a huge role in identifying the tension between the shore and the waves. This is a difficult state to be in, especially if one has internalized and adheres to the 5-point marking scale. In the following statement, it is evident that Tara tries not to inflate the test’s “importance”, and focuses less on individual student performance and more on addressing areas that require more attention in general.

We do our classroom work, I prepare the kids for the construct and expectations of the standards on the exam, but my attitude about the exam in the classroom, is more of a “relaxed realism.” I think if I model this sort of, “I want you to do well, but this isn’t the be-all and end-all of things” attitude, the kids may relax as well. And if they’re more relaxed and not too hard on themselves, they will most likely do their best, and that’s all we can ask of them...I have put less pressure on myself [and] in the classroom, we are spending more time writing for thinking, for fun and for experimentation, and less time on timed, practice compositions.

However, despite this mindset, hints of the influence of the diploma exam are exposed in a collection of handouts which includes the course calendar, PowerPoint slides with each week’s writing prompts, a Literature Reflection Portfolio/ Collection,

a lesson on opening a Writer’s Workshop, a lesson on major rhetorical modes, a lesson on developing voice, a sample of a unit test, and a few rubrics. Although Tara provides students with many opportunities for inquiry learning through a wide definition of literacy, she still appears bound by the notion of teaching to the test, or at least using the test as the goal she must work toward. In the following table (Table 7), I have outlined each handout, lesson, assignment or test, and have categorized its purpose as “diploma exam-prep” or “innovative/ inquiry-based” or “both” in order to determine which river of thought Tara is most persuaded by, if any.

Table 7

Inventory of Tara’s English 30-1 handouts

Handout Type	Diploma exam-Prep	Innovative/ Inquiry-based	Both
Course calendar			A combination of days set aside for diploma exam type content and writing (6 days) and days set aside for inquiry (5 days)
PowerPoint of Writing Prompts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connection to literature • Specific examples to strengthen ideas • Quotation analysis • Character analysis • Symbol deconstruction 	<input type="checkbox"/> Choose Your Own Adventure <input type="checkbox"/> Vivid description <input type="checkbox"/> Advocate for something <input type="checkbox"/> Persuade and convince <input type="checkbox"/> Creative <input type="checkbox"/> Opinion piece <input type="checkbox"/> Reflective <input type="checkbox"/> Perspective and empathy <input type="checkbox"/> Writing about metaphors <input type="checkbox"/> Emotional response	<input type="checkbox"/> How to write a good short story <input type="checkbox"/> Analytical <input type="checkbox"/> Personal <input type="checkbox"/> Vocabulary enhancement and word etymology <input type="checkbox"/> Narrative
Literature Reflection Collection		To help foster an appreciation for literature we’ve	

		studied this course, you will submit the following four items as a creative, culminating product: 1. Diametric characters 2. No-text text analysis 3. Free Reflection 4. Word Gifter	
Opening Writer's Workshop			Includes writing prompts, lesson on voice, effectiveness of style, attention to syntax and diction
Lesson on Major Rhetorical Modes	Communication with an Audience through: argument, cause-effect, classification, comparison and/or contrast, description, exemplification, narration.		
Introduction to Literary Theory		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formalism • Marxist criticism • Reader Response Theory • Feminist Criticism • Archetypal Criticism 	
King Lear Research Paper	Literary Criticism	Proper MLA citation	
Personal Response to Texts	Two practices		
Critical/Analytical Response to Literary Texts Assignment	One practice		
Part A Practice	One practice		
Short Fiction Test			For each unit test, students would have to respond to long answer questions, along with a reading comprehension selection.

From the table, it can be deduced that Tara does indeed see the “bigger picture” of exposing students to concepts (like those found in the Literature Reflection Collection), genres (seen in the types of literary theories), and expectations beyond the diploma exam (such as proper MLA citation), but, as noted before, allots much time and instruction to laying the groundwork for a solid understanding of the expectations placed on a student during the writing of the diploma exam (Part A, more specifically). In fact, during three separate observations in February, 2016, (I had to conduct three as opposed to the planned two, as my time was cut short in the first observation), I experienced diploma exam Part A preparation for both the “Ideas and Impressions” and “Presentation” categories of the Personal Response to Literary Texts and an introduction to the Critical/ Analytical Response to Texts... with a twist. Through references to relevant scenarios, use of familiar, intriguing, and student-friendly texts, application of engaging teaching strategies like speed dating, mind map activities and placemats, use of exemplars, creation of interesting (and funny) acronyms, and reflection through peer evaluation, Tara was trying not to teach directly to the test, while still adhering to the goal of preparing students for the diploma exam. An example of this is taken from my second observation as Tara leads into a lesson on presentation or positive features of voice:

Tara reading off of a PowerPoint slide:

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.

Tara addressing the class:

I hope this should be familiar to you. This is from First Corinthians, often read at weddings. And what I want you to do is put on your HCTWA (Holy Crap, That Was Amazing) glasses.

You are going to read this again and let the language wash over you. Then consider what sort of “beauty”, if you will, or aesthetic effect that this selection from scripture has.

What makes this beautiful? In terms of language choices, what makes this poetic or beautiful?

This kind of language and use of powerful and captivating texts are typical of Tara’s approaches to preparing students for the diploma exam– subtle, non-intimidating, and accessible to students. And although Tara is, technically, teaching to the test, as “it shapes the way [she teaches]”, her own passion for words and desire for students to savor language shines through and makes these diploma exam-prep classes seem like just another lesson.

While it is apparent that Tara is *trying* to cut through the strong and relentless waves of the diploma exam by making the concept of teaching to the test more personable, it is clear that Tara is reluctant to throw out everything she knows about the English 30-1 diploma exam. And, although, she has found personal nuances and techniques, like humor and use of her own zeal for writing beyond the exam, to steer through and cut through the tensions that exist between the standardized exam and innovative practice, and inquiry-based learning, the exam’s influence is quite prevalent in Tara’s approaches to teaching.

Case study profile context: Mark. Mark was born and raised in the province of Manitoba, where he received his Bachelor of Arts degree in English and history in 1994 and his Bachelor of Education degree in 1996. He started his teaching career in a Kindergarten to grade 12 school (which serves a population of just over 300) in a rural village just outside of Lethbridge in 1998, as junior high and high school English Language Arts teacher, before moving to the dual-campus high school in

2014. Although Mark's first school was in preparations to begin its journey with the Foundational Guiding Principles of *Moving Forward With High School Redesign* in September 2014, Mark felt that he was ready for a change for a variety of reasons, a few of which include: a) he was THE English teacher and, as such, felt isolated in his area of expertise, b) he had around a 30-minute, one-way commute every day, c) the community is heavily Mormon and Mark is not, and d) the right opportunity to apply for another position in a much bigger school in Lethbridge, within the separate school system with, potentially, more chances to collaborate came along. It was providential, then, that three years ago, Mark not only became the newest addition to the English Department of the school in this study but, a year after, he felt comfortable enough with becoming a candidate for me to observe and interview.

