

21st Century Competencies: The Effect on Teacher Workload

by

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Bachelor of Education, University of Alberta, 2006

A Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTERS OF EDUCATION

In the Area of Curriculum and Curriculum Leadership

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

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Abstract

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This project is a proposed strategic plan for districts, schools and individual teachers to aid in the successful implementation of 21st century competencies, specifically *Critical Thinking, Problem Solving and Decision Making* and *Lifelong Learning, Personal Management and Well-being*, while keeping in mind teacher workload. The proposed strategic plans allow for the breakdown of new initiatives into manageable goals, while keeping in mind government mandates and teacher attrition. Included is an exemplar plan for all levels and stakeholders who include the school district, schools and individual teachers. This was created in the wake of a mandate letter from Alberta Education (2010) which specified that teachers must teach students the competencies as well as the original curriculum, in all grades across all subject levels and grades.

Key words: competencies, teacher workload, strategic plan, critical thinking skills, authentic assessments

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Dedication

This master's project is dedicated to my parents who from a young age, instill the value of education in me.

This master's project is also dedicated in loving memory to my progressive thinking Grandpa Ernie Gibb who believed having one degree was just ok, but having two must be better, especially for females in this day and age.

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Project

Background

Since the beginning of formal education, policies have been in place. In order to keep things up to date with societal changes, educational policy must also be renewed occasionally to ensure that students leaving the formal school setting are well equipped to be contributing members of society. Since beginning teaching just about 10 years ago, I have seen countless initiatives introduced, expected, modified and lost, such as the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AIS), the beginning of the elimination of the Provincial Achievement Tests (PATs), the introduction of Student Learning Assessments (SLAs) and countless district initiatives, too numerous to name. In my experience these initiatives, which include policy changes, come from two main places: the government, specifically the ministry of education and the district for whom I work for. Sometimes these two are closely linked; a government initiative begins and the district moves to embrace it and other times it has been the district acting alone to bring about transformation in the classroom. In both cases, I have been impacted as a classroom teacher. As teaching is my true vocation, I have always found myself to be at the forefront of these new initiatives. If the principal has said we, as a school community, are moving in a new direction, I have always jumped on the bandwagon, been a leader in the school, and tried my best to implement whatever they were asking. Sometimes things worked, and other times they didn't, but I can always say I tried.

Unfortunately, the toll that this takes on a teacher, who has good classroom management skills, is fluent in changing technologies and, because of working to complete my Masters in Education (M.Ed.) and am current with the research, is plentiful. Countless hours have been spent on re-working lessons into new formats, planning projects, developing reading corners and the list could go on. Very few of these initiatives have 'stuck'.

For example, the AISI (Alberta Initiatives for School Improvement) project that I was a part of surrounded struggling readers. We were given some money to create a classroom library that focused on nonfiction works. We weren't allowed to displace books with their spines facing outward, but with their covers facing forward in nice little baskets and book display racks. One year after spending countless hours (and \$2500 to get this all rolling), AISI was cut by the government. The consultant in charge of the struggling readers program was re-assigned to a school and that was it. To this day, I have a nice reading corner (which has been repopulated with fictional books), but that's about all – a prime example of government initiatives trickling down to the classroom teacher.

A second, more recent, example is the Alberta Government's Inspiring Education (2010) document which introduces competencies which teachers are being told to teach and assess on top of their regular curriculum. Although there is a mandate letter from the Education Minister, different districts around the province are at different levels of implementation. In my own district, Edmonton Catholic Schools, we have been at the forefront of change which has included numerous professional development opportunities, mandatory district wide professional development and the implementation of a program called Transform, which includes a manager at the district level who over sees all of the projects happening in each of our schools. Needless to say, this is a massive undertaking which involves all teachers, administration and senior administration. Last year's district focus was on Lee Crockett's 6 Fluencies and his book *Literacy is NOT enough: 21st-century Fluencies for the Digital Age* (2011). Since there was a really negative feeling around this (an individual who had never been a teacher, teaching teachers how to think), this year the district has moved to Project Based Learning (PBL) and hired the Buck Institute to in-service all Transform Lead Teachers at each site. Seeing as we

don't know what is in store for next year, I think everyone's fingers are crossed that it doesn't change again.

With constant new things being introduced, it's no wonder that the majority of teachers feel overworked; just keeping up with the changes can be exhausting, let alone immersing oneself into learning the fine details time after time. The last time teachers were at the bargaining table with the government, teacher workload was a major point. The result of intense bargaining left each Alberta Teachers Association (ATA) local to create a Clause 2 (C2) committee who would look at reducing teacher workload. The name comes from the clause in the collective agreement that directly links to teacher workload. The C2 committee for my district went to work right way and sent out a survey about workload. This survey was then analyzed, the results posted on the website and meetings ensued with the district superintendent to begin to work on reducing teacher workload. The results of these meetings and the agreements that were reached were posted on the local's website. Through this came a report card redesign group who worked hard to reduce teacher workload during reporting season (which has worked because of up-to-date digital reporting in our schools), as well as a list of recommendations from the committee in agreement with the superintendent which 'encourages' school principals to follow some of the recommendations. Some principals have taken this encouragement, and others haven't, just as some districts have created a C2 committee and others haven't. The ATA also hired Linda Duxbury to study teacher work life balance which is described in larger detail in chapter 2. Growing teacher workload is not something that is new, although it is time to wonder if we have reached our breaking point.

Personal and/or Professional Motivations and Relevance of the Project

This topic is relevant to teachers right now in Alberta. With the mandate from the Education Minister, Jeff Johnson (Alberta Education, 2013), education in Alberta as we previously knew it is gone. Things seemed to be up in the air in regards to the mandate when mid-year, there was a cabinet shuffle and a new Education Minister, Gordon Dirks, was appointed. Teachers across the province wondered what his ‘agenda’ would be. As it turns out, the same mandate letter remained in place, but with the addition of maintaining some traditional means of education (reading, writing and arithmetic). With all of these changes, it’s no wonder Alberta’s teachers’ heads were spinning. Some teachers were well aware of, and able to make changes in their teaching practices, while others knew of the issues and did not make any effort to change their practices and others were not aware of the mandate.

In the past few years, the ATA has recognized this issue and has embarked on studies to get to the bottom of it. These studies include, but are not limited to the *Report of the Blue Ribbon Panel on Inclusive Education in Alberta Schools* (2014) and *The 2011/12 National Study on Balancing Work, Life and Caregiving in Canada: The Situation for Alberta Teachers* (2013). These studies have found that there are issues within education in Alberta and offers some possible strategies on how to work with the changes as well as some viable solutions for all stakeholders to consider.

All of this has happened because society has voiced their concerns about the type of preparation schools are doing in order to prepare students for the real-world. Societal norms have changed drastically in the past decade, and so, the slow moving education system is moving ahead at lightning speed in order to catch up. The Alberta Education competencies that have been mandated will help better prepare young people for life after formal schooling.

Finally, the current teacher attrition rate in Alberta is also on the rise. The Alberta Teacher's Association study *The Early Years of Practice: Interim Report of a Five-Year Study of Beginning Teachers in Alberta* (2011) states that "a significant number of teachers who leave the classroom are committed educators. Such teachers fall into two categories: (1) those who wish to remain in the field but find classroom teaching unsatisfying or intolerable and (2) those who, in an effort to balance the demands of work and family, seek alternatives to full-time teaching." (p. 5). Both of these reasons should not be the sole reason teachers leave the profession; there needs to be a work-life balance that can be struck in order to keep teachers in the profession.

Statement of the Problem

It is because of the constantly changing landscape of education, that one must wonder what the effects of these initiatives have on teachers implementing the changes. Being that 21st century competencies are at the forefront of education in Alberta, this is what I have chosen to focus on: to discover the relationship between the implementation of 21st century competencies, specifically *Critical Thinking, Problem Solving and Decision Making* and *Lifelong Learning, Personal Management and Well-being*, and teacher workload. Still not enough is known about how much work teachers will need to invest in order to ensure their students are meeting the newly mandated 21st century competencies.

Purpose of the Project

As mentioned above, employers are looking for different skills in their new employees than they have in the past. In order to ensure our students are best prepared to be contributing members of society, the government is ensuring teachers are including such skills in their daily teaching. As new skills need to be taught, 'old' skills are remaining in the program of studies; nothing is being removed from the teacher's workload.. New skills include the use of

technology, risk-taking and creativity. The older skills include basic math skills and cursive handwriting. This leads me to question as new curriculum is introduced, what is the effect on teacher workload to meet the new demands? Because the government has mandated these changes, they have to occur, but there has to be a way to make it manageable and sustainable for our teachers while still providing a world-class education for our students. The research question being examined here is: How is teacher workload impacted by the required implementation of 21st century competencies, specifically *Critical Thinking, Problem Solving and Decision Making* and *Lifelong Learning, Personal Management and Well-being*?

