

## **Assessment and Evaluation: Exploring their Principles and Purposes in Relation to Neoliberalism through a Social Studies Case Study<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Abstract**

This paper begins with a discussion of Canadian and international work that has identified a number of shortcomings with standardized assessments, which are framed within neoliberal ideology. It then explores the principles of good assessment and applies them to an analysis of British Columbia's standardized Social Studies 11 exam. It finds that the exam does not meet all of these criteria. This discussion includes the comments of British Columbian students and teachers on the exam. The paper concludes with a description of alternative assessment tools that are framed within four educational philosophies through which Social Studies can be understood.

A broad philosophic movement is sweeping into education from an increasingly prominent business ideology, and it has consequences for student learning and teaching practice. In the first section of this paper, the history and impact of neoliberalism are described. This ideology is immersed in power relations and expressed in varied knowledge forms, such as media (Foucault, 2006; Orłowski, 2011). After which, a case study exploration of a standardized exam in BC will be discussed.

### **Setting the Broader Context: Neoliberalism and Standardized Testing**

Apple (2006) has written of a “power bloc [that] combines multiple fractions of capital who are committed to neo-liberal marketized solutions to educational problems” (p. 469) by using techniques such as accountability, choice, standardized testing, and public rankings of schools.<sup>2</sup> He describes these as having negative results on students in both the United Kingdom and the United States; rather than focusing on student learning, schools aim to improve their school's ranking by attempting to attract high achieving students and directing resources away from special needs students. Teachers teach to standardized, fact-based tests and so do not focus

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<sup>1</sup> This manuscript was accepted by the previous editor of *CSS*.

<sup>2</sup> Neoliberalism is understood as a political ideology grounded in individualism, competition and free markets that is associated with globalization. Applying economic principles to education, it supports parental and student choice of schools, privatization, evaluating students using standardized assessments that test mostly factual recall, fostering competition through the public rating and ranking of schools, and forcing compliance through means such as accountability contracts and standards. It supports “human capital” development in schools. Much research evidence and theory argue for its damaging effects on student learning. See, for example, Mathison, Sandra and Wayne Ross (Eds.). (2007). *Neoliberalism and education reform*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press and Orłowski, Paul. (2011). *Teaching about hegemony: Race, class, and democracy in the 21st Century*. New York: Springer.

on developing important abilities such as critical thinking; creative and innovative teaching practice declines. Inequalities in schools rise, as students have varying amounts of capital with which to negotiate the system. These reforms ignore the larger social factors that cause inequalities in the first place (such as poverty). Government control through national standards and testing are a function of “a concern for external supervision, regulation, and external judgment of performance” (Apple, p. 478) that are undergirded by a devalued belief in the professional ability and judgment of the teacher.

These critiques often draw on the work of theorists such as Foucault (1980, 2006). Foucault (2006) writes of disciplinary power as having three tools: “hierarchical observation, normalizing judgment, and their combination in a procedure that is specific to it, the examination” (p. 120). Observation relates to the ability to see what others are doing in order to control their behaviours. Normalizing judgment refers to the setting up of a standard of behaviour or achievement that all students are expected to achieve, “so that they might all be like one another” (Foucault, 2006, p. 120). Students are classified as *good* if they meet the standard, and *inept* if they don’t, without any concern for their individual characters. Standardized exams use observation and normalization in the quantification and control of individuals. They have the effect of making each student “visible” while at the same time comparing them to a predetermined standard. They “constitute” the individual by assigning him or her a certain value. This standardized and rationalized approach is negatively influencing teaching practice, student learning, and institutional culture.

### **Performativity and its Dangers**

Ball (2006) develops the concepts described by Apple and Foucault into a theory of performativity in which mechanisms of control, such as visibility and standards, are applied to behaviours in contemporary schools and society. He explains how control of individuals is achieved through means such as assessments and reviews that cause fear and uncertainty and thus result in particular behaviours—performances—from the individual and the institution. These fabricated behaviours, seen as necessary for security, result in the “possibility that commitment, judgment, and authenticity within practice are sacrificed for impression” (Ball, 2006, p. 695) and can result in feelings of hollowness. For schools and teachers, the aim is to fabricate the appearance of meeting their “clients” demands, for example, by strategically focusing on teaching to the exam, by providing extra help to students who are seen as possible candidates for achieving good marks on exams, by aiming to attract “good” students who will increase the school’s ranking, and by refocusing resources away from students with special needs. The aim is to appear successful through strategically developed websites and promotional materials and high standardized test scores that result in high school rankings on public scales (Ball, 2006, p. 699). Performativity changes behaviour and, thus, plays a role in re-constituting the self and the organization. It is what is seen to be done that is key.

Broadfoot and Pollard (2006) add that standardized testing is a form of assessment used to control teacher and student behaviour and is having serious effects on student learning as it is moving teaching from a progressive to a performative model. The progressive model is one in which professionalism and collegiality are key. Teachers are viewed as facilitators, who focus on student learning through student-based learning activities, such as projects, which result in deep learning and intrinsic motivation. Performativity, in contrast, develops from neoliberal standardized testing regimes and results in teachers as technicians who implement directives

from above. Strict control of content learning occurs through standardized assessment and is used to classify and differentiate students. The performative model results in superficial learning, extrinsic motivation or a complete loss of motivation and interest in learning. Despite rhetoric to the opposite, Broadfoot and Pollard find that students no longer become life long learners or collaborative citizens, for the focus of learning on competition for high grades providing access to more life options effectively quells a spirit of collegial and collaborative cooperation for the betterment of society, a major goal of citizenship education. Large numbers of students lose confidence in themselves as learners, often due to circumstances beyond their control rather than actual ability. Teachers become technicians whose teaching is geared to increasing test scores. Class, race, and gender differences escalate.