Mark admits that it was exciting to finally join a team, as opposed to being the only English Language Arts teacher in the school, but acknowledges that he was "equally terrified" as he understood the expectations in place for innovation and creative thinking. The thought of having "no curriculum police" and the motivation to "do something extra-ordinary" was daunting to start, as Mark was coming from a very different context where there were external factors that seemed to play into a heightened sense of tension. In an interview, Mark touches upon a personal story, which he had experienced before coming to the dual-campus school in Lethbridge:

In fact I have written at length personally about the toll of the exam on me as a teacher. I experienced years where my classes scored close to 80% as an average; in other years, the scores were far more humbling. To have a principal stand up in a staff meeting and laud teachers with strong results, then humiliate those with mediocre or poor averages and suggest they were incompetent led me to experience great pain as a professional. I was attached to the process of marking, but I could see these numbers that came tumbling in each year also caused tremendous hurt and anxiety.

This statement makes us acutely aware of deeper reasons for Mark's move, other than the ones already outlined. Furthermore, it also provides an explanation as to why the tensions between teaching to the test and inquiry and innovative approaches to teaching exist.

In addition to teaching full-time English, Mark helps with the school's Yearbook Club, co-coaches the Curling Team, and assists with the grade 12 speakers (speech writers) at graduation. He brings with him a wealth of knowledge about approaches to writing and the writing process, literary texts of all genres, and prides himself on being somewhat of a "grammar ninja" and would be considered, extremely well-read. Additionally, important aspects to note about Mark that are relevant to this study are: he piously attends the English Language Arts 30-1 marking sessions in January and June, as it is one sure way to improve on the practice of teaching to the test and getting those "80% averages", and he has been part of the Professional Development Committee for every year that he has been at the "new" school. These two means of Professional Development present the multi-faceted perspective on approaches to teaching. One does not exist without the other. In other words, his consistent attendance at marking sessions and his commitment to school PD, are equally necessary. Mark's personal approach is evidenced in his practice as diploma exams are and have become "a fact of life" and while they are not all-consuming, he realizes that helping students do well on diploma exams is his responsibility. In terms of his own exploits with the concept of life-writing, he does write, on occasion, but keeps most of his works of poetry, non-fiction, and reflective pieces to himself.

One of the first forms of data collection conducted with regards to Mark's case study was an interview that he submitted to me in writing in mid-September, 2015. It was a lengthy document wherein I got to know more about Mark, both personally and professionally, and could very much sense the tension in Mark's feelings about inquiry-learning and innovative approaches and his need to ensure students are prepared for the diploma exam. There are a significant number of statements that show this very palpable tensionality, in virtually every question posed.

1. Inquiry or project-based learning:

I was initially reticent to participate, even with my own affinity for computers, because I truly had little understanding of what such learning could look like. If I am to be honest with you, I was privately adamant in my belief that *I* needed to be the one directing learning activities, and that the “expert”, *my* questions were the ones best designed for learning. I could accept that some students may find increased motivation if they could make decisions about a project – particularly in how they worked or what they created, but I feared that too much time would be wasted in the process, and that *my* students would fail to learn necessary parts of the curriculum.

Here, the fear of students' lack of achieving optimal scores plays into the time spent, or “wasted” on the inquiry process or project-based learning. The “necessary parts of the curriculum”, in Mark's eyes, are to be adhered to or students will “fail to learn.”

Moreover, it can be concluded, that if necessary parts of the curriculum are not taught, students will fail or perform poorly on the exam.

2. Dual-campus and location influence on teaching practice:

I was thrilled to join [school of study] at the beginning of the 2014-2015 school year, but I was equally terrified to be starting on Campus West. For one, I understood that our administration saw the west side school as a place for innovation and creative thinking, and our classrooms as an environment to thoughtfully experiment and “press the envelope” of traditional teaching and learning... Really, I knew that innovative teaching was expected of all teachers – east or west, but after meeting [other teachers], I learned there were no mixed messages here concerning curriculum and pedagogy!... No pressure here at all!

There is a definite feeling of trepidation from Mark about moving into a school where inquiry-based learning is encouraged, and even expected, rather than traditional

“stand-and-deliver” methods. Perhaps Mark’s earlier experience with regards to teachers being praised for proficient or excellent-caliber grades versus teachers who were shamed for limited or poor-caliber grades serves as a painful reminder not to experiment or deviate from traditional teaching and learning, which includes traditional means of assessment.

3. Foundational Guiding Principles of High School Redesign:

Call me a moderate, but I have always taken a balanced approach to changes in curricula, and in this way, I have tried to open myself up to anything that will make the process of education more fulfilling and more powerful.

It is evident that although there is a desire for Mark to embrace changes in education, he does so with caution; he has become selective about which trends or waves to open himself up to. One interesting aspect to note is that Mark uses the word “balanced” to describe his approach to changes in curriculum, but it could be argued that the scale tips closer to more conservative and conventional approaches, as evidenced throughout this case study.

4. English 30-1 differ from approaches to 20-1 or 10-1:

Expected rigour grows with each course – but on a simple level, I want students to continue to practice and refine the skills of reading and writing. As we move forward from 10 to 30 I am ever conscious of students experimenting with sentence types and beginnings, incorporating meaningful figures of speech, trying out repetition or parallel structures. The grammar becomes increasingly important to show the sophistication! I would hope by 30 level students feel confident in experimenting with language and forms, and that they are “ready” in terms of using writing as a form of communication.

In this response, out of anything that Mark could have focused on, like critical thinking or encouraging individual approaches to literacy, emphasis is definitely placed on grammar, mechanics and sentence structure, with the end result of being “ready” to write.

5. The diploma exam:

When the opportunity came to mark diploma exams in Edmonton, I jumped at the chance, and while the work was onerous and mind-numbing, I remain so thankful to those on the marking floor who welcomed me and gave me much-needed chance to see for myself what constituted a ‘Satisfactory’, ‘Proficient’ and ‘Excellent’ for student work...I had been far too isolated in a rural school, and I was desperate to talk to other teachers about texts that worked for their classrooms, and assessment strategies that worked to improve student performance. Doesn’t it seem strange to look back with fondness at marking? It was the people and the subsequent relationships that forged on the marking floor inspired me to continue to refine my practice. I introduced new texts; I worked to introduce guiding inquiry questions; I started to accumulate an exemplar databank so students could see papers. I still worry that all of what I gained was built upon a “one-shot” test that made up 50% of my students’ progress in my class.