Summary

So many initiatives, such little time. This seems to be a sentiment that many educators feel speaks loudly to them. Most teachers are life-long learners and want to learn new skills and have new tools in their classrooms to benefit their students, but often it seems that nothing sticks because there are so many initiatives happening at once.

When initiatives are only introduced for one year and then abandoned, teachers can become disheartened because time and energy has been spent learning something new only for it to be gone as quick as it was introduced. It also makes teachers hesitant to try new things the next year because of the high likelihood that it won't be sustainable.

This project will help all stakeholders realize the value in committing to a new initiative over the course of three years and seeing that new initiatives, when broken down correctly, can be manageable and attainable, as well as have a lasting impact on teachers pedagogy.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In a mandate letter from Alberta Premier Jim Prentice to Alberta Education Minister Gordon Dirks, Premier Prentice stipulates that “teachers incorporate 21st century competencies such as innovation, communication and critical thinking [which are to be] applied in all subjects” (Province of Alberta, 2014, p. 2). Teachers are having to transform their practices to include teaching students 21st century skills in addition to those more typical basic skills (i.e., literacy, numeracy and historical facts). The problem faced in regards to the mandate letter is not that teachers are not implementing 21st century competencies into their teaching and that students are not learning critical thinking skills, but the cost to the teacher’s workload in order to meet this directive. This is the main focus of this research paper. The vision of this mandate in Alberta is to “inspire and enable students to achieve success and fulfillment as engaged thinkers and ethical citizens with an entrepreneurial spirit within an inclusive education system” (Alberta Education, 2010a, p. 7). More specifically, Alberta Education has introduced a *Framework for Student Learning* which introduced seven competencies all students in Alberta to work toward achieving. “A competency is an interrelated set of attitudes, skills and knowledge that is drawn upon and applied to a particular context for successful learning and living” (Alberta Education, 2010b, p.7). The seven competencies that Alberta Education (2010b) has proposed are:

- Critical Thinking, Problem Solving and Decision Making
- Creativity and Innovation
- Social, Cultural, Global and Environmental Responsibility
- Communication
- Digital and Technological Fluency
- Lifelong Learning, Personal Management and Well-being

- Collaboration and Leadership (p. 7 - 9)

For the purpose of this research, two competencies are focussed on: *Critical Thinking, Problem Solving and Decision Making* and *Lifelong Learning, Personal Management and Well-being*. As critical thinking skills are necessary for successful lifelong learning, it was felt that these two would be the most important to focus on. As well, they are the most relevant in my context of teaching junior high as teachers at this level are preparing students to become successful learners as they enter high school and the possibility of post-secondary education.

This chapter is broken down into 3 main themes which examine different studies regarding the composition of 21st century skills and teacher workload. The main themes are: critical thinking, authenticity and teacher workload. These three areas will give an in-depth look at literature and studies conducted in each area. The purpose of this literature review is to identify what teachers are already effectively doing in regards to these competencies and what is being given up or sacrificed in order to accommodate this.

As teachers begin to implement 21st century skills into their teaching practices, students are still required to learn the basics. Teachers may feel at conflict with what they are having to do: schedule time for 21st century learning skills as well as ensure students have the basic knowledge needed at a particular grade level. Fortunately for students, they are getting the full range of skills, but teachers may be enduring hardships (i.e., time, knowledge or skills) to do this. The main hardship is the workload to ensure student success across the board, from basic skills to high levels of metacognition. Many studies have been done on how to successfully teach students through authentic task (Flowerday & Schraw, 2000; Gambrell, Hughes, Calvert, Malloy & Igo, 2011; Wiggins, 1990) but little mention is ever given to how many hours teachers put into creating these tasks. This also goes for critical thinking; many teachers already try to

instill skills to achieve critical thinking in their students. As with everything, something has to give; this may be what teachers are teaching or their work-life balance yet the literature never mentions what that is or what it may be. Based on my own experiences, my assumption is that this sacrifice comes from teachers own time.

The following provides information in regards to 21st century learning competencies and teacher workload and how these influence our students and school environment the most, focussing on authentic tasks and critical thinking. It should be mentioned here that an assumption was made that authentic tasks increase student engagement. The academic research and literature on each of these is plentiful (Flowerday & Schraw, 2000; Gambrell, Hughes, Calvert, Malloy & Igo, 2011; Wiggins, 1990); the effects they have on students has been researched and written about. As mentioned earlier, teachers have been embracing the shift to 21st century learning in order “to produce people who are morally good, intellectually competent, socially sensitive, spiritually inquisitive, and committed to living full and satisfying lives” (Noddings, 2014, p. 16). Where there is a gap in the research is the effect on teacher workload to implement these new initiatives. The literature will be further explored and identified with an eye to exploring this stated gap.

Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is a term that all educators have heard and most likely used in their classes with their students, but what does it really mean? The term has many different definitions that vary widely in depth.

Broadly defined, critical thinking was seen as the cognitive processes and strategies involved in decision making, problem solving, or inquiry, whereas a narrow definition

was seen as an essential element of general cognitive processes, such as problem solving or decision making, but was not synonymous with them. (Alazzi, 2008, p. 244)

Further, Glaser (1941), defined critical thinking as being comprised of three components:

1. an attitude of being disposed to consider in a thoughtful way the problems and subjects that come within range of one's experience
2. knowledge of methods of logical inquiry and reasoning
3. some skills in applying those methods (p. 5-6)

Although many researchers and education philosophers have defined critical thinking, it “can be traced back to Dewey’s concept of reflective thinking” (Garrett, 2013, p. 304). As Day and Harbour (2013) summarize, Dewey defined reflective thinking as “active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge” (p. 112). In order to help students get to the point that Dewey defines as reflective learning, many teachers have relied on “Blooms Taxonomy as a common source for reference...because the taxonomy provide[s] support to the argument that these skills were essential to students of all ages” (Garrett, 2013, p. 304).

“Bloom’s taxonomy is a six-level classification system that uses observed student behavior to infer the level of student achievement. Moving from simple to more complex, the taxonomy’s levels include knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation” (Athanassiou et al., 2003, p. 535). Athanassiou et al. (2003) state that Bloom’s Taxonomy provides “additional ways [for teachers] to support student success in their teaching... [the taxonomy] suggests ways [teachers] can encourage students to develop responsibility for their learning and increase the complexity of their critical-thinking skills” (p. 538). Generally speaking, the taxonomy provides information for teachers looking to develop higher level thinking skills in their students.

In a descriptive research study, students in a music class were monitored over the course of 18 classes for how often they were practicing their instruments versus the amount of time they were doing lower-order thinking and critical thinking. It was found that “teacher talk accounted for the majority of non-performance teacher-student interactions” (Garrett, 2013, p. 309). “Isolating critical thinking time...for teachers and students showed that teachers spent more time instructing than students did responding” (Garrett, 2013, p. 312), which is not time spent building critical thinking skills. If teachers want students to build critical thinking skills, time must be spent where students are actually employing different strategies to advance them to the highest level of thinking possible. Garrett (2013) summarized his findings by stating that “development of critical thinking skills...can shape dramatically the independence of musicians” (p. 314). Fortunately, this does not only apply to musicians, but to students in all classes.

This notion is echoed by Hemer (2013), when she states that “deep learning is associated with knowledge facilitation rather than knowledge transmission” (p. 487). There are three ways students acquire knowledge: transmissively, transactionally and transformatively. Transmissive learning “assumes knowledge is content, a commodity possessed by individuals, controlled by educators, and transferrable to students through demonstration, telling, and modeling” (Harris & Cullen, 2009, p. 57). Transactional learning is characterized by “experiential activities, student - to-student learning through collaborative acts of discovery, active learning, and team-based projects” (Harris & Cullen, 2009, p. 57) and finally, transformative learning is achieved “through self-reflection, self-awareness, and self-learning...whereby the learner must reassess new knowledge in relation to existing knowledge and reflect upon the underlying assumptions and biases that are the foundation of that existing knowledge” (Harris & Cullen, 2009, p. 57). These different types of learning transactions provide information to educators about how they are

teaching students. As education moves towards teaching students 21st century skills, teachers' own teaching must transform as well.