### **Increasing Inequities**

Arnot and Reay (2006) describe how the move to national curricula with frequent standardized testing in the UK has had the unjust result of privileging middle class students who come from homes and backgrounds that provide them with the ability to maneuver the system with greater ease. They further describe how schools are attempting to manage these requirements in ways that heighten these injustices, such as by streaming students according to perceived abilities.<sup>3</sup> They find evidence that students from working class or multicultural backgrounds are more strongly controlled than middle class students, as they are more likely to question the relevance of the prescribed materials they are required to learn through their behaviours. As the schools focus on controlling behaviour, students are thus provided with fewer opportunities to engage with the material and to be perceived as, or to perceive themselves as, successful learners. Irrelevant materials and strong control tactics function to disengage students from learning.

Gillborn and Youdell's (2006) findings are similar. They conclude that performativity culture favours middle class students and affects teachers' practice in schools. As the schools attempt to compete to get a higher ranking on public school rankings and to improve their internal accountability goals, teachers label students into bands (strands) and then focus on helping those who are seen to have a chance of passing. Students in the "C" group are given up on: They are perceived as failures upon whom resources such as time and money would be wasted. Unsurprisingly, many of these students are from the working class or from different cultural backgrounds. The authors liken the process to that of triage, where doctors make difficult decisions on whose lives to save during crises. As the researchers find clear evidence that students' class, race and/or gender affect how they are labeled, the streaming of students has much more to do with perception than it does with any "innate" intelligence or ability. Teachers feel pressure to be seen as successful and so they can engage in harmful and non-educational practices such as publicly posting students' names and expected grades in school hallways. The authors find that students are well aware of these processes at work, and that some actively resist these attempts at manipulation and control.

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<sup>3</sup> Some BC schools have a "regular" Social Studies 11 course as well as an "enriched" or "honours" Social Studies course for the "smart kids."

## **Loss of Teacher Professionalism**

Standardized testing, in short, is part of a larger educational philosophy that is having negative impacts on student learning and exacerbating inequalities in society. Hargreaves (2006) also adds that it has a negative impact on teachers. He describes the history of teacher professionalism over the twentieth century as one that moved from a pre-professional view of the teacher as that of a technician who focused on teaching through “chalk and talk” methods to the development of teachers as collegial professionals, who were viewed to have expertise related to teaching methods and who worked collaboratively with their peers to enhance their practice. He argues that this status as a collegial professional is now under threat: standardized testing and the various reforms associated with the implementation of centralized neoliberal agendas devalue the role of teachers as professionals capable of making their own judgments on their students’ learning. Teachers are forced to “teach to the test” in order to be seen to be effective teachers. Performativity becomes key, as teachers are evaluated based on the publicly displayed marks their students receive on exams, both at the national and international level.

## **Increasing Stratification and Cultural Unfairness**

Standardized testing unfairly benefits some students over others, for as Bourdieu (2006) theorized, students do not come to school with the same “capital:” generational inequalities continue in schools due to differences in early childhood education and the child’s family and environmental conditions (Carnoy, 2006; Esping-Andersen, 2006). Social justice theorists question whether students should be forced to compete as if they are equal by being compared to the same norm, when they are not all on equal playing grounds. If we want a collaborative society of citizens working together to improve our democracy, why are we fostering competition in order to stream students (by their final marks that determine access to higher education), partly in relation to socioeconomic or sociocultural factors?

Neoliberalism, in short, is influencing student learning and teaching practice in a number of negative ways. It is present in Canada as well.

## **International Trends in Canada**

A review of Canadian educational research makes clear that the trends described at the international level are also occurring in Canada, and in BC. For example, in their study of educational reforms across Canadian provinces, Lessard and Brassard (2009) found the following: “In most of the provinces, school funding, curricula and testing have all become more centralized since 1990” (p. 263). They argue that these changes, which include increasing choice, centralizing curricula and testing, developing performance indicators and outcome-based measures (all features of neoliberalism), illustrate that Canadian provinces are implicated in the international globalization trends and philosophies described above. Vibert (2009) adds that more than a decade of research exists to demonstrate that standardized testing reinforces inequalities. Further, Ungerleider and Kreiger (2009) state that the BC government is implementing neoliberal reforms. BC’s liberal government views students as economic units whose “capital” must be developed in order to allow BC to compete on the global scale. These

individuals are to be shaped through policies that foster competition using means such as standardized testing, the public rankings of schools, parental and student (“client”) choice, and competition between students and schools. BC has a long history of neoliberalism.

### **Contextualizing BC: Social Efficiency and Neoliberalism**

Standardized testing and accountability share many similarities with, and can be argued to be the modern manifestation of, the American Social Efficiency movement of the early twentieth century. This movement was influenced by Taylor and Bobbitt (Kliebard, 1998; Broom, 2007). Social Efficiency applied business principles to schools in order to rationalize processes, and included advocacy for streaming students through testing: students were to be placed in varying programs of study in order to prepare them for varying types of work (Callaghan, 1962).