Mark acknowledges that the driving force behind his students’ success on the diploma exam is his mastery of how to teach to it. In fact, he has found a sort of solace and was even fond of marking because he could speak to other teachers about texts that worked for their classrooms (that were exam-worthy) and assessment strategies that worked to improve student performance. Furthermore, Mark recognizes (and worries) that all that he has gained from marking diploma exams in Edmonton has been about how to best prepare his students for the test that is worth 50% of their final mark.

6. Student Performance and the pressure for them to perform well:

With the diploma exam looming at the end of the course, it has always been important to me that they feel a sense of confidence in writing the test. Consequently, the pressure I feel stems from two significant sources. First, I cannot help but see my own practice/ pedagogy/ choices in texts partially reflected in their achievement on the exam. If a student bombs the diploma exam, I can get past it as an outlier, but when a class does poorly, I feel like I have personally let down my students by failing to communicate some intrinsic key to mastering English. How sad!

Undoubtedly, this response is directly linked to the 80% class average that Mark and his colleagues were held to at his previous school. One student is not a concern but if a class performs poorly, Mark takes this as a personal smear on his ability to prepare students properly for the diploma exam, which he also equates to as “mastering English.” In making this association, it is clear that, to Mark, mastering English means performing well on a “one-shot” standardized exam and, therefore, it is his

obligation to ensure that his own practice, pedagogy, and choices warrant student performance.

7. The existence of tensionality between teaching practice and standardized exam:

The standardized test that lies at the end of my English 30 course truly has added a kind of rigidity to my approach to reading and writing. I often feel “stretched too thin.” I try to expose my students to different forms of writing, but I still feel they must be prepared to write a Personal and Critical/Analytical Response. I try to co-construct criteria for particular assignments, but I still feel bound to the government approved rubrics. I try to get students to read with a critical eye and develop inference skills, but I still feel I must measure them with a multiple-choice test.

Herein lies the barefaced truth. Mark feels “stretched too thin” *trying* to expose students to different forms of writing so, instead, chooses to focus on preparation for the Personal and Critical/ Analytical Response, which he also feels bound to.

Moreover, when it comes to development of critical thinking and inference skills, Mark feels that the only way to measure these skills is with a multiple-choice test, much like the Reading Comprehension component of the diploma exam. The tension or pull to gravitate to teaching to the test is far too great for Mark to lean in the opposite direction of inquiry and project-based learning.

8. Balance between the tension:

At issue, was my own divide between “teaching to the exam” or experimenting with a “Writer’s Workshop” approach to writing that gave students far more freedom in choosing how they would respond to texts. My feelings then mirror my feelings now. I feel bound by the government test and restricted in the kind of activities and representations students complete within my class.

Clearly, Mark is struggling with dispelling his “old” mindset, wherein he found a sense of security in knowing what the end goal was – performing at, at least, the ‘Satisfactory’ level – and how to teach to it, and accepting this “new” construct he now finds himself faced with of innovative approaches to teaching and student-lead inquiry. He even acknowledges various reasons for being anxious of jumping right in and embracing an inquiry-based learning approach such as feeling unsure that

students are capable of understanding and processing such challenges, letting go of teacher ownership of curricula, being fearful of doing things the “wrong” way and being compared to his colleagues, leaving behind the comfort that teaching to the test provides, and trusting that somewhere along the journey of inquiry that students will learn the skills and get the tools they need to do well on the diploma exam. The theme of trust in oneself as a teacher who can facilitate a process where students formulate questions, build understanding of the world around them, and form meanings and apply knowledge (Focus on Inquiry, 2004), is a key component in beginning the journey of steering away from feeling bound to a government test. With more techniques and acquisition of teaching strategies, and the time to experiment with and reflect on practice of these newly found tools, one can hope that Mark gains momentum in swimming against the current of teaching to the test.

Traces of growth toward a more innovative mindset can be evidenced in both the documents that were collected from Mark’s English 30-1 class, which ran during the first quarter of the 2015 school year, and within the classroom observations, which were conducted in late September of the same year. In Mark’s course outline, in the course description, it states:

The ultimate goal of this course is to foster an appreciation for the significance and artistry of literature, and to provide students with a range of opportunities to refine their skills in reading, writing and other forms of communication.

Noticeably, this description goes beyond a strictly teaching to the test mentality as Mark veers away from any mention of preparation for the diploma exam, but instead references the “artistry of literature” and “the opportunity to refine skills”. Additionally, the section entitled “Assessment Philosophy” in the course outline provides some hint of Mark’s desire to manoeuvre past the requirements of

the diploma exam toward a deeper understanding of what writing for life and the process of inquiry looks like.

Assessment between teachers and students is really meant to be a conversation. My goal is to provide you with structured practice that will help you master course concepts. With some hard work (and loads of feedback and revision) you will be ready for your final by the end of the quarter – but, more importantly, you will have learned something about yourself and the world as a reader, thinker, and writer.

While there is reference for students to being ready for the “final by the end of the quarter”, there is also reference to learning “something about [themselves] and the world” and developing skills – literal and analytical – that will benefit them in the future. Likewise, although there were many robust documents in the form of packages or in duotangs that served the sole purpose of writing successful essays and reviewing for the diploma exam (Figures 9& 10), there were also documents and assignments that allowed students to experiment with different forms of literary texts, play with diverse approaches to writing, be creative with style and voice development, and take the risk of building new understandings and communicating what they have learned to others (*Focus on Inquiry*, 2004). Exemplars of both these kinds of documents are pictured below.