As it has been explained, instilling critical thinking skills by developing authentic tasks for students has been proven to positively affect students. Not only do teachers need to do this for their students, it is also mandated by the Alberta Government. For example, Alberta Education mandates that teachers be instructing students to become critical thinkers (Province of Alberta, 2014, p. 2). This is named in one of the seven competencies that were outlined in the Framework for Student Learning (2010). Numerous pieces of research focus on the results of these initiatives on students learning (Garrett, 2013; Harris & Cullen, 2009; Hemer, 2013), but I am left to wonder what the effects are on teachers and teacher workload. A teacher's workload can be impacted by many different aspects of their day, for example, the creation of student assessments. The creation of authentic tasks which truly measure student's ability can be time consuming and difficult.

Authentic Assessment

To some teachers, creating assessments may seem simple, but to others it can be a difficult chore. In order to create truly authentic assessment pieces, teachers must be fully in tune with their students' abilities, prior knowledge, curriculum and skills (for example, with technology). Authentic assessments can be constantly evolving from year to year, class to class which makes a teacher's job of the creation of these items endless. Educational assessment should be viewed as "a tool to measure the effectiveness of [the] teaching and learning process [and as] a means to attain educational goals" (Mansor, Leng, Rasul, Raof, & Yusoff, 2013, p. 102). "Assessment supports the learning process by helping teachers identify and begin to

address student strengths and needs. It is ongoing and responsive, changing over the course of a unit in response to student growth and development” (Government of Alberta, 2010, p. 46).

Authentic assessment is defined as when a teacher “directly examine[s] student performance on worthy intellectual tasks” (Wiggins, 1990, p. 2) based on real world tasks or projects, rather than paper and pencil exams. Wiggins (1990) goes on to further clarify authentic tasks:

- Requires students to be effective performers with acquired knowledge
- Presents the student with the full array of tasks that mirror the priorities and challenges found in the best instructional activities
- Attends to whether the student can craft polished, thorough and justifiable answers, performances or products. (p. 2)

Generally speaking, creating authentic tasks requires teachers to examine where their students are to help them decide where they want them to be, academically. It is through authentic tasks that learning really takes place because “having an authentic audience is far more motivating than ‘writing for nobody’ or just the teacher” (Werner-Burke, 2014, p. 44). Many students focus on rote memorization; creating tasks that go beyond general recall can be an arduous task for some teachers, but if we want our students to succeed once they are through the education system, it is something that needs to be done because “quality teaching must be centered on learning” (Gloffre Scott, 2014, p. 73). For some, the creation of assessments based solely on memorization may be easy, as they are assessments that can be used from year to year. The assessment may include matching or multiple choice type questions. On the other hand, authentic assessments may ask teachers to create real-life projects for students to work through;

tasks of this type force the learner to go beyond simple rote memorization, thereby driving them to think beyond basic knowledge and onto analysis, evaluation and synthesis.

It was important to find information on creating authentic tasks for students. Once students are engaged, it is important to have their learning be as authentic as possible (in accordance with Wiggin's (1990) definition of authenticity). The study of authentic assessment is complex and has been done across a few domains, some of which will be examined in this paper. For example, a mixed-methods study by Gambrell, Hughes, Calvert, Malloy and Igo (2011) involved qualitative interviews; some pre- and post- data that was collected quantitatively. The research focused on creating authentic reading and writing tasks for students in grades 3 – 5.

The study consisted of students who were “matched with carefully screened adult pen pals” (Gambrell, et al, 2011, p. 240) who they wrote back and forth with about different books over the course of the year. The adults were trained how to write meaningful letters back to their elementary pen pals who would prompt the students to think deeper about different stories they had read. The study found that “motivation increased significantly” (p. 246) when students were paired up with an adult pen pal. Finally, it was found that student “participation in authentic tasks not only provide[d] opportunities for students to use their prior knowledge and to practice using interpretive strategies, it also provide[d] a rich context for developing critical thinking skills” (p. 252). The concept of developing critical thinking skills will be addressed later in the literature review.

Another study that looked at authentic assessment was a phenomenology study which was used to “generate rather than test theory” (Flowerday & Schraw, 2000, p. 634) about the “role of choice in the classroom” (p. 634). The study looked at offering students choice on

writing; thirty-six teachers took part. The paper outlined two types of questions that were asked, one relating to students and the other relating to teachers. Students felt that choice was synonymous with “empowered, responsibility, ownership and motivation” (p. 639). Teachers felt that choice “enhance[d] motivation by increasing interest...by providing opportunity for students to select what they [were] already interested in...and generat[ing] interest where previously it did not exist” (p. 639). The study concluded that there may be lots of different factors that influence a teacher’s choice to offer choice, such as “students’ ages and ability levels” (p. 640), and “engagement, satisfaction and empowerment” (p. 644), but failed to conclude if it improved deeper learning. This article brings forth a good argument regarding choice and which is if it leads to critical thinking, or only provides students with a sense of empowerment. This was important to examine because it can be widely interpreted that student choice leads to student engagement and students are engaged during authentic tasks.

Both Gambrell et al. (2011) and Flowerday and Schraw (2000) point to the important idea that student engagement relates to the projects they are faced with; the more authentic and meaningful a task is the more engaged a student will be. Gambrell et al. (2011) found that “participation in authentic literacy tasks not only provides opportunities for students to use their prior knowledge and to practice using interpretative strategies, it also provides a rich context for developing critical thinking skills in literacy development” (p. 20). Flowerday and Schraw (2000) found teachers employed choice for three reasons: 1) to increase student self-determination; 2) to increase personal interest; 3) to provide an opportunity for students to practice their decision making skills. Conclusions from both pieces of research illustrate that authentic assessment provides students with the deepest type of learning possible, while also building other skills that will suit them later in life. It also was a springboard to the next piece of

literature I sought – the effects on teacher workload in relation to creating critical thinkers through the use of authentic assessments.

Teacher Workload

According to the Province of Alberta's School Act (2000), teachers, "while providing instruction or supervision" (p. 17) must:

- a) provide instruction competently to students;
- b) teach the courses of study and education programs that are prescribed, approved or authorized pursuant to this Act;
- c) promote goals and standards applicable to the provision of education adopted or approved pursuant to this Act;
- d) encourage and foster learning in students;
- e) regularly evaluate students and periodically report the results of the evaluation to the students, the students' parents and the board;
- f) maintain, under the direction of the principal, order and discipline among the students while they are in the school or on the school grounds and while they are attending or participating in activities sponsored or approved by the board;
- g) subject to any applicable collective agreement and the teacher's contract of employment, carry out those duties that are assigned to the teacher by the principal or the board. (p. 23)

It is important to look at all that a teacher is required to do because it sheds light on how teachers become at skilled multitaskers.

It is especially important to recognize item (f) in the definition as this is the portion of a teacher's workload that he/she is not in control of because the district he/she works for could be

getting direction from the government about what initiatives to introduce. In a study completed in Britain in 2005, researchers looked at secondary teachers' workload. It studied 32 schools and multiple teachers over the course of two weeks. Each teacher was required to keep a journal that outlined what they worked on during the day. It was found that there were several reasons why teachers perceived their workload to be high, but most notable was that there were too many "government-school initiatives" which were "time consuming" (Butt, 2005, p. 17). Even more importantly, "teachers felt that they were regularly experiencing almost constant change, a situation made worse by the lack of co-ordination of initiatives" (p. 17). This is compounded by "teachers' caring attributes... [which] only have the potential to contribute to the intensity of their workload" (p. 8) as they are "always chasing the next initiative" (Butt, 2005, p. 19). This is echoed by Murgatroyd (2014): "too often policies, technologies, and curriculum is "done" to teachers rather than created and designed by teachers" (p. 25). Although this study was completed in the UK, it is also found in studies done in Alberta by Duxbury (2013) and the ATA (2014). As Murgatroyd (2014) explained at the end of his article, to be effective, "educational change and development are best led by professionals, supported by research and aligned with the needs of communities and the province" (p. 28). This places a lot of the onus of educational change on the teachers who are on the front lines of change.