BC’s Ministry of Education’s current interest in neoliberalism was nurtured, in part, by C. B. Conway, a statistician in the Ministry from the late 1930s to the 1970s, who developed standardized testing as a way for the Ministry to maintain control of what teachers taught (Fleming, 1996). Conway was a follower of the American *scientific measurement* (Social Efficiency) movement and was brought in as the head of new Department of Education Division of Tests, Standards, and Research, with the goal, as a statistical expert of “scientific measurement” to develop standardized testing (Fleming, 1996), an effective means of student and teacher control (Foucault, 2006). By the tenth year of the Division, Conway was able to comment that scaling was increasingly being accepted (Department of Education, 1955, ff143).

Conway built on earlier foundations. From 1900 to 1929, BC’s public school system was developed using a number of Social Efficiency principles such as establishing grades, professionalizing teachers, developing administrative structures, increasing vocational courses and streaming students using standardized tests (Dunn, 1980). Putman and Weir’s (1925) Royal Commission Report advocated, among a number of other Social Efficiency ideas, the use of standardized testing (Broom, 2007). The commissioners hired Peter Sandiford, a University of Toronto professor who advocated “mental measurement,” to carry out intelligence testing in BC (Fleming, 1996). Sandiford was educated at Columbia Teachers’ College and influenced by Social Efficiency ideas. He was Conway’s teacher.

In summary, standardized testing, choice, and other means of teacher control, such as accountability, school rankings, and standards are part of a neoliberal doctrine. This doctrine is the contemporary manifestation of Social Efficiency theory. Neoliberalism has (re)emerged in BC at the end of the twentieth century, as well as in a number of nations including the United Kingdom and United States as a hegemonic discourse. Much writing has occurred regarding its negative impacts on student learning. The next section will present a case study discussion of BC’s standardized Social Studies exam illustrating a number of the issues discussed and problematizing the exam’s reliability and validity. The paper ends with alternative means of assessing student learning.

### **Case Study: Standardized Exam in BC**

The Ministry of Education introduced the Social Studies 11 exam in its 2004 Graduation Program. The exam aims to “certify the performance of B.C. students graduating from Grade 12” (Ministry of Education, 2011, p. 1). A total of five graduation exams in the curriculum areas

of Math, Science, Social Studies, and Language Arts/English (two exams) have been implemented. A grade 11 Social Studies course is required for high school graduation. Students can choose either Social Studies 11, Civic Studies 11, or BC First Nations Studies 12, each of which has a standardized exam at the end of the course. One of the most commonly chosen courses is Social Studies 11. The latter course is primarily a twentieth century history of Canada course, with additional units on Government and Human Geography. The discussion begins with a contextual review of the types, significance of, and means for evaluating assessment.

### **Assessment versus Evaluation and Identifying Evaluation Criteria**

Evaluating students is of importance. The decisions made by teachers, or identified through standardized test scores, can influence the future career options of students (through access to further educational options) and may affect students' identities of themselves as learners. Much, then, has been written about assessment (Apple, 2006; Davies, 2007; Foucault, 2006; Kirman, 2008; Myers, 2004). For example, assessment has been compared to evaluation. Assessment is the investigation of learning, and evaluation is the making of judgments about that learning. It has also been classified into assessment *for, as, of* learning, or as formative and summative (Davies, 2007). Formative assessment is used to refine teaching practice, and summative assessment is used to identify what students have learned. Further, different evaluation systems, such as standardized evaluation and authentic assessment, have been developed. The former compares students' performances to standardized norms, while the latter aims to assess students against themselves as measures of comparison and shies away from large, standardized measurement tools such as exams and rubrics, preferring means such as portfolios.<sup>4</sup> The latter is also related to performative assessment, a form of assessment in which students actively engage in completing an assignment, such as creating and performing a historical skit. Assessment and evaluation are complex and contested as they are rooted in varying philosophic interpretations of the meaning, purpose, and procedures of education.

Further, assessment methods and procedures can be evaluated using a number a criteria. Assessments ought to be of varied types, so that students are given a chance to illustrate their learning in a number of ways, such as portfolios, projects, and media presentations. Tests are not the only means of assessing student learning; however, when they are used they should be both valid and reliable (Kirman, 2008). That is, tests and exams should accurately illustrate whether or not students have learned course materials in a manner that is fair and consistent for all students, and they should test what students were required to learn. One popular type of test—particularly with neoliberals, is called a standardized test. It requires all students to write the

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<sup>4</sup> BC's Ministry of Education portfolio requirement in the Graduation Portfolio introduced in its Graduation Program of 2004 can be deemed a failure. Students were required to begin carefully-delineated portfolios in Planning 10, and were then supposed to work on them by themselves in grade 11 and 12. Sometime during their grade 12 year, they were to present these portfolios to a number of educational stakeholders in order to receive some graduation credits. Students complained vociferously, and ended up preparing and sending a petition to the government. The Ministry, as a consequence, backed down on requirements. The failure of the portfolio resulted from the strange combination of micro-management (by specifying in great detail what students had to include in their portfolios) and lack of support (by not providing courses/mentoring and so on for students as they worked through the process in grades 11 and 12). The portfolio is an effective assessment strategy when it is used by a teacher in one particular class and when it allows students to be the masters of the process by letting them select and organize work that is of significance to them in ways that are personally meaningful. Portfolios have been effectively used by many teachers, including by CAPP (Career and Personal Planning, the previous name of Planning 10) teachers, in the right circumstances and with the right guidance and support.

same test and be compared to an artificial “standard,” or norm. This test has been subject to a number of critiques in the literature. Apple (2006) and others (Kohn, 2000; Neil, 2003; Volante, 2004), as discussed above, have found evidence that standardized exams negatively affect student learning, particularly students from different cultural and class backgrounds, cause students anxiety, test a limited number of skills, and cause teachers to teach to the test.