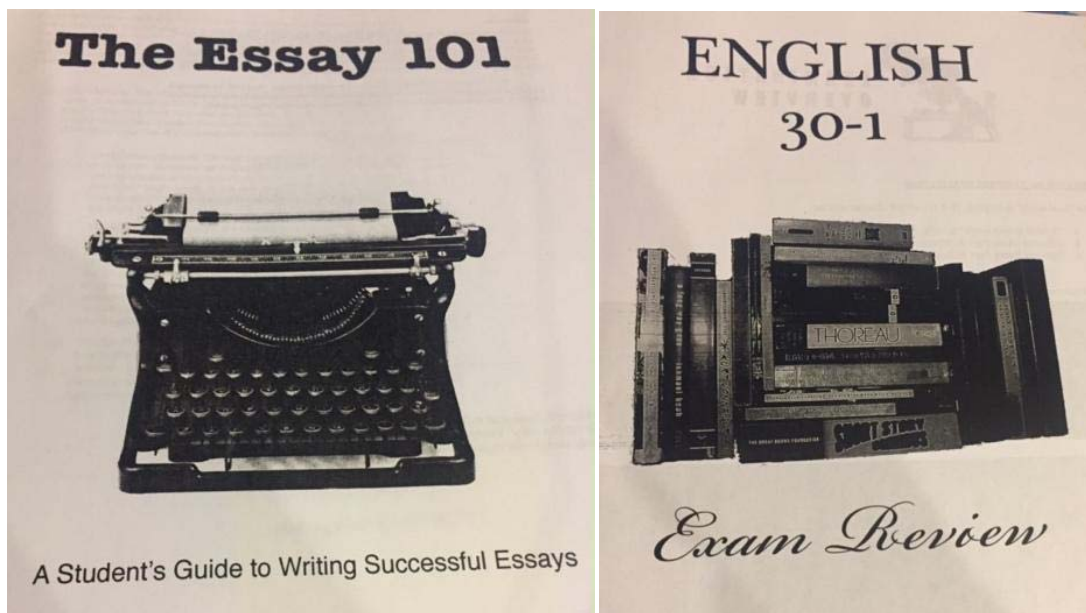


Figure 9. Preparatory and review packages for the diploma exam. These documents are evidence of rigorous adherence to curriculum-as-planned and teaching to the test.

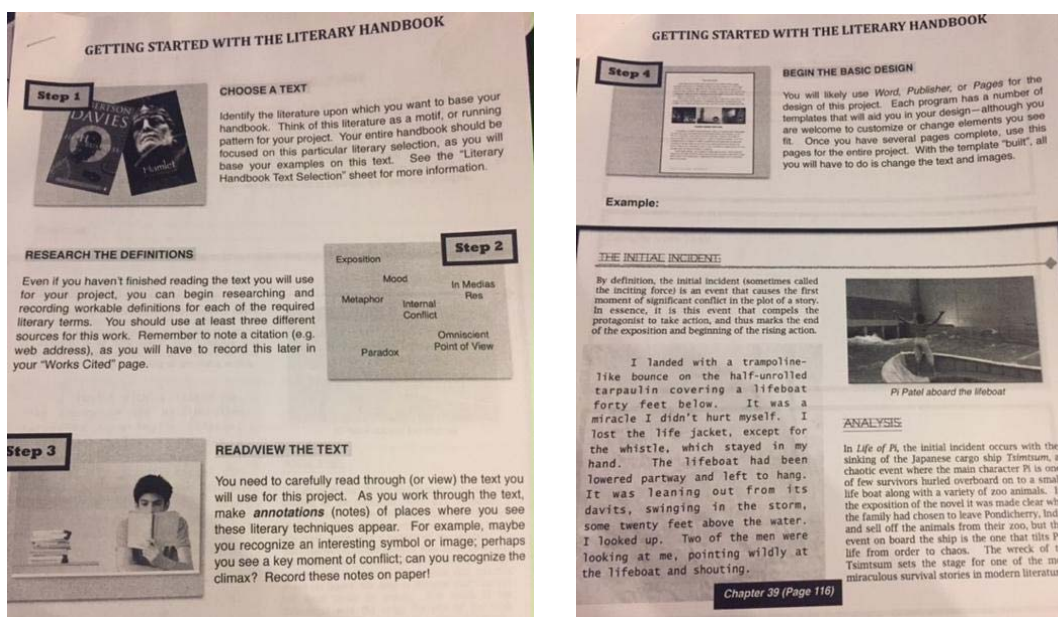


Figure 10. The Literary Handbook assignment. This assignment challenged students to take the concepts and terminology they learned throughout the English 30-1 class and apply their learning to a text of their own choosing (music, film, television show, musical production, novel, etc.). Student creativity, independence, innovation, and analytical skills were developed through this assignment.

Furthermore, during an observation (in September, 2015) wherein Mark introduced a project not unlike the Literary Handbook, he depicts a shift in mindset:

Right, to me, this is “do we have to do this?” versus “can we do this?” The projects that come out can be excellent. Alright, it’s pretty authentic. Alright, so that’s basically where we are going. For the first part, I edited this first part, “Be the voice, not the echo. My experience in English was very dry. We sat, I took notes down and I tried to regurgitate exactly what my teacher told me and I did it pretty well that way. You know, I was a decent student. There wasn’t anything original though, right? And I don’t want that, even on the dry stuff we are looking at but, for the project, I want something that’s for you and that’s why the choices are different. Hopefully, we have people doing all kinds of projects.

It is quite obvious that Mark would like nothing more than for his students to experience the kind of learning he describes – authentic, individualistic, original, and diverse – but what kind of tools or strategies does Mark have to pull from or rely upon that will help him turn his hope to reality – a reality where students are leading the learning through their own methods of inquiry and Mark is trusting in the process? Perhaps a deeper look at Mark’s involvement with professional development can provide some insight into what is influencing his paradigm to shift.

Prior to the start of each school year, each staff member at this dual-campus school (administration, teaching staff, educational assistants, and support staff) all sign up for at least one committee, which range from operational committees such as Building Quality, to particular event planning committees such as Grad, to focused on student learning committees such as Wellness or Professional Development, to name a few. Each committee has a chair; most of the time, the chair is one of the four administrators but certainly does not have to be (although each committee is “tied to” at least one administrator).

Mark has been a part of the Professional Development (PD) Committee since he came the school in 2014. The PD Committee is chaired by two administrators and

is composed of about eight or so teachers who are highly engaged and invested in student learning. They meet every month to plan the upcoming PD day, of which there are typically 7-8 days in one school year, and the administrators only guide and facilitate the discussion as opposed to direct the committee to specific areas of focus. It is within this collaborative context that Mark has found himself exposed to innovative strategies, examples of inquiry-based learning, and ways to implement various principles of *Moving Forward With High School Redesign*. In fact, Mark has been a part of the team of teachers who travel to Red Deer in the fall for the Collaborative Day for *MFWHSR*, a day that is designed to support educators and leaders on their journey through High School Redesign. During the Collaborative Day, there are opportunities, through keynote speakers and breakout sessions, to hear others' stories regarding a wide range of Redesign topics. Mark and the PD team farm themselves out, listen to as many stories as possible, come back together to share and debrief, and then sieve out the content that they will pass on to the rest of the team in order to structure and guide their planning. As Mark continues to involve himself with experiences like these – a chance to network, collaborate, and share – he will find more confidence to navigate the tensions between promoting an atmosphere of inquiry learning while supporting his personal choice to prepare students for the diploma exam. Through Mark's case study, the idea that the need for comprehensiveness of instruction is required for teachers to fulfill their responsibility of preparing students for the diploma exam **while** providing students the opportunity to experience inquiry-based learning is evident.