In a blue ribbon panel study completed by the ATA on Inclusive Education, many survey participants are quoted in regards to comments about their workload. In the report, sentiments such as "I need time to properly plan and find the resources I need to address the concerns of these learners" (The Alberta Teachers Association, 2014, p. 66) and "I find effectively modifying lessons, independent work and assessments...to be quite timely and challenging" (p. 67) are echoed throughout the document by survey participants. This is explained further by the

American Federation of Teachers (2005), who explain that “while teachers often use published or other external assessment tools, the bulk of the assessment information they use for decision-making comes from approaches they create and implement. Indeed, the assessment demands of the classroom go well beyond readily available instruments” (p. 31). Jenkins and Yoshimura (2010), as quoted by The ATA, state “teachers are facing ever-increasing demands in trying to meet the needs of students in general education classrooms...the diverse needs of students...require teachers to keep abreast of the current research and literature” (p. 42). This study is about inclusive education and does not fully encapsulate 21st century competencies which is why teacher workload and 21st century competencies should be examined. The common thread between inclusive education and teaching critical thinking through authentic tasks is the need for teachers to have time to plan, implement and assess these new structures that they are being asked to implement.

Over the course of 2013, renowned Canadian researcher Linda Duxbury conducted an arm’s length study with the ATA entitled *The 2011/12 National Study on Balancing Work, Life and Caregiving: The Situation in Alberta* (2013). The study compared Alberta teachers’ responses to the national survey and looked at possible reasons for differences in areas that had a large difference from the national average. Of specific interest in regards to teacher workload, it was found that “88% of teachers work more than 45 hours a week” (p. 51) and “the typical teacher in the ATA sample spends 60.8 hours in work-related activities per week—10 more hours in work per week, on average, than the professionals in the total [national] sample” (p. 51). This may be because “teachers are more likely than other employees to devote a lot of energy to their work role” (Duxbury & Higgins, 2013, p. 51). It is important to note here that the Framework for Student Learning (Alberta Education, 2010b) was mandated not long after its

release. This became a busy time for educators in Alberta which could be reflected in the high numbers found in this report.

The last piece of this research that is of interest in regards to teacher workload is that “school boards across Alberta need to deal with workload issues if they want to improve teachers’ engagement, job satisfaction and intent to turnover. They also need to address issues with respect to career development if they wish to retain and engage employees within the Generation X and Generation Y cohorts.” (Duxbury & Higgins, 2013, p. 53). ‘Generation X’ is defined as “people born between the 1960 and 1970, at the end of the baby boom” (Ho, 2010, p. 58) and ‘Generation Y’ is people “born immediately after the ‘Generation X’, in the 1980s and early 1990s” (Ho, 2010, p. 59). It is interesting to note that Generation X and Y were mentioned in this research as these teachers who are going to become the face of education in Alberta. As Alberta Education looks towards fully implementing 21st century learning skills, these are the teachers in our schools that are going to need to be given the time to be fully trained to bring these strategies to the students of Alberta.

An ethnographic study conducted in Australia looked into the effects of teacher workload on teaching quality. Hemer’s (2013) research focussed on university staff’s perception about workload and the quality of education their students were receiving. Although there was “no common definition of quality teaching” (Hemer, 2013, p. 486), staff felt student engagement was at the forefront; staff wanted “to deepen their knowledge and teach them how think and question” (p. 487). The author found two main strategies used by staff: “the first was to take time from research for the sake of teaching [and]...the second was to keep up the productivity of research by working after hours and on weekends” (p. 488-489). This lead to two main issues:

1. “‘Time banditry’ [which] refers to workers taking time out of work for personal activities”
2. “‘Magically expanding working week’ [which] refers to working outside ‘normal’ hours”

The main problem with both of these issues is that teachers are using it as a “resistant strategy to cope with the pressures of high workloads” (Hemer, 2013, p. 489). Staff were lead to change the way they assessed students in order to compensate for this reduced working time which some saw as “being of better quality than ‘surface’ approaches” (p. 491). Although this is a positive, the creation of new assessments takes time, thus adding to a teachers workload while developing the new assessments in the meantime.

Finally, it is important to note that no study has ever been conducted solely on teacher workload in Canada. In response to this, the ATA, Alberta Ministry of Education and the Alberta School Boards Association are beginning a study in which “3700 teachers and school administrators are participating in a year-long workload study” (Harris, 2014, p. 4). This is an important study because it is a time when teachers in Alberta are “fac[ing] issues like class size, complex classroom composition and finding time for the professional development needed to keep pace with continually evolving factors like technology and inclusion” (p. 4). It will be exciting to see the results of this survey over the course of the next year and if it will have any influence on the workload of teachers in Alberta.

The challenge to this in Alberta will be to offer time for teachers work on implementing “*Critical Thinking, Problem Solving and Decision Making [and]...Lifelong Learning, Personal Management and Well-being*” (Alberta Education, 2010b, p. 7-9). There is a lot of business

matter to be dealt with in a school and sometimes time is the last thing on a staff meeting agenda because “teachers need space and time to engage in authentic learning” (Van Tassell, 2014, p. 78). “Educational policy makers today tout creativity, critical thinking and collaborative problem solving as major aims of education for students – yet they institute methods that deprive teachers of opportunities to exercise their own creativity” (Noddings, 2014, p. 17). Teacher support is of the utmost importance; “conditions that support the ongoing learning of the most important resource of any school or district – the professionals who work there” (DuFour, 2014, p. 32). This is going to need become the forefront of all school communities as “improving educational outcomes is...achieved by increasing the quality of the teaching force” (William, 2011, p. 26) which requires time; something that teachers do not have a lot of, but always seem to make more of.

Summary and Conclusion

Teachers are busy people who aim to try their best to teach students the best way they know how. Many teachers are great even without the government telling them how they must teach. Many teachers own autonomy about the curriculum and how to best teach it is sufficient, but sometimes there are people in different positions that feel they know best about how teachers should teach.

Teachers workload in regards to implementing 21st century competencies is “deficit conception” (Gerbic, 2011, p. 225); “while there are substantive texts that provide guidelines for teachers on blended learning practice, there is a much smaller body of work that directly investigates teacher perspectives” (p. 232). Basically, the literature notes the importance of teaching students critical thinking skills and that the best way to do this is through the creation of authentic assessments, but “additional research is needed to explore the relationships between

teacher behaviors and the development of student critical thinking skills” (Garrett, 2013, p. 304).

This is an area where little has been researched; there have been general research pieces conducted on general teacher workload, but never on a teacher’s workload in regards to new government initiatives.

As this area has not been looked at from this light, Chapter 3 will outline the project design in order to offer some insight about the effects government initiatives have on teacher workload and offer a solution about how to make this shift manageable for districts, schools and ultimately teachers who are on the front line with students.

Chapter 3: Project Design and Details

Based on the literature review and the information that was discovered through that exercise, I have decided that the project that is best suited to ensure students are meeting the mentioned competencies while keeping in mind teacher workload is a strategic plan for all stakeholders. Having helped develop and implement a strategic plan for the English Language Arts Council (ELAC) of the ATA for 2012-2015, I have seen firsthand how well it works when all stakeholders, myself included, feel ownership of the goals. A strategic plan will work best because it is a collaborative process which results in a shared vision. I feel this best suits the project because it allows skills that are already being mandated to be included as well as it breaks down each stakeholder's role in achieving the shared goals. It also makes the whole process attainable for all as it provides short term and long term goals. The idea of the plan will be explained as well as the process to develop and implement the plan. Benefits and limitations will also be discussed as to provide sound rationale for the reasons why this is the best and most efficient mode to implement 21st century competencies within Alberta. As DuFour (2014) states, implementation must include "conditions that support...the professionals who work [in schools]" (p. 32) so teachers don't feel they are "experiencing almost constant change...made worse by the lack of co-ordination of initiatives" (Butt, 2005, p. 17). This is supported by Duxbury (2013) and Murgartroyd (2014) who feel implementation of initiatives should be led by teachers and supported by the province and community.

Strategic Plan Definition and Purpose

Strategic plans have had a place in the business world and are just beginning to enter the educational realm (Albertson-Zenor & Raferty, 1993, p. 3). With that in mind, the definition and purpose, benefits and limitations are limited to the business sector, but can be applied to

educational plans as well, because “strategic planning is far from a passing fad” (Bryson, 2011, p. 22).

Olsen and Eadie, as quoted by Albertson-Zenor and Raferty (1993) explain strategic planning to be “a disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what a community or organization is, what it does, and why it does it” (p. 3). It is a “process: a set of concepts, procedures, and tools designed to assist a group in meeting the needs of its organization or a community in changing its environment” (Albertson-Zenor & Raferty, 1993, p. 2). Generally speaking, strategic planning is an action plan which includes many stakeholders and occurs over a longer period of time. This allows communities (i.e. schools, businesses, cities) to “tak[e] charge and mak[e] it happen rather than accept the status quo” (Albertson-Zenor & Raferty, 1993, p. 3).