In British Columbia, the standardized Social Studies 11 exam is worth 20% of students’ final grades. The next section of this paper presents the results of a content analysis of the exam and compares this to stated course objectives. The analysis is conducted from a progressivist, social justice, and democratic stance that is critical of neoliberalism. The study illustrates that the exam has some shortcomings in terms of its validity, as it does not test students’ knowledge of all course objectives or illustrate students’ developing citizenship, which is given as the aim of the course.<sup>5</sup>

The exam is also limited in the methods used to test student learning. The exam requires all students to answer the same questions and be compared to a standard or norm. Yet, from a social justice orientation, this is a questionable procedure, as students do not learn in the same manner and have different learning strengths (Foucault, 2006). According to Gardner’s Multiple Intelligence theory, students have varying intelligences (Mbuva, 2003). These include spatial, linguistic, artistic, mathematical, and musical intelligences. The exam focuses primarily on linguistic intelligence; thus discounting the abilities and strengths of many students and—if poor marks are received—possibly destroying the self-confidence of these students in themselves as learners. Furthermore, the process of standardized examinations does not take into consideration that students do not come to the classroom or the exam on equal footing. These issues require careful thinking about the aims of and for education in a democracy, which values all individuals and provides each with opportunities to find meaning and success in life, understood in Apiah’s (2006) sense of “capability building.”

Some students come from privileged homes, where parents can afford to provide healthy meals, learning time, and tutors if needed. Many other students come from homes where food or money is in short supply and students may need to help their families by working after school limiting their time to focus on academics. This is particularly the case in BC, which has the highest rate of child poverty in Canada (Kines, 2009). Students from these homes may not have the time to focus on studying that some other students may have. They may have trouble staying focused, as they are malnourished or tired. Further, they may not come to school with the same cultural capital (Bourdieu, 2006). Standardized exams may exacerbate social inequalities rather than nurturing opportunities for all students to be successful.

For some social justice theorists, then, comparing students’ individual performances on tests with an external standard (or norm) is considered problematic as students are not equal in terms of their interests, exposures to class materials, learning styles, or life situations (Foucault, 1980; 2006). Indeed, students and teachers who participated in a survey study of Social Studies in BC had much to say about their views on the unfairness of the exam:<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The author acknowledges the complexity of terms such as “education for democracy, good citizenship, and social justice” in the academic literature. Her use of these terms is framed within a progressive (Deweyian) lens. The first two terms relate to educational process that nurture students concern for and connection to others with the aim of further developing a democracy. The third term is linked to Post Modernism and Critical Theory and is understood as education that aims involve students in critical exploration of social issues and power injustices with the aim of transforming consciousness and thus society.

<sup>6</sup> An anonymous survey study was conducted with close to 200 students and teachers in high schools in varied socioeconomic neighbourhoods across BC. The primary purpose of the study was to investigate student and

*I think provincials are unfair for most of the student population. As a new immigrant, I only learned Canada's history for two years. I get really frustrated when I see questions and government history of Canada which I'm obviously unfamiliar with. In my opinion, one large test would not justify and represent everything that a student learned in a year. (Student comment, Broom, 2012)*

*I think writing the provincial exam is unnecessary because it just shows how much we can study, not how much we can learn. We get stressed so much about the exam, and end up not doing as well as wanted and that ruins our marks which in turn affects our future. (Student comment, Broom, 2012)*

These comments illustrate that the exam is not an entirely valid measure of learning Social Studies 11 content and aims, if the prescribed learning outcomes (PLOs) are used as a starting point.

### **Analyzing the Social Studies 11 Exam in Relation to Course Objectives**

According to the Social Studies 11 Integrated Resource Package (IRP) (BC Ministry of Education [BC MOE] 2005), the government claims that the following principles are used to guide the development of the curriculum document:

Learning requires the active participation of the student. People learn in a variety of ways and at different rates. Learning is both an individual and a group process. In addition to these three principles, this document recognizes that British Columbia's schools include young people of varied backgrounds, interests, abilities, and needs. Wherever appropriate for this curriculum, ways to meet these needs and to ensure equity and access for all learners have been integrated as much as possible into the learning outcomes, achievement indicators, and assessment activities. (Ministry of Education 2005, p. 11)

However, the exam is not consistent with these principles. Students are asked to answer factual questions. The author conducted a content analysis of two exams (Ministry of Education, 2006–7; Ministry of Education, 2008–9). Factual questions were defined as recall questions that asked students to answer “what, when, where, which” questions. As illustrated in Table 1, which compares the 2006/7 exam with a more recent (2008/9) exam, the author found that 90% of the multiple choice questions on the exam were factual-based, ranked on Bloom's (1956) lowest level of critical thinking (factual recall). The other 10% of multiple-choice questions were at Bloom's lower levels (comprehension and application). Italicized words illustrate content that was tested on one exam and not on the other.