Emergent ideas, themes, and findings.

Looking at all three case study profiles collectively. To some extent, each of the teachers presented in the case study profiles began their expeditions into the deep and further waters of innovation and inquiry-based learning from the same place: from the safe and secure shores of what they know, what they have been taught or exposed to, and the constructs they are familiar with (like the diploma exam). From the data, Marie began her teaching career just before the implementation of the diploma exam in 1983 (The Alberta Teachers' Association, 2015) so the landscape looked very different for Marie, when the new system of mandatory course specific exams was administered than it does today. Contrarily, both Tara and Marshall have only ever known a landscape of a high-stake diploma exam, where half of a students' final mark in a course is based on how he or she performs on the exam. And, although, it is much easier to watch the current or latest waves in education crash upon the shore than to dive in and swim against, quite possibly, raging waters that might drag them under, Tara and Mark both attempt to contest the deadly rapids (Avison, 1962) and challenge their current perceptions and constructs. The question is why? Why would they take steps away from the safety of the shore, knowing what concepts and skills they need to teach to prepare a student for the diploma exam, and venture into the waves of inquiry-based learning, and multiple and diverse approaches to literacy? Because, they are personally choosing to embrace inquiry-based learning and the Foundational Principles of *Moving Forward With High School Redesign* (2013).

The focus and emphasis that Marie places on professional learning, both upon herself and her staff, as well as her role as an administrator, are important pieces to acknowledge in her “why” or her ability to be more confident in navigating new waters of inquiry and literacy. From the wider lens provided by continuous engagement with professional learning, her foundational work with the implementation of the foundational principles of *Moving Forward With High School Redesign*, and vantage point of principal, it becomes clear as to why Marie would question the purpose and validity of the diploma exam and see it as “no longer realistic”, as she expresses in her interview. She even states that the diploma exam is a “one-shot, standardized reporting tool that is outdated and anachronistic” and a “hoop to jump through”. Marie can see the exam for what it is now, near the end of her career, as she acknowledges that “the more [she] teach[es], the less [she] sees evaluation as a key part of the learning process” which is “not to be confused with assessment, which IS a key aspect of the learning process.” It takes time, years of experience, and a growth mindset, exposed to professional learning, to be able to come to this kind of confidence and conclusion when working with the demands of the diploma exams placed on a teacher. In acknowledging that the exam is just that, a “one-shot” exam that all students are required to write, Marie has made the personal choice to move past the possible tensions that could impact her approaches to teaching.

This is certainly evidenced in both Tara and Mark’s case studies as well, as both express a strong adherence to the diploma exam as the framework within which they work from. Tara outwardly expresses that “[the diploma exam] shapes the way

[she] teach[es]” and that she has “internalized the 5-scale grading schema”. Furthermore, she shows a dependence on the diploma exam when she says, “if the whole exam were suddenly removed from our reality, I would feel lost.” Likewise, Mark expresses feeling “bound by the government test” and “bound to the government approved rubrics”. Although Mark has been teaching for four years longer than Tara, he is relatively new to the concept of inquiry-based learning and the foundational principles of *Moving Forward With High School Redesign* because of his move from his former high school to this one. As such, it appears, through the similarity of their responses, that Mark and Tara share similar opinions of the validity and value of the diploma exam. Unlike Marie, neither of them questions its purpose, nor do they see it as just another evaluation tool (whereas Marie does). However, both Mark and Tara feel the pull of the waves of inquiry and diverse approaches to teaching literacy. As they choose to focus on these approaches and teach to the test, there is the potential for tension to arise in their teaching practice and responses to the diploma exam.

Mark’s “pull” is more extrinsic as he becomes more exposed to new teaching strategies and more professional learning opportunities. He understands the vision of that administration has for classrooms as being “innovation and creative thinking” environments and the school as a place to “thoughtfully experiment and ‘press the envelope’ of traditional teaching and learning.” He has taken small steps toward inquiry-based learning, as evidenced in The Literary Handbook assignment, and acknowledges that his hope is to “have [students] doing all kinds of projects.”

Tara's "pull" is more intrinsic, which comes from her own personal interests in blog-writing (for herself and for students), journaling, and creating of podcasts. In her interview, she shares her hope that by putting less pressure on herself in the classroom and spending more time writing "for thinking, for fun, and for experimentation" that her students will be more "relaxed and not too hard on themselves." This self-reflection piece is a necessary step for Tara to take if she is to "un"-internalize the 5-point grading scale as her "go-to" rubric and unbound herself from the constraints of teaching to the test. This introspection, more professional learning, and the time to develop confidence in inquiry-based teaching strategies will help Tara navigate the waves she faces.

Interesting enough, any possible feelings of tensionality were not enhanced or subdued by the campus the teachers taught from; in other words, the feelings of tension, like those expressed by both Mark and Tara, came from within the teachers themselves and were not influenced by their location. This is not surprising as the school prides itself on having the "one school but two buildings" attitude. Teachers are considered one staff – they collaborate with one another, share with each other, and have the opportunity to grow professionally together. It is important to note, too, that the quarter system and professional development days play a huge role in keeping staff feeling unified. Because the quarters are approximately 40 days long, four times within the school year, teachers have the opportunity to move between campuses, and therefore, experience both, without feeling isolated or restricted to one campus. Furthermore, the three-hour length of classes nurtures a context of inquiry onto teachers as it is quite difficult and even more challenging to have a "stand-and-

deliver” approach to teaching. Teachers, thus, find themselves collaborating more during breaks and flex time and provides teachers with much needed time to decompress, reflect, recharge, and share teaching practices on a daily basis.

It is within moments like these and through strong belief in strengthening one’s professional development and widening the breadth of innovative teaching approaches and sound understanding of inquiry-based learning, that it becomes easier to forge ahead and leave behind the feeling of reassurance that the steady shores of standardized testing provides. However, when a teacher has a clearer sense of what is on each side of the tension they are experiencing within their own practice, the easier it is to recognize them and navigate them accordingly, with effective tools and an effectual mindset. Feelings of anxiety, fear and resistance or reluctance, will be replaced with a recognition and understanding of why these approaches are better for students’ learning, which will then lead to change and growth within the teacher.