In terms of strategic planning in education, district and school “values are important as they underpin the school vision and they identify expected student outcomes” (Mbugua & Rarieya, 2014, p. 105). This is especially important as schools in Alberta move towards teaching and assessing 21st century competencies, recognizing and accepting these competencies as new additions to the curriculum. It is important to note that strategic plans “use current and future trends to make current, not future, decisions” (Hambright & Diamantes, 2004, p. 235) which is detrimental as teachers begin the shift to teaching new skill sets. A strategic plan will help guide policy makers, district staff, school administration, teachers, parents and students in making the best decisions for students.

Strategic Planning Process

The process of developing a strategic plan is not one that is prescribed in the sense that it requires a set number of goals, stakeholders, and a specific timeline. Rather, the literature on

strategic plans was clear on a few key pieces that need to be in place in order for the strategic plan to be successful. First, Albertson-Zenor & Raferty (1993) state that the “involvement of the entire community is the ideal” (p. 6) when developing a strategic plan. This was echoed by Hambright and Diamantes (2004) who state that to be successful, “everyone gets involved in realizing the vision” (p. 235). In terms of this project, ‘everyone’ is all educational stakeholders in Alberta: government personnel, district-level leaders, school principals, teachers, parents and students. The process of inclusion is quite simple; “strategic planning features the best features of ‘top down’ and ‘bottom up’ management; top management maintains its responsibility for over-all direction, but the [strategic] planning team includes broad representation of stakeholder groups” (Hambright & Diamantes, 2004, p. 235). When a shared vision is present, all can work toward the collective goal.

In order for the process to work best, “the plan must be constantly revised to reflect the effects of change” (Albertson-Zenor & Raferty, 1993, p. 6). If there were to be top-down changes, the strategic planning process allows for all members to adjust the plan as they see fit to ensure that the goals can be met. This may be why strategic plans are so successful; they are able to be fluid with the changing dimensions of society. When a goal is rigid, and changes occur, it can be disheartening and lead to potential failure and member disengagement, thereby causing part or whole of the strategic plan not be completed. This can be detrimental to different groups who employ strategic plans. The fact that they are ‘allowed’ and encouraged to be changed as change happens is what makes strategic plans so great for something like the field of education, which is constantly in flux.

Benefits of a Strategic Plan

Implementation of 21st century competencies is blurring the distinction between schools and the public sector. As such, we must prepare our students for life after school while they are still in school. “Strategic planning allows a community to dream and envision a higher quality of life for all its members” (Albertson-Zenor & Raferty, 1993, p. 3). Albertson-Zenor and Raferty (1993) go on further to explain that “strategic planning becomes a process through which a community can begin to strategically develop its local vision while understanding that the outside world is very much a part of the local context” (p. 2). Just as what employers are looking for in new hires is changing, what educators must teach and assess is also shifting. It is through understanding what the outside world wants (from students) and the type of shift that is currently occurring that all stakeholders should be able to see the benefits in utilizing such a goal-setting structure.

According to Bryson (2011), there are six benefits of strategic planning that the business or organization will experience:

1. Promotion of strategic thinking, acting and learning through strategic conversation
2. Improved decision making
3. Enhanced organizational effectiveness, responsiveness and resilience
4. Enhanced organizational legitimacy
5. Enhanced effectiveness of broader societal systems
6. Benefit the people involved (p. 14-17)

These all relate the benefits that the organization and stakeholders will experience. I believe that all organizations, schools included, would want to achieve these six benefits as they create a more efficient, organized body.

Continuing with the benefits of strategic planning, the communities that are transformed through the implementation process will also benefit. The following benefits are among those that the community might experience. Strategic planning:

- Promotes efficient use of scarce resources.
- Improves coordination.
- Builds community consensus.
- Increases public awareness.
- Strengthens the community's competitive position.
- Encourages forward thinking.
- Focuses community efforts on key issues.” (Albertson-Zenor & Raftery, 1993, p. 6)

The benefits on the contributing members and the community affected are too large to be dismissed; strategic planning allows for the growth of both the individual and community.

More specifically, strategic planning is beneficial for schools in particular. It “enables a commitment to both short- and long-term goals and therefore enables schools to envision their future (Mbugua & Rarieya, 2014, p. 99). By allowing educators to see attainable goals which are both short and long term, it can create a positive forward-thinking motion that can help steer the school or district towards accomplishing the set out goals. It is also

smart, because it is relatively easy to do; is not all that time- and resource-intensive, particularly when matched against the costs of potential failure; seeks out relevant information; makes use of deliberative argumentation, which is an important route to producing wise judgments; and would seem to go hand in hand with the craft of creating public value. (Bryson, 2011, p. 17).

Overall the benefits of implementing a strategic plan at the district and school outweigh the few limitations it has.

Limitations of a Strategic Plan

Although few, there are some limitations to using a strategic plan. These limitations can be reduced if the necessary resources are put into place prior to engaging in strategic conversations. With the knowledge that some barriers may arise, they can be avoided to the best of the community's ability. These limitations are commitment, long term planning, student voice and government directives; each is explained further.

First, strategic planning may be difficult if the community “lacks the skills...or commitment by key decision makers to produce a viable plan” (Albertson-Zenor & Raferty, 1993, p. 3). An unfortunate consequence of this would be that the “expectations will not be fulfilled” (p. 3). In order to ensure this does not happen, all key members of the planning committee need to be fully committed and on board with the strategic planning process to ensure there is no disappointment in the larger community when key stakeholders do not fulfill their roles. This can be likened to situations where there are “great intentions but no follow-through” (p. 3); all stakeholders need to be fully committed to the process.

Secondly, long term goal setting needs to be in place in order for strategic planning to be successful. Historically, school's planning is “often short-term and usually based on the immediate needs of the school” (Mbugua & Rarieya, 2014, p. 100). Although some planning at the school level will need to be this way, long-term planning needs to focus on the broader vision of the district, which is directly affected by government initiatives and mandates.

Third, all stakeholders need to be part of the strategic conversation. Historically, planning has included government members, district administration, school administration and

teachers, but failed to include students. “Student voice in more areas of the strategic plan may have improved collaboration, since the strategic plan is geared to improving students’ performance” (Mbugua & Rarieya, 2014, p. 105); who better to ask about their own learning needs than student’s themselves. It is in this way that students will feel empowered to take ownership of their learning, thereby creating higher achievement and hopefully, more successes. This should directly relate to the type of individual schools are sending out into the workforce which will ultimately benefit society.

Lastly, often times strategic planning is hampered by ministerial directives which impede the strategic process from being completed. Government directives occur, and the strategic planning process will allow for changes and revisions to be made along the way. If the government, district and schools are all working collaboratively, then it may be possible for these directives to be worked into the strategic plan. It is when there is a lack of communication and collaboration that these directives often seem to come from nowhere and can radically change the course of a district or an individual school. The government should also recognize that changes within a school often occur and are most successful when the process does come from within a school (Mbugua & Rarieya, 2014, p. 108). Retalick (2009) as cited by Mbugua and Rarieya (2014) states that “a decentralized system of education and a high degree of autonomy results in successful schools [which] suggests that policy initiated by the school-based management is likely to be better accepted and implemented as opposed to external directives and bureaucracy, which rarely result in the intended good” (p. 108). Basically, government should be following the lead of districts and schools, rather than the other way around. Through strategic planning, the collaborative process would allow some of this balancing of power to occur.

Other Possible Issues

The strategic planning process could be prevented from being fully successful by a few other factors: funding, inflexibility and full representation of all stakeholders. Sometimes the process of strategic planning may be hampered by a lack of funding for the process. It recommended that “school districts not engage in [strategic planning] unless they were willing to provide sufficient funding at the sites for the implementation of the action plans” (Hambright & Diamantes, 2004, p. 236). With this in mind, as long as the process is funded, it should not be an issue. If a community does not want to respect the process and fund it as it should be, then it would be advised not to engage in the strategic process. Secondly, “inflexibility was cited as another potential drawback of strategic planning” (Hambright & Diamantes, 2004, p. 236). All stakeholders need to understand that the whole idea of the strategic planning process is to be flexible and revised and changed as needed. Without this understanding, the process may face a potential failure. Finally, there needs to be representation of all stakeholders; the more involvement, the better as “as more participants from stakeholders (i.e., parent representatives) [is] desired” (Hambright & Diamantes, 2004, p. 236). In order to be transparent, the strategic process requires active involvement from all parties. Overall, these are just a few issues that may hamper the implementation of a success strategic plan.