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teachers' conceptions of the subject. However, students and teachers were both given an open-ended question for them to provide any general feedback they wanted to. Many students and teachers (by their own volition) chose to write comments on the exam. All of these comments were negative. Some of the typical comments given have been included here. The BC Social Studies Teachers Association (BCSSTA, 2010) has just posted its own survey of teachers' comments on the exam. It is available at: [http://bctf.ca/bcssta/docs\\_forms/SurveySummary\\_Social\\_Studies11.pdf](http://bctf.ca/bcssta/docs_forms/SurveySummary_Social_Studies11.pdf) The teacher comments they include largely reflect the findings of this study: most of the respondents do not like the exam, state the exam is based on content-testing (not critical thinking), and that it is changing how teachers teach the course.



The last section of the exam was essay writing. On both exams, one essay asked students to “describe” environmental issues. “Describing” is placed low on Bloom’s taxonomy as it doesn’t require or promote critical thinking. The second essay in 2006/7 asked students to “evaluate” French-English relationships over the twentieth century, the only exam question that was at a higher level on Bloom taxonomy (application/analysis). However, the second essay in the last exam was a recall question that asked students to “describe” the development of Canadian autonomy over the twentieth century.

The exams tested particular areas in more detail than others. Twenty four percent of the multiple-choice questions (42% if one includes national and foreign government policy) tested students’ knowledge of definitions/details of a government term or process, such as:

6. Which of the following is a characteristic of a majority government?
- The reading of bills by the Senate is not necessary.
  - It does not require Royal Assent for the passage of bills.
  - The approval of independent Members of Parliament is needed.
  - It is able to pass legislation without the support of the opposition parties.
- (Ministry of Education 2006/07, p. 2)

Table 1. Content Analysis of Two Social Studies 11 Exams. (Note that percentages are broken down by sections, and not as a total of each exam)

Exam	2006/7 Exam	2008/9 Exam
<b>Sections</b>		
<i>Multiple Choice</i> (Total out of 55, worth 70% of the exam)	<p><b>Factual/Recall Questions (90%)</b></p> <p>Government-structures/terms/processes (24%)</p> <p>Government- national/ foreign policy (including Autonomy) (18%)</p> <p>WWI (4%)</p> <p>Labour unrest (2%)</p> <p>Great Depression (5%)</p> <p>Regional issues (eg. Quebec nationalism): (9%)</p> <p>WWII (5%)</p> <p>Other twentieth century wars/events (2%)</p> <p>UN peacekeeping (2%)</p> <p><i>Cold War (4%)</i></p> <p>Geography (population pyramids, “development”) (15%)</p> <p><b>Higher order thinking at lower levels (10%)</b></p> <p>Cdn national policy (application) (2%)</p> <p>Historical thinking (comprehension) (2%)</p> <p>Economic terms (comprehension) (2%)</p> <p>Geography (application) (5%)</p>	<p><b>Factual/Recall Questions (90%)</b></p> <p>Government-structures/terms/processes (22%)</p> <p>Canadian government- national/ foreign policy (including Autonomy) (16%)</p> <p>WWI (5%)</p> <p>Labour unrest (2%)</p> <p>Great Depression (5%)</p> <p>Regional issues (eg. Quebec nationalism) (5%)</p> <p>WWII (5%)</p> <p>Other twentieth century wars/events: (2%)</p> <p>UN peacekeeping: (2%)</p> <p>Geography (population pyramids, “development”) (20%)</p> <p><i>First Nations issues (residential schools) (2%)</i></p> <p><i>Gender Equity, Human rights (2%)</i></p> <p><i>Economic processes (2%)</i></p> <p><b>Higher order thinking at lower levels (10%)</b></p> <p>Cdn government (application) (2%)</p> <p>WWI- II: 2 (comprehension) (4%)</p> <p>Gt Depression (comprehension) (2%)</p> <p>Geography (comprehension) (2%)</p>
<i>Essays</i> (2, worth 15% each)	<p><b>Factual (15%)</b></p> <p>Geography (describe)</p> <p><b>Application/Analysis (15%)</b></p> <p>French-English relations (evaluate)</p>	<p><b>Factual (30%)</b></p> <p>Describe Canadian autonomy (recall)</p> <p>Explain global warming (recall)</p>

The exams also focused on Autonomy/International Involvement and Geography. Some areas, such as World War II and social-justice issues, were barely tested on these samples. By

conducting yearly analyses of these exams, teachers should be able to develop some understanding of topics that are more likely to be tested and thus to strategically focus on these areas (in the two examples, presented here, Government terms, structures, processes, and policies over the century) with the likelihood of increasing their students' marks. As teachers are aware of the fact-based nature of the exam, they are refocusing their attention on teaching particular fact-based content to their students (BCSSTA, 2010). Teachers are teaching to the test, rather than focusing on assessment *of* and *for* learning.

As mentioned in the first section of this paper, Ball (2006) theorizes this as Performativity: how accountability measures such as standardized testing negatively affect teaching practice (p. 692-701). As students' marks are publicized and used to rank schools by the Fraser Institute in BC, teachers are, in effect, evaluated themselves.<sup>7</sup> They thus have a vested interest in ensuring that their students do well in the exams and so evidence exists (as the BCSSTA survey illustrated) that teachers alter their teaching practices to focus on what is tested, and not what is of value to learn. Further, many teachers feel a sense of responsibility to their students to prepare them for the exam, as the grades received may have some influence on students' future life opportunities.