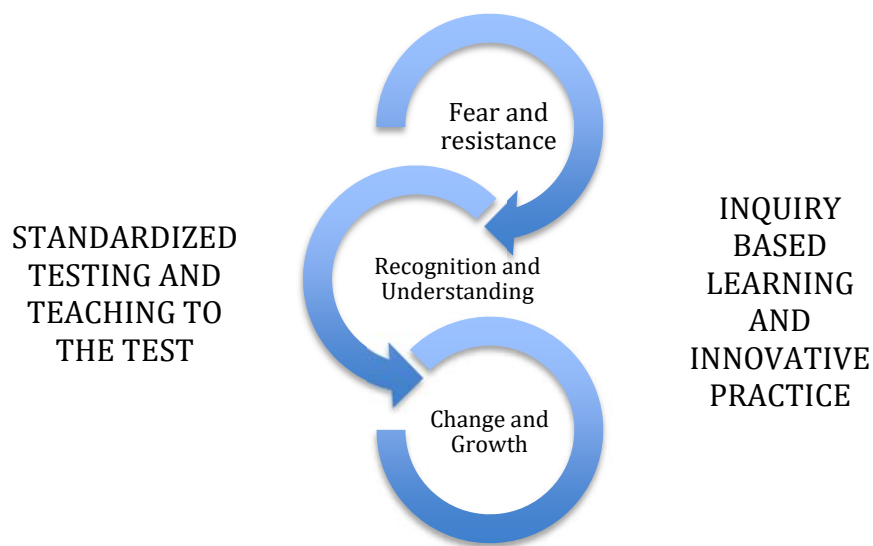


Figure 11. Depicts the journey from standardized testing and teaching to the test toward inquiry based learning and innovative practice.

Inquiry and project-based learning. As previously outlined, key components to truly implementing inquiry and project-based learning include the time for educators to collaborate and reflect, the space (both physical and professional) to experiment and take risks, and the resources to effectively carry out project learning. Reflecting on the three case studies and the context within which they teach – a dual-campus school, of which one campus is spatially created for inquiry and cross-curricular work to happen – resources and physical space are not a problem. However, time and professional space are. Mark expressed more than once that he felt “stretched too thin” to include any type of inquiry or project-based learning as he felt he needed to cover curriculum outcomes and prepare students for the diploma exam. Tara indicated that she spends more time writing and thinking for “fun and experimentation” and less time on timed, practice compositions but still felt the need

to delegate time on said timed, practice compositions. It should be noted that this is only Tara's *perception* of the time spent on different genres and styles of writing in her class and that no inventory of these approaches to writing or data was collected on the *actual* time spent on them. As for Marie, although she verbally did not express feeling strapped for time, it is important to highlight that she spends at least one three-hour class a week, plus some time from ensuing days, on specific diploma exam preparation. For instance, during the lesson about how to write the Personal Response to texts, she reviewed the expectations, went over the how-to step-by-step, walked students through an exemplar, and then gave students time to plan and write. This took three hours. Students were also given time (about 30 minutes) the next day to make final revisions to their compositions. Then, once they were marked (which was typically within a night or two), time was spent going over them and providing feedback. Thus, more time spent on diploma exam preparation means less time allotted to inquiry or project-based learning. In terms of professional space, it comes down to how confident a teacher is to step into the waters of creative, analytical, and thematic approaches to learning. It is risky and to properly do so would mean completely revamping what assessment of outcomes would look like, including very little, if any, attention to the diploma exam. This is a risk that even the most experienced English Language Arts 30-1 teacher with a wealth of strategies in his/her tool-box is not willing to completely take, as it would mean zero *direct* teaching to the test and more *indirect* strategies to prepare for the exam.

Moving forward With High School Redesign. What began in 2009 until the end of June 2013 as the *High School Flexibility Enhancement Pilot Project* has

triggered the shift in thinking and practice by removing the 25 hour per credit requirement (the Carnegie Unit). It has also struck some important conversations across the province about responsibility of the teacher (what is teacher-directed), responsibility of the learner (what can be self-taught), teacher practice (toward a more collaborative model), and success in learning from achievement to success in learning from engagement. The last piece with regard to achievement and engagement and, ultimately, assessment, will be a crucial conversation to continue as we examine the question: Have the Foundational Principles of *Moving Forward With High School Redesign* really shifted pedagogy or is testing-based pedagogy still pervasive to the teacher's practice? Based on the data collected from all three participants in a school that was one of the first of 16 to be part of the Pilot Project, the answer to both parts of the question would be yes. Yes, the Foundational Principles of *Moving Forward With High School Redesign* **have** shifted pedagogy. And, yes, testing-based pedagogy is still evident in teaching practice. Despite all of the advances that have been made in the principles of Personalization, Flexible Learning Environments, and Meaningful Relationships, it is evident that without a complete shift from the diploma exam as we know it, advances in Mastery Learning (which is an instructional strategy that results in comprehensive grasp of curriculum as demonstrated through performance-based evaluations), Relevant Curriculum (which challenges students to apply what they learn to real world situations that uses higher order thinking skills), and Assessment (which should build student self-confidence, metacognition and self-directed learning) have not and will not occur. Regardless of the fact that the administration of the school focused upon in this study emphasizes the development of instructional

leaders and highly encourages and supports professional development opportunities in collaborative environments, teachers like Mark, Tara, and even Marie still struggle with fully embracing what High School Redesign could *actually* look like if there were no standardized exams or post-secondary admission grades to be concerned about.

Once again, the concepts of time and professional space are brought into focus as all three participants found it difficult to argue against the value of High School Redesign, but were challenged with finding the time to put into practice what they know to be of value. In some way, shape, or form, throughout the quarter, Marie, Tara, and Mark substituted performance-based evaluations with traditional rubrics that mimicked the ones used for the diploma exam, real world situations became lessons on how to write the Personal and Critical Response, and student self-confidence was replaced with anxiety about performing well on the exam. It became very clear through the observations that test-based pedagogy is still pervasive and that teachers are giving up their own constructs to comply with standardized testing. Why? For one, even though the rewards for student learning are clear-cut and beneficial, there is still the lingering feeling of “what-would-happen-if-the-risk-was-taken-to disengage-from-teaching-to-the-test?” that poses a threat. Fear of the unknown holds educators back as the potential for backlash and scrutiny exists from invested stakeholders such as administration (division and school-level), fellow educators, parents, and even the students themselves. Secondly, habit. Waves or trends in education overlap and feed into one another and most just dissolve with time. *Inspiring Education* (2010) and *The High School Flexibility Pilot Project*

(2009-2013) lead to *Moving Forward With High School Redesign* (2013 to present).