What I have just provided here is a review of the literature from Chapter 2, an indication based upon this literature as to why a strategic plan for the district and schools is a valuable idea and have offered a bit of an overview of strategic planning. I will now outline how all of this will come together in the form of a strategic plan for both a school district and individual schools. As well, a link to a teacher’s professional growth plan will be made.

Proposed Project

For the purpose of this project, a strategic plan template for the district and school to use was created, as was a teacher professional growth plan template that is in line with the district and school's plan. Each of these plans will need to be aligned closely with one another to ensure all of the goals can be met. In order to demonstrate this, a numbering system is used which illustrates how all of the goals are tied closely together, in order to maintain cohesiveness throughout the different levels. As with all strategic plans, they are "a disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what a community or organization is, what it does, and why it does it" (Albertson-Zenor & Raferty, 1993, p. 3). A potential plan for the district, school and individual teacher can be found in Appendix A, B and C.

In order to be effective, the strategic plan template will be created to occur over a period of three years. In implementing this over a period of time, rather than in one year, this ensures all members understand what is being asked of them and their own responsibilities; at the same time it does not seem overwhelming to anyone. Plans which are created for only one year do not increase stakeholder understanding or goal completion. While this is all happening, teachers, schools and the district are also ensuring that they are meeting the mandate set out by the education minister. This can be found in Figure 1.

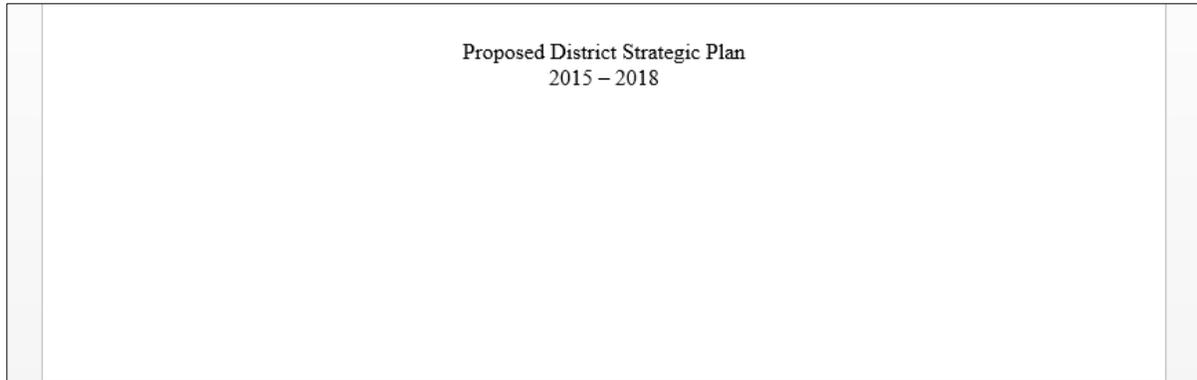


Figure 1. Three year time period for the proposed strategic plan.

When deciding on how to create the strategic plan, I knew that there had to be a place for multiple long term goals which would each include their own short term goals and subsequent strategies. A timeline had to also be incorporated to ensure that all goals would be met by the end of three years. See Figure 2.

Long Term Goal 1:	
Contributors:	
Short Term Goal 1:	
Strategies	Timeline
Examples	
Review Dates	

Figure 2. Long term goals with subsequent short term goals which include strategies, examples, a timeline and review dates.

Albertson-Zenor and Raferty (1993) advise that strategic plans need “2 to 3 years to implement strategic objectives...and to begin the journey, the team needs to detail an immediate implementation strategy for the first 6 to 12 months” (p. 6). This is in-line with the short term and long term goals that I have chosen for my project. I chose three years because this allows time to create, implement and reflect on the different areas of the plan. Anything shorter and I feared that stakeholders would feel pressure to meet unattainable goals.

Review dates are included so that over the course of the three years, each short term goal can be revisited to ensure that all involved are on track (Figure 3). Another piece of this strategic plan template is a row under each long term goal that allows the users to list the names and roles of contributors to each specific goal. This ensures that all involved are consulted at each step of the way as the group works collectively to reach the goal. See Figure 4.

	Examples	
	Review Dates	

Figure 3. Review date category where stakeholders can diarize conversations and action items.

	Long Term Goal 1:	
	Contributors:	
	Short Term Goal 1:	

Figure 4. A list of contributors for each long term goal is included. These individuals or groups may contribute to any of the short term goals listed under each long term goal.

As Figure 5 shows, each goal also has a secondary row for specific examples to be included. This allows stakeholders to see exactly what they are doing and how it fits into the final plan.

	Examples	
	Review Dates	

Figure 5. Specific examples from districts, schools or individual teachers experience should be included to illustrate the goal is tangible.

A completed and not completed portion exists at the bottom of each short term goal so they can be checked off as each goal is completed; each goal may not take the full three years to complete, and nor is that the idea behind the strategic plan as shown in Figure 6. There are portions of this plan that must be completed before others can be started. The design allows for this to be communicated with all stakeholders in a clear and transparent way. It also provides an

easy jumping off point for when the strategic plan has run its course over three years and the next one is being created.

	Review Dates	
	Completion Date	

Figure 6. The completion date allows all stakeholders an easy way to identify completed goals and goals which require more attention.

Future Steps

If educators and policy makers are looking to create students for 2030 (Province of Alberta, 2010b, p. 1), the strategic plan needs to be sustainable and thinking and planning needs to be long term. In order to ensure this is a long term process, district and school strategic plans and teacher growth plans need to be three year plans which are revisited each year and not created each year.

The district strategic plan should be housed on the district website as well as the collaborative website so all community members and staff can find the plan easily. It should be made public, as the community has input into the creation of it. The school strategic plan should be placed on the school website, as well as be displayed in the school. It should be the focus of all staff meetings and subsequent in-school professional development for teachers. Teacher professional growth plans should be discussed with school administration. Every effort should be made to help each individual teacher reach their goals within the three year timeline.

Each year, all three documents should be reviewed, with minor changes made. These review dates should be well documented in the proper areas on the plan to ensure transparency for all stakeholders. As the entire district would be on the same page in regards to common goals, if teachers were to change schools, or administrators be placed at a different location, their

growth plan would be easily transferable to another school as common goals are created across all areas.

Once teacher workload is manageable, teachers will be more willing to move towards teaching 21st century competencies. This is reflected in the strategic plan which can be found in the three appendixes; there are more goals to be completed during the first year which focus on managing teacher workload. Once completed, the focus shifts to teaching students the 21st century competencies. These goals may or may not be completed at the end of the three years as they would be a good starting point for the next plan being created. This is because after three years, teachers will not be experts in teaching these competencies and nor will the students have mastered all of the skills needed.

Chapter 4: Reflection

Changed Thoughts and Beliefs

When I first began my M. Ed, my end goal was to advance my qualifications for my salary. I had already completed a few graduate level courses that had been fairly easy and didn't challenge my thinking much. After the first three weeks of the program, I had mentally pushed myself harder than I ever had before. During this exhausting time, I completed two courses which were based on the theories of education. The value of having to intrinsically examine my own beliefs is what I found so challenging. Here I was thinking I was one type of teacher with a solid philosophy of education and I was thrown for a loop. By the end of the first three weeks, I wasn't sure who I was as a teacher, and thus began my journey.

As I progressed through the program, I found again and again my own thinking would be challenged. I was looking at teaching in my own classroom in a completely different way and I was looking at my school administration and district leaders in a different way as well. On one hand, I respected the work they were doing with our school and district to bring it up to speed in regards to the shift towards 21st century learning, but I also began to question some of what they were doing and how they were going about it. Up until I began to work on my masters, I didn't question the decisions my principals or district administration were making; I went with what they told us to do. Questioning this helped shape my own beliefs.

When I think back to what one course from the past two years influenced my thinking the most it has to be EDCI 591: Leadership (Fall 2013). This course shifted my thinking about what a leader should be and how to lead people. I found that my interactions with people, both my administrators and colleagues, changed significantly after this course. During the course, we had to rate ourselves as a leader according to a scale and survey. With each question, we were asked

to justify our rating and give concrete examples. This reflective activity really had me consider the different leaders I had encountered in my career and through volunteering with different groups. It also required me to reflect about what type of leader I was when given the opportunity. I believe that this activity helped shape me for the remainder of the program and ultimately, will have a lasting impact on my career.

Before beginning my capstone project, I wasn't sure what my topic would be and where it would lead to in terms of what my project would look like. I'm satisfied with how my topic transformed from looking at competencies and teacher workload to the creation of the strategic plan. I believe that without the change in what I believed from the beginning of my masters to that point, my capstone would not have been what it turned out to be.