### **PLOs and the Value of Assessment**

Table 1 indicates some reliability in terms of the content tested on both exams, although not a reliable sampling of all PLOs. As some PLOs were not included in some exams at all and some of these were considered key goals as expressed in the course description, aims, and objectives, the exam is problematic as a valid evaluation measure of the course. For example, the 2006/7 exam had no questions on First Nations events or issues over the Twentieth Century, which is a required course outcome. The following table (Table 2) summarizes the major Themes/PLOs for Social Studies 11 and the suggested assessment weightings listed in the curriculum document. The last column describes the content that was/wasn't tested on the exam and at what weightings, illustrating that not all content was equally tested.

The exams are based on multiple-choice questions and essay writing, affirming the focus on the two academic abilities of reading and writing. No questions allow students to demonstrate their learning in varied ways that draw on their strengths or to work collaboratively in addressing key social issues, a vital element of good citizenship. These were also identified as key principles underlying the curriculum guide, as described above. In addition, exam content does not include materials from the varied backgrounds of BC's students, and it does not match the stated rationale of the course which is given as: "The aim of social studies is to develop thoughtful, responsible, active citizens" (Ministry of Education, 2005, 11).

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<sup>7</sup> The Fraser Institute is a right wing Think Tank that publishes yearly statistics on school rankings based on aggregated course and exam results.

Table 2. Correlation between Social Studies PLOs, Suggested Weightings and the Exam<sup>8</sup>

Social Studies 11 PLOs	Suggested Weightings	Tested/Not Tested and at What Weightings
<i>Skills and Processes</i> (Critical Thinking; Research; Communication; Citizenship)	30%	Generally, not tested on the exam.
<i>Politics and Government</i> (Government structures and processes)	17%	Heavily weighted, (22-24% of multiple choice). If policy is included, this section is 38-42% of multiple choice.
<i>Autonomy and International Involvement</i> (Canada's development of Self-government; international role)	17%	Heavily weighted, but hard to separate as many questions are policy questions. With policy questions, 34-37% of multiple choice questions, plus 1 essay in each exam (worth 15%).
<i>Human Geography</i> (World issues related to population, environment, "development")	17%	More weighted. 20-22% of multiple choice. Plus 1 essay each in each exam (worth 15%)
<i>Society and Identity</i> (National- social change and issues)	19%	18-25% of multiple choice (but much overlap between Social policy-related questions and Politics).

The exam is questionable as a valid measure of such an aim. Answering a number of fact-based questions does not demonstrate that students are, or will be, responsible or active individuals, or that they will be "responsible, active citizens" (Ministry of Education, 2005, 11). In reality, forcing students to memorize a number of detailed facts related to the Canadian government that are to be demonstrated in a stressful and competitive standardized evaluation can have the damaging effect of destroying, rather than fostering, students' interest in being active citizens, as they may come to conflate the latter with the former. Indeed, many of the students commented on the fear and stress that the exam engendered:

*The exam is the worst one out of all of them and I am not looking forward to it. (Student Comment, Broom, 2012)*

*I think we shouldn't have any more provincial exams because not everyone can do well because of the information that you learn. They become too stressful to study for. (Student Comment, Broom, 2012)*

A better measure of students' developing citizenship would be to have students engage in active, community-based projects and then to reflect on these experiences. As one teacher commented:

*Social studies needs to be about interacting with society and not be about the "test." Social Studies is the worst possible course to put a standardized test in. Grade 11s are*

<sup>8</sup> The Ministry of Education (2010) has a "Table of Specifications" for the exam on its website. For unknown reasons, they have identified different percentage values for the exam: Skills and Processes 30%. Politics and Government 15%; Autonomy and International Development 15%, Society and Autonomy 25%, and Human Geography 15%. They state that "higher mental processes" (presumably critical thinking, research skills and so on) are tested on the essay section of the exam. However, considering that three of the essays surveyed here asked students to "describe" or "explain" factual events or processes, this can be disputed.

*responsible enough to be out in the community doing real learning.” (Teacher comment, Broom, 2012)*

Whether students become “good citizens” will not be known until they are adults (Myers, 2004), but associating knowledge of government structures and processes with good citizenship is flawed: knowing and doing are very different processes. Further, what is meant by “active” citizenship is not defined. Is voting sufficient for being considered active? What if one votes but lives a dishonest life?

The curriculum IRP goes on to state its learning objectives. The first is that students are to be “able to acquire the requisite information” (Ministry of Education, 2005, 11). However, students are not asked to research information, or to demonstrate the procedures of good research, such as to identify authors and assess their biases, on the exam. This would be better assessed by having students engage in research projects that include a reflection component on the resources used. The IRP goes on to state that students will learn, “to consider multiple perspectives and to make reasoned judgments” (Ministry of Education, 2005, 11). Critical Thinking is considered an important objective of Social Studies. However, the exam is based on fact-based, recall questions that do not develop critical thinking. Most of the questions require students to select from pre-determined factual choices. Students are quite aware of this fact-based learning, and they do not feel that it adds to—or is a good measure of—their learning, or their development as citizens:


*I will forget in 5 years anyways. (Student comment, Broom, 2012)*

*I think provincials are not useful because we shouldn't have to cram our knowledge together. (Student comment, Broom 2012)*

*I get really stressed out so I end up cramming it all and in the end I forget it all because I forced myself to memorize everything. I think that the provincial should be eliminated. (Student comment, Broom, 2012)*

*Actually, most of us totally forget what we learned after doing the exam. (Student comment, Broom, 2012)*

Bloom (1956) developed the following model to illustrate levels of critical thinking. Beside each level are examples of activities that will foster them (Zevin, 2000).