What is next? However, the fact that the diploma exam in Alberta has existed without much change since 1983 has become a constant that teachers have become reliant upon. What is more crucial to recognize, as it is at the core of the problem of tensionality, is the issue that the diploma exam measures a small part of the overall literacy construct and does not allow for much wiggle room for approaches to inquiry or project-based learning. Yet, it is difficult to argue with a mandatory assessment system that has become the responsibility of the teacher to prepare students for and that has set the standard of excellence in this province for 34 years. In fact, teachers have come to expect the exam score to reflect the student's true score and work toward attaining a mark in class that is similar or close to what a student would achieve on the diploma exam.

Literacy, literacy constructs and assessment. It was reassuring to see that Tara, Marie, and Mark defined literacy in the broadest sense that they could. Literacy:

- is a skill involving ways of taking “in” and comprehending information, and communicating “out” information (Tara);
- has infinite variation – text-based, image-based, sound-based, etc. (Tara);
- is more than the ability to read and write (Marie);
- also includes the ability to interpret visual and written language of a particular form, to deconstruct the writing or visual to determine meaning, and to understand nuances of language and figurative expressions (Marie);

- is the proficiency a person has in reading and decoding printed text, as well as the ability of the person to write in a legible and coherent way (Mark); and
- also involves understanding tone, nuances of language, validity or authenticity of a message in a variety of text forms (Mark).

If this is the case, and the definition is expansive, accepted, and valued, why the hesitancy to assess literacy in all of its forms and modes appropriately? Why the mismatch between literacy constructs and assessment? Perhaps because literacy is a complex enterprise that is ever-evolving and rapidly changing to meet the needs of the people it serves and because assessment, as we know it, has not. Changes in the diploma exam (established 1983) in Alberta have moved at glacial speed with momentary blips of movement toward evaluation of its validity and its effectiveness in facilitating the teaching/ learning process (1989). Since then, nothing. And despite personal philosophies and teacher choices to move toward differentiation of assessment *for* learning (formative) and assessment *of* learning (summative), standardized testing has remained stagnant and regressive as compared to the budding understanding and definition of literacy.

Teachers work with what is within their control. Approaches to literacy, their own pedagogical approaches, and even some forms of assessment are those aspects they can control; they have ownership over these aspects. Unfortunately, diploma exams are not, so they choose to adjust their own personal philosophies and even opinions about the diploma exam to suit their context. Tara, in an interview, stated, “I like the diploma exam because it provides a standard – an understanding of what

Alberta graduates in a university-entrance academic class are expected to be able to do [and] it's challenging. The expectations are high, but not impossible. It evaluates the work that we do together, and pushes the students to make conscientious, thoughtful reading and writing choices (if they want to succeed)." Tara has found a way to explain the validity of the exam to herself, to justify its purpose, whereas Marie questions its purpose: "Is it to provide a common benchmark for all Alberta students? My experience with marking tells me that this is no longer realistic as it is apparent that teachers are teaching directly to the exam. As a result, it's really a test of how well teachers can coach students for a particular approach." Meanwhile, there are teachers, like Mark, who really struggle with the current construct of the exam: "I have found the questions on both the personal and critical sides more than daunting." He shares that there are other teachers like him who wrestle with understanding the purpose as well: "Try sitting down with a group of markers and really listen to their interpretation of a topic! It doesn't take long to hear the confusion even amongst teachers." Hence, when assessment and approaches to pedagogy, like inquiry or project-based learning, and varying approaches to literacy, do not align there is reason for tension to exist, in some more than others, but it is there.

Tensionality and indwelling. As explained in Chapter 4, teachers who search for a balance within their approaches to inquiry-based learning and their approaches to standardized exam preparation may "[live] with tensionality" (Aoki, 1986/1991, p. 159). Aoki further explains that the "tensionality emerges, in part from indwelling in a zone between two curriculum worlds: the worlds of curriculum-as-planned and curriculum-as-lived-experiences" (Aoki, 1986/1991, p. 159). Tension, in this sense is

required as a catalyst for fine chords of pedagogy to be struck. It is important, thus, to identify the cause of tension, address it, and attempt to find strategies to deal with or dwell within it. Throughout analysis of the case studies, it became apparent that the cause of tension is the archaic construct of the diploma exam and how it fails to align with more modern approaches to inquiry or project-based learning, new initiatives like *Moving Forward With High School Redesign*, and broader definitions of literacy. During this study, many conclusions have been deduced and addressed, such as:

- what pedagogy looks like when influenced by the diploma exam,
- the uncertainty of what is measured by the diploma exam,
- reluctance of educators to assess differently,
- feelings of incompetence which arise due to low test scores,
- feelings pressured by time and professional space (confidence), and
- the possibility of negative consequences to face should one not teach to the test.

Thus, the last piece becomes an attempt to find coping mechanisms for educators to deal with or dwell within the tension. The following table (Table 7) summarizes the strategies/ approaches that each case study has provided in terms of navigating the tension between their own professional judgements about curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment, and the content and constructs of standardized testing.

Table 8

Strategies and Approaches of “Indwelling” as Presented by Each Case Study

MARIE	TARA	MARK
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • focus on data besides diploma exam marks to drive pedagogical choices • cultivate an appreciation of a wide variety of literature • understand and promote writing as a process (ie: allow for draft writing and opportunities for rewrites) • introduce inquiry-based skills, like independent thought, group and peer collaboration, and self-directed learning • provide room for students to try new things • expose students to a variety of writing genres • discover or create projects that allow for broader definitions of literacy • utilize engaging teaching strategies even when it is necessary to teach to the test • accept the diploma exam for what it really is – a “one-shot, standardized reporting tool” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • find other methods/ means of exposing students to other genres and styles of writing • utilize multimodal texts and introduce students to multiliteracies • commence life-writing as regular, daily practice • be as innovative in practice as possible – engage in critical thinking, questioning, and reflecting and promote diversity • help students discover the importance of cultivating their own writing voice • have an open mindset and be careful about the tone that is set about performance on the diploma exam • make learning, including teaching to the test, relevant to students and their contexts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify why tension exists and the reason(s) behind it • immerse yourself into professional development that allows for growth in learning strategies, student engagement, and assessment • write often, for the sake of writing • try not to worry about success, but rather focus on engagement • find time to try something new • trust yourself • collaborate with colleagues • take risks

So, how *do* teachers of literacy, who attempt to implement inquiry-based learning, work between the tensions of personal philosophies and beliefs about pedagogy and the constraints of the diploma exam? It is clear from the table that there is not one

“right” way to do so. It is evident from the findings of the three participants of this study that each teacher discovered unique ways of handling the tensions that allowed him or her to dwell aright within his or her teaching practice. Moreover, their unique ways were likely influenced by many personal factors, since they all worked within the same teaching context of the dual-campus school. They all dealt with the tensions differently based on personal context and history, engagement in professional development, what career stage they are at, and other external circumstances, as well as internal interests. Ultimately, it is important that teachers acknowledge the tension that exists within practice and that this is a good thing because it might motivate them to find ways to dwell within (as in Table 8). These ways, then, continue to inform and keep teaching practice and professional growth vibrant.