Changed actions

Before I began working on my masters, I was 'just' a teacher who taught Language Arts. I did my fair share of extra-curricular activities and contributed at staff meetings when needed. As I began my masters and I started to feel more confident in terms of leadership, I began to speak up more at meetings and take on more of a leadership role within my school. I volunteered to be acting admin when our principal or vice-principal were out of the building, helped create the school calendar and volunteered to be the coordinator of our FLEX initiative. Through all of these, I began to be seen as a leader on staff. One staff member even joked that I should be given a prep for all of the time I spend counselling other staff members. Although exhausting, this impromptu role has proved to me that I do have what it takes to be a leader and I credit this master's program for helping me get to this point.

Thoughts regarding education

This program began during a time when education faced some drastic changes; it was interesting to see the evolution from the point of view as someone completely immersed in the changes. In doing the many readings, I was able to identify why our school and district was moving a certain way; I was also able to substantiate my own opinions of what they were doing with research. It was like having the front row seat to a ‘choose your own adventure’ show and we still don’t know what the ending is going to be like. I feel like this is where my capstone project strategic plan fit in nicely with the way education is moving; it allows teachers, schools and districts to take a critical look at what they are doing and have done and to break it up into manageable goals for everyone.

My role as an educational professional

Doing what is right by our students is our main concern as educators. I feel that I have been able to manage this as a professional especially since embarking on this journey. Before, I would have done what I was always doing in my classroom. I would have attempted to shift my teaching and completed what was asked of me, but I would not have stepped up and taken on such a leadership role had I not been a part of this cohort. By knowing that I am able to do something to evoke change and do what is right for the students (any ultimately myself and my own profession) is affirming.

Another aspect that has evolved is that I have become more of a reflective teacher and colleague. Before, during and after a lesson, I have found myself to be more in tune with the type of teacher that I am. I am recognizing the different types of learners in my class and I am able to empathize with students who struggle with writing more now. Having sat in front of a blank computer screen more than a few times during the course of my masters, I understand the defeat some students may feel when they say they can’t think of anything to write. Through

different courses, our cohort has been taught how to quick write and generate ideas. I found I have been taking lesson ideas from class and have been transferring them to my own students. They appreciate a lesson when I say it's something I had to do as a student. Secondly, I have found myself to be more engaged with my colleagues, including our administration. I am able to dialogue on a different level with my administration as they now see me as a leader among staff. With my peers, I help mentor and teach those who are not as in tune with the changes in Alberta. It is nice to be seen as somewhat of an expert on staff. As such, I am able to help advocate on behalf of staff with administration in regards to the type of professional development they would like to see as I am able to see it from both the teacher and the principals view.

Overall, I think one word that sums up my experience with the courses I have taken so far and with my capstone is empowering. I felt empowered to adjust my teaching to better suite my student's needs, I felt empowered to transform my own teaching to what works best for me (and not just by what others are doing or because I was told to by someone) and I felt empowered to take on a leadership role at my school. Who knows where this last one will lead, but I now have the confidence that if I choose to pursue this further, that I will be capable of it.

The Future

As a cohort, we had just finished our first summer where we spent three crazy weeks completing two courses. I remember sitting on a patio in Banff visiting with one of my friends who has a Ph.D. in Education. She mentioned that once you begin to use your mind and writing skills again, the thirst for knowledge becomes addictive. Being so exhausted from such a steep learning curve that summer I remember just nodding and smiling and thinking to myself, "ya right", but as I reflect back on it now, I can completely understand her point.

I need a few more graduate level courses to bring myself up to 6 years of post-secondary, and those classes don't seem scary to take now. When I had enrolled in a course before this, I was always nervous about the readings and the writing that would be involved. I can actually say now that I will look forward to taking those classes now. As teachers, we call ourselves lifelong learners, but not many teachers get more than their four year degree. Now I can honestly call myself a lifelong learner. Although I will most likely not get a Ph.D., I can see myself constantly keeping myself engaged in some kind of learning, whether it be a course or through professional development through my school or specialist council.

I haven't yet decided if administration is where I want my career to lead. I feel that I am best utilized as a classroom teacher, for now. Unfortunately many principals see a teacher getting their masters and automatically assume they want to go into administration. I think teachers can take on leadership roles within the schools they are at without having to also take on the role of principal or assistant principal. I feel, for the time being, this is where I will best serve my school community and district.

Eventually, I can see myself looking to move to a university or college to teach pre-service teachers. I have presented at the Edmonton Beginning Teachers Conference for a few years and find that this is something that I enjoy doing as I feel like I am able to give new teachers a fair view of the world of teaching using real experiences I have encountered. I feel that this is something that would serve pre-service teachers in their education before they hit the real world of teaching.

I can also see myself in the Professional Development area of the Alberta Teachers Association (ATA). Having volunteered with my own specialist council, the English Language Arts Council of Alberta (ELAC) for my entire career, I feel that this is something that I am well

versed in and comfortable with. This position also includes many aspects of leadership; I can see this master's program being beneficial if I ever choose to apply for a job at the ATA.

I think it is always beneficial for a school and for a district to encourage their teachers to advance their own learning. By having teachers who are well-educated and well-versed in different areas (i.e. leadership, different curricular areas, technology), it can create a sense of empowerment for the teachers. It may also inspire teachers (and schools and districts) to also want better for our students. This is not to say that this isn't already happening, but that teachers who are specialists in different areas can inspire students to want to learn in different areas as well.

Networking

One of the most important lessons that I took away from completing this master's program is the value in networking. I began my career in a very collaborative school and moved to a school that was the complete opposite the year before beginning the program. What I found refreshing and essential to my success was the amount of comradery that our cohort experienced. Through this, I believe that the networking that was inadvertently provided through such a program will provide itself extremely useful in the future. I have a good friend who completed her masters through a completely online course. The only way her and her fellow classmates got to know each other was through a Facebook page they had created. I believe that by seeing each other every few months, friendships and professional relationships were formed that will most likely come to benefit everyone at some point in the future. I believe that the dialogue and collaboration between each one of us helped with our success. For me personally, I feel that it is because of some of my classmates that were able to expand my own views and offer a view from a different perspective. Our conversations were well rounded and allowed a glimpse into the life

of a teacher at a different school with different demographics as well as at different grades levels. This was insightful and always interesting to listen to. I believe I owe much of my success over the last two years to some of my classmates.

My mother-in-law, who has a Masters in nursing said to me when I first began on this journey, that having my masters will open doors for me that an undergrad couldn't. At first, I was skeptical, but now as this program comes to a close, I can see the benefits of completing it already. For example, the effect it has had on my students and my own school and my own perceived value that I can bring to the table, in whatever capacity that may be, now and in the future.

I cannot wait to see what doors may be opened up in the future because of completing my Masters of Education in Curriculum and Leadership from the University of Victoria.

Key Recommendations

Researching teacher workload is not something that is brand new, but looking at the effects of government mandates on workload, while also keeping student learning at the forefront is something that has not been researched extensively. It is a delicate balance which must be struck in order for teachers to be effective and students to be learning the competencies. This balance, I believe, may be achieved through the creation and implementation of the strategic plan for which I provided an exemplar template for in Chapter 3.

In terms of 21st century competencies and student achievement and teacher workload and attrition rates, three key recommendations are:

1. To look into specific ways 21st century competencies can be implemented in a manner that does not severely impact teacher workload. A study of the work in Finland may be beneficial in this area where the government and school boards are “scrapping traditional

‘teaching by subject’ in favour of ‘teaching by topic’” (Garner, 2015) in the next school year.

2. To examine the effects on student learning and achievement in the areas of 21st century competencies. The government feels that these new skills are imperative for our students to learn, but we have not yet seen the success rates of these students out in the ‘real world’ yet. A long-term study of these students would be beneficial.
3. To continue to examine teacher workload in the area of the implementation of different curricular outcomes and its effect on teacher attrition rates. As education shifts again, it would be important to look at teacher workload and the effects it has on attrition rates and if they are in line with the changes implemented by the government.