Highest	<b>Bloom's Levels of Critical Thinking and Zevin (2000)'s Activity Types</b>
 ↑     ↓ Lowest	<i>Judgment</i> (informed option), assessed through controversy (debates, issues-exploration)
	<i>Synthesis</i> (put ideas together), assessed through means like mystery (discovery learning)
	<i>Analysis</i> (consider options using learning), assessed through activities such as frames of References (presenting multiple viewpoints)
	<i>Application</i> (use learning), assessed through active means such as drama, role play, simulations
	<i>Comprehension</i> (understand), assessed through compare/contrast/classify worksheets
	<i>Recall</i> (remember facts) can be assessed through quizzes and tests.

## Integrating Critical Thinking

As demonstrated above, the questions on the exam are largely at the bottom of Bloom's hierarchy: recall and comprehension questions dominate. Critical thinking could be tested. For example, rather than asking students to match given political orientations with their appropriate definitions, students could be asked to read a short extract of a speech from one political orientation, to identify the orientation it comes from and give examples of community actions it supports, and then to discuss whether they agree with the orientation or not and why. They could also describe how a supporter of this orientation would tackle a social problem (such as, rising health care costs), or write a political speech for parliament supporting (or opposing) a proposed policy. All of these activities could occur in class and be evaluated by teachers. Critical thinking could also be fostered by having students consider multiple viewpoints on an issue or engage in a discovery-learning project of the varying views of citizenship held in different countries that illustrates a range of ideological positionings. Students could engage in debates on issues, such as global human rights abuses. Students could read three viewpoints on Canada as a Human Rights leader, from the perspective of the Canada government and as written in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, from the standpoint of First Nations people, and from Amnesty International's view. They could be asked to identify the positions held by all the three, the possible biases or omissions in each, and then to argue which view they support and why. This would require both the use of knowledge or facts as well as higher order thinking.

## Citizenship

The IRP goes onto to state that:

Through their participation in social studies, students are encouraged to understand and prepare to exercise their roles, rights, and responsibilities within Canada and the world.... Social Studies 11 contributes to the important goal of preparing students for their lives as Canadian citizens and members of the international community. (Ministry of Education, 2005, p. 11)

The exam does not include questions that provide evidence that students will exercise their rights and responsibilities as citizens. One student stated:

*The provincial doesn't give a good judgment of what you know. (Student comment, Broom 2012)*

As mentioned, good citizenship can really only be judged in the future (Myers, 2004), but attitudes that are more likely to support it can be explored. For example, students could be asked to explain whether they will vote or not and why/why not, or to describe an issue they are concerned about and how they would actively get involved to support it. The best ways to assess these sorts of learning are by the teachers themselves through a variety of interactive activities. Students themselves stated their views that the exam was not a useful method of evaluating their learning:

*I think that a social studies provincial is quite unnecessary. We do need to know the subject and its many topics for they relate to our everyday lives and our future. However*

*not so much that we have to memorize every date and name in history. (Student comment, Broom, 2012)*

*I feel the provincial exam isn't the best way to test the province's level of understanding of social studies. (Student comment, Broom, 2012)*

*I believe that a provincial exam worth 20% of a students' grade is unnecessary. It can ruin a mark an overall be an unsuccessful way to gauge a person's knowledge of a subject. (Student comment, Broom, 2012)*

Placing assessment in the hands of teachers requires the Ministry of Education to trust teachers' judgments (Apple, 2006). If the Ministry of Education views teachers as professionals who are capable of assessing their students effectively through in class assignments, it will not need to have a provincial exam, as teachers can develop and use a variety of different assessments in their classrooms. Trust may be a major hurdle, yet students voiced the belief that teachers adequately assessed their learning:

*The provincial exam is useless. We have studied the course all year and did multiple tests, quizzes, and projects. I believe we've done well for 10 months of taking this course. (Student comment, Broom, 2012)*

Other Departments/Ministries of Education across Canada, such as Nova Scotia and Ontario, value teachers' judgments by placing assessments and evaluations in teachers' hands. In Ontario, for example, teachers are asked to prepare a final evaluation worth 30% of the course that is appropriate to the content taught.

The curriculum IRP goes on to state that Social Studies 11 aims to have students, "develop an appreciation of democracy and what it means to be Canadian" (Ministry of Education, 2005, p. 11). As students are expected to accept this value without critically thinking about it, this PLO can be considered a form of indoctrination. Indeed, the attempt to use education to foster values supportive of the nation state can be traced back to the foundations of public school systems in Prussia (Cordasco, 1976; Lauder et al., 2006). Further, students learn primarily about Canada in the twentieth century by studying the Canadian government and Canada's national and international policies over the century (Ministry of Education, 2005). Students are only briefly introduced to the Cold War, Human Rights, the United Nations and general World History, and this information is primarily presented as factual information for students to learn. One could argue that appreciating democracy and Canada requires more than being able to list a number of factual events. As students wrote:

*I don't believe provincials are beneficial to my future. (Student comment, Broom, 2012)*

*It's not fair to test students on everything they have learned in one year. The provincial is not a fundamental part of learning about social studies. (Student comment, Broom, 2012)*

In summary, the Social Studies 11 exam is a poor measure of student learning and has validity issues, as it has been written in relation to the guiding principles that the Ministry of Education has identified for Social Studies. It privileges good memorizers and asks fact-based

(who, what, where, when or describe) questions. The questions are not focused on assessing critical thinking, nor do they value students' varying learning styles or allow students to demonstrate their learning in diverse ways. The exam does not consider the varying backgrounds students bring with them to schools. Finally, the exam does not meet the major course objective: its questions do not illustrate that students have met the course goal of good citizenship in terms of attitude and action. Students and teachers' comments illustrate awareness of these shortcomings. One could argue that a course with Progressivist roots whose goal is good citizenship as elaborated by Dewey (1916), does not need to have fact-based exams. The implication is that students who fail the exam fail them as *citizens*. Rather, course activities and assessments could be ones that allow all students to develop their awareness of the strengths and challenges of democracy and of the key role individuals with empathy and critical thought can play in nurturing a continually growing democratic society (see Dewey).