Conclusion and Implications

The Last Wave

The diploma exam has set the landscape for many, many years and even the waves in education that lap its shore have not really changed it. Indeed, there have been ebbs and flows that gently splash at the shore in the form of buzz words such as 21st Century Learner and Flipped Classrooms, and there have been bigger more robust whitecaps such as *Inspiring Education* and *Moving Forward With High School Redesign* that bring with them many great benefits. Yet, these do little to alter the landscape over time. We must inquire, even after all the changes in education over the last ten years, if things have really changed? Or have they, paradoxically, stayed the same? What is more, we should continue to question how long they will remain this way because it is in questioning that we begin to wonder again, and it is in wondering that we challenge the norm and discover new ways of doing things.

Implications and conclusions for Alberta Education. By no means am I suggesting that Alberta Education just does away with standardized testing. I am, however, suggesting that a more focused look and evaluation of how the final exam can better align with the philosophies that were initiated in *Inspiring Education* and have been nurtured by the Foundational Principles of *Moving Forward With High School Redesign* is necessary. Essentially, draw upon the imperative research that has already been done with regards to validity (Messick, 1989) and validity theories (Slomp, Corrigan & Sugimoto, 2014) and the depth and breadth of literacy constructs that reach all the way back to Vygotsky (1978) to more contemporary literacy theorists like Janks (2010) and Kress (2014) to start the transformation process. The

research is there. The reasons are there. The motivation is there. Administrators, teachers, and students have already experienced what learning could become when the limitations of the Carnegie Unit were removed. Imagine what the outcomes of looking more closely at what a test is purported to measure would be. What dynamic shifts in thinking and approaches to pedagogy would be made? More research, support, and resources would be required to authentically initiate, transition, and measure the shifts, but the time is definitely coming as more and more schools are added to the distribution lists of *Moving Forward With High School Redesign* (now in its fifth phase). Soon, there will be a greater demand to, and no choice but to, re-evaluate standardized testing in this province.

Implications and conclusions for High School Redesign. In my own conversations, over the last four years with the High School Redesign team and their Alberta Education counterparts, the topic of assessment continues to be a hot one. It is a topic that is highlighted as a foundational principle but presents a challenge because of the limitations of the diploma exam. Although there are pockets of schools here and there that are more “advanced” in their thinking with regards to assessment and assessment strategies, the truth of the matter is that so long as there is an antiquated way of assessing students at the end, there is very little that teachers can change within their own classroom contexts when it comes to what tests and exams should look like. Time must be spent on sharing these concerns and stories with Alberta Education. Perhaps a three-year study of a school(s) willing to forfeit the current face of assessment for one that is in alignment with the expectations of *Moving Forward With High School Redesign* should be conducted to really know what impact a full

change in assessment could have. In addition, the redesign movement cannot begin in grade 10 and end in grade 12. Perhaps conversations about inquiry-based and project-based learning, as well as the Foundational Principles should begin before grade 10 and continue into the post-secondary level. Who initiates these conversations and where they would even start is beyond the parameters of the research conducted here, but is, most definitely, an area that would require more investigation.

Implications and conclusions for high school English language arts

teachers. So where does this leave English Language Arts teachers, who continue to work tirelessly at the shore, hoping that the work they have done, the sand castles of inquiry-based learning and valid assessment methods they have built in their own classrooms, do not fall into the sea and become part of the landscape once more? To these teachers, I would recommend a four-pronged approach: first, recognize that there is a pressure, a tension, that they work against; second, once this has been established, carry on in collaboration with each other; third, emphasize and utilize professional development to share stories and create a reserve of strategies to draw upon; and fourth, work with the knowledge that students are at the center of the work that they do. Through the support of school administrators and the collaboration among high school English Language Arts teachers, these actions can provide teachers with the tools they need to dwell comfortably within the tensions.

As a starting point, it is vital to acknowledge the tension and identify its source because this can look differently for each person and it can affect people differently as well. A critically reflective teacher is a more effective teacher as there is an increased awareness of one's teaching from as many perspectives as possible

(Brookfield, 2010). Through the lens of self-reflection, teachers may focus on previous experiences as a learner and as a teacher in order to become aware of the assumptions, approaches to learning, and frameworks within which they work (Brookfield, 2010.). Teachers should ask themselves: What is causing me stress as I try something new? Why? Where is this stemming from? Why do I hesitate to implement a specific strategy? Who or what is causing me to feel this tension? Is this something or someone within my control? How do I navigate past the tension?

Once this prong has been addressed, teachers will need to share their struggles, and come up with strategies to cope in partnership with each other. In doing so, a teacher can draw upon colleagues to engage in generative dialogue, or for mentoring, advice and feedback. Brookfield suggest that “peers can highlight hidden habits in teaching practice, and also provide innovative solutions to teaching problems. Further, teachers can gain confidence through engagements with other teachers, as they realise perceived idiosyncratic failings are shared by many others who work in situations like ours” (2010). Encouragement to use the support of a strong network to work through tensions that teachers all commonly share, is key to working through them.

It is through targeted and effective professional development, rooted in research and driven by data, that teachers can begin to generate solutions to the tensions that exist. Data and research are invaluable as teachers “come to understand the link between their private [teaching] struggles and broader political processes” (Brookfield, 2010). In this case, links between literacy and validity theories and teaching practice can be forged so that teachers can understand that the battle they

fight against the landscape of the diploma exam, in its current construct, is a worthy and legitimate one.

Lastly, teachers must remind themselves why they are working to reshape the environment that they have been laboring from within for all these years and to tolerate the waves that pound, roll, and crash upon the shore: to provide equal opportunities for success (in whatever form that might be) for all students. It is my hope that the work they have done and will continue to do will be supported and encouraged by all necessary stakeholders – school and division administrators, *Moving Forward With High School Redesign* personnel, Alberta Education, and the governing heads of this province – for the sake of learning and our students.

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