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Appendix A

Exemplar District Strategic Plan

Exemplar District Strategic Plan
2015 – 2018

Long Term Goal 1: Develop student competencies (critical thinking through authentic assessments)
Contributors: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Minister of Education - District leaders - Schools leaders - University representatives - Parents - Community members

Short Term Goal 1: Ensure government mandate is being met at all sites	
Strategies	Timeline
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Creation of a district-wide focus group with a member from each school to relay information regarding the mandate - Inform government representatives that mandate is/is not being met - Collect and review information from teachers about what is needed to meet mandate - Use targeted intervention with schools who are not meeting the mandate - Advocate on behalf of schools 	To be completed by the end of Year 1
Examples	
Review Dates	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Four dates throughout Year 1 (September, December, March and June) 	
Completion Date	

Short Term Goal 2: Secure and provide the resources necessary to schools for successful implementation.	
Strategies	Timeline
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Allocate funds to the process of implementing 21st century competencies - Provide the tools needed (technology, time, money) to schools to aid in the implementation of all competencies - Request funds from the government and outside agencies to ensure the proper tools can be given to teachers 	To be completed by the end of Year 3

to ensure efficient and effective implementation of competencies	
Examples	
Review Dates	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Throughout process - On an as-needed basis 	
Completion Date	

Short Term Goal 3: Provide timely professional development to all stakeholders	
Strategies	Timeline
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Create a district leadership program in which principals are educated and trained to instruct their staff about the competencies - Set aside time in the district calendar for all teachers to attend professional development sessions regarding the competencies - Hire experts to give professional development sessions for teachers on a multitude of 21st century competencies 	To be completed by the end of Year 3
Examples	
Review Dates	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ongoing throughout the three years 	
Completion Date	

Short Term Goal 4: Build capacity	
Strategies	Timeline
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Build principal knowledge and skills - Build teacher knowledge and skills - Provide school-based support where requested or needed - Monitor teacher attrition rates and staff shortages which could prevent successful implementation - Ensure parents and community members are knowledgeable about the occurring changes 	To be completed by the end of Year 2

- Keep principals and assistant principals at the same site for a minimum of three years	
Examples	
Review Dates	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ongoing throughout Years 1 and 2 - Should be completed by the end of year 2 (to the point where leaders are present at each site) 	
Completion Date	

Short Term Goal 5: Collaborate with universities and pre-service teachers	
Strategies	Timeline
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensure teachers entering the workforce are knowledgeable about the government mandate - New teachers should be familiar with and confident in teaching the competencies - Ensure new teachers are part of a mentorship with an experienced teacher - Send new teachers to professional development to help shape their pedagogy from the beginning 	To be completed by the end of Year 3
Examples	
Review Dates	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ongoing throughout process 	
Completion Date	

Long Term Goal 2: Manage teacher workload	
Contributors:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - District leaders - Teachers 	

Short Term Goal 1: Reduce the number of initiatives to only competency-based learning	
Strategies	Timeline
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Focus on implementation of competencies only - Complete other initiatives by the end of Year 1 to ensure focus for Year 2 and 3 	To be completed by the end of Year 1.
Examples	
Review Dates	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Four dates throughout Year 1 (September, December, March and June) 	
Completion Date	

Short Term Goal 2: Allow time for teachers to work collaboratively across the district	
Strategies	Timeline
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide dates in the calendar which allow teachers to work with teachers from other sites - Build collaborative relationships throughout district - Create an online space where teachers can collaborate between face to face dates 	To be completed by the end of Year 3.
Examples	
Review Dates	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ongoing throughout process 	
Completion Date	

Short Term Goal 3: Build in wellness breaks throughout the year (November/March breaks)	
Strategies	Timeline
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Monitor teacher burnout rates - Monitor teacher attrition rates 	To be completed by the end of Year 3.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Build into the district calendar, two breaks in the year to allow teacher’s time to relax and come back to work refreshed - Develop a staff wellness committee to monitor teacher wellness 	
Examples	
Review Dates	
Completion Date	

Appendix B

Exemplar School Strategic Plan

Exemplar School Strategic Plan
2015 – 2018

Long Term Goal 1: Develop student competencies (critical thinking through authentic assessments)
Contributors: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - School administration - Teachers

Short Term Goal 1: Build capacity	
Strategies	Timeline
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Determine teacher leaders to lead school through the implementation - Provide time and professional development opportunities to these teachers to ensure they are knowledgeable and able to lead staff - Each year of process, choose someone new from staff to receive training 	To be completed by the end of Year 3.
Examples	
Review Dates	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ongoing throughout process 	
Completion Date	

Short Term Goal 2: Provide timely professional development at the school site	
Strategies	Timeline
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide time each month to educate teachers on the competencies and how to introduce them in their teaching - Ask experts to present at schools in a more intimate setting than large PD events - As knowledge and skills of staff increases, ensure PD meets the needs of staff 	To be completed by the end of Year 3.
Examples	
Review Dates	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ongoing throughout process 	
Completion Date	

Short Term Goal 3: Ensure PLC's are focused on 21st century competencies	
Strategies	Timeline
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Allow time for teachers to work in PLCs each month - Ensure time is spent focusing on the implementation of 21st century competencies and not other school initiatives - Provide PLCs an agenda to follow at each meeting to ensure on task conversation - Provide PLC's a goal to reach by the end of each term or semester 	To be completed by the end of Year 3.
Examples	
Review Dates	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ongoing throughout process 	
Completion Date	

Long Term Goal 2: Manage teacher workload	
Contributors:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - School administration - Teachers 	

Short Term Goal 1: Streamline staff meeting agendas	
Strategies	Timeline
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - When possible, send out information via email to teachers - Attempt to remove, when possible, beaurocratic topics from meeting - If agenda point only affects a small number of staff, meet with them independently - Focus time on 21st century learning 	To be completed by the end of Year 1.
Examples	
Review Dates	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Two check in dates with district leaders (January and June) 	
Completion Date	

Short Term Goal 2: Create and adhere to yearlong calendars which include professional development, meetings and PLC time	
Strategies	Timeline
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Create calendar by June of the previous year - Ensure calendar is accepted by all staff members - Work in each of the different PD each month (i.e staff meetings, PLC's, district collaborative dates) 	To be completed by the end of Year 3.
Examples	
Review Dates	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ongoing throughout process 	
Completion Date	

Short Term Goal 3: Create common language and assessment tools
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Strategies	Timeline
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - As a staff and/or PLC group, create common language for subjects - Create assessment tools which are aligned with competencies - Work with subject consultants to ensure curriculum is still being met and assessed 	To be completed by the end of Year 3.
Examples	
Review Dates	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ongoing throughout process. 	
Completion Date	

Short Term Goal 4: Monitor staff wellness	
Strategies	Timeline
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensure staff members have a work-life balance - Create opportunities to build staff collegiality - Celebrate success together 	To be completed by the end of Year 3.
Examples	
Review Dates	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ongoing throughout process. 	
Completion Date	

Appendix C

Exemplar Teacher Professional Growth Plan

Exemplar Teacher Professional Growth Plan
2015 – 2018
(adapted from www.teachers.ab.ca / template 3.1)

Goal 1
Create authentic assessments to develop critical thinking skills in my students
Alignment with District and School Goals
District Short Term Goal 1: Ensure government mandate is being met at all sites District Short Term Goal 3: Provide timely professional development to all stakeholders School Short Term Goal 2: Provide timely professional development at the school site
Strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Attend professional development on project-based learning - Start using competency-based language in class with students - Become a leader on staff and help to build capacity within staff
Timeline
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Will be reviewed each year - To be completed by the end of Year 3
Completion Date

Goal 2
Collaboratively work with others in my subject area
Alignment with District and School Goals
District Short Term Goal 2: Allow time for teachers to work collaboratively across the district Short Term Goal 3: Ensure PLC's are focused on 21st century competencies School Short Term Goal 3: Create common language and assessment tools
Strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Utilize time given to work with subject area - Collaborate with teachers from other schools - Share work with others - Create common language and rubrics for all grade levels
Timeline
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reviewed each year - To be completed by the end of Year 3
Completion Date

Goal 3
Manage work – life balance and personal wellness
Alignment with District and School Goals
District Short Term Goal 3: Build in wellness breaks throughout the year (November/March breaks) School Short Term Goal 4: Monitor staff wellness
Strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Take time each day for personal reflection

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Monitor workload throughout year to identify times when exceptionally high; report back to principal - Use allotted time from district (November and March) to relax
Timeline
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Review each year - To be completed by the end of Year 3
Completion Date

Reflection/Indicators of Success
How successful have I been in meeting my goals?
Review goals and strategies each year (at the beginning and end of each year) Revise goals as needed to align with successes or set backs
How has my professional practice improved?
Practice should transform to include the teaching and assessing of 21st century competencies, specifically through the creation of authentic assessments and developing student critical thinking skills
How has student learning improved?
Students should be taking responsibility for learning Deeper, more thorough learning should be occurring in my classes Students should be better prepared for life after school