### Conclusion

Standard testing is part of a larger philosophic orientation that is based in a neoliberal, marketized view of education. The research presented at the beginning of this paper shows that it is about control and classification and that is having negative results on student learning, teaching practice, and school culture. BC is following along in implementing this international ideology, as illustrated in the fairly new (2004), standardized Social Studies 11 exam. The exam affects students' well-being and school culture as the results are used by the Fraser Institute to develop public ratings that rank schools from excellent to poor. As these ratings are largely related to sociocultural background (that is, schools in wealthy neighbourhoods consistently get higher ratings), the rankings largely demonstrate that social background influences school success, rather than that wealthier students are *smarter*. However, schools (and thus students) that are rated as poor may suffer a loss of self-esteem that can affect their desire to do well in school (a self-fulfilling prophecy). Furthermore, as teachers are evaluated based on how their students do on these publicized assessments, their teaching practices may change to focus on exam preparation. The marks students receive on this exam (along with other graduation exams and when combined with class marks) become students' final course marks. Universities, and other post-secondary opportunities, select students based on these final grades students. In effect, the career choices of students who do not receive high marks on these exams may be affected, as students may be barred access to some forms of post secondary education.

The Social Studies 11 exam has validity issues, as it primarily tests factual content and does not align with Social Studies 11's main objectives, which are focused on Progressivist goals of developing critical thinking and citizenship—the later of which includes community building and group collaboration. Students and teachers' comments illustrate both groups to be aware of the exam's shortcomings and echo many of the findings of international researchers described above. Assessments that meet the PLOs can best be developed and used by teachers in their classrooms. Table 3 presents an example of various assessment options framed within varying conceptions of the course.

Table 3. Four Social Studies Frames and Associated Activities.

<b>Perennialism/Classicism</b>	<b>Essentialism/New Social Studies</b>	<b>Progressivism</b>	<b>Reconstructionism</b>
-Plato (1999), Oakeshott (1989)	-Bruner (1987)	-Dewey (1916)	-Freire (2000)/Foucault
Textbook Socratic Method Q and A Debates Guided Discussion Reading Worksheets Inductive and Deductive work	Inquiry Research Independent work Depth learning Scientific Method Historica Fairs Webquests Interviews Methods from different disciplines (e.g., Archeological dig) Simulating academic practices	Project method Cooperative work Peer based learning Problem solving Relevant issues Activities based Field trips Simulations Games Drama	Issues-exploration Action Self reflection Moral discussions Art Personal Biographies Curriculum from the ground up Picture/primary document analysis Journals Portfolios Stories Critical Thinking

Assessment will be enriched by using a variety of these measures as well as other measures that draw on varying student intelligences, including media projects, plays, and art walks. If teachers want to use tests to assess students' learning of course material, they should be carefully written to ensure that they are valid measures of PLOs.

Teacher-focused assessment requires that the Ministry of Education trust the professional judgment of teachers in assigning grades and that the Ministry refuse to buy into neoliberal views of education sweeping the globe.

If the Ministry has concerns that some course content is not being taught, or that teachers are assessing course content in varying ways, it can use other means to manage these concerns that do not penalize students or push teachers and students to focus on memorizing facts. These means include: 1) holding professional development days that illustrate how to teach the course with engaging lessons and how to assess fairly; 2) providing ready-to-use materials for difficult/unpopular teaching areas (such as government); 3) having teachers meet with principals/heads of department during the year to review what PLOs have been taught, and 4) establishing Social Studies "communities of practices" that allow teachers to share resources with each other and that give teachers time to do this.<sup>9</sup> The Ministry could provide more demonstration lessons and free materials on the Ministry site from the money saved in not giving the standardized exam. It could also provide extra resources to support student learning in socioeconomically-challenged areas. For example, a popular fieldtrip for many Social Studies 11 teachers and students is to visit the provincial government in Victoria. However, less wealthy students cannot afford these trips. Providing funding for students to participate in such trips (or to aid them in visiting and exploring their local, municipal governments) can play a vital role in positively transforming students' understanding and value of government, a key component of

<sup>9</sup> The BCSSTA is a good example. Its newsletter includes a number of engaging lessons that aim to develop critical thinking in students using varied, student-centred, and collaborative practices. Its last newsletter even had an example of how to teach students to think critically about history using errors found in one Social Studies 11 exam.



citizenship education. This may be more significant in the long term in developing students' citizenship than fact-based standardized assessments that create stress and fear in students. Nurturing citizenship—the stated goal of Social Studies 11—involves developing critical thinkers with empathy who work to improve their democratic society. Assessment means should match this goal. For growth in society to occur, each student should be given the opportunity to develop his or her potential in an environment where process matches aims.

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