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**Congruency of Values: A Study of the Perceived Writing Values Among
Students, Teachers and Markers Involved in the Summative English
Examination in British Columbia**

by

Ronald Derek Peach

B. Ed., University of Victoria, 1970

M. Ed., University of Victoria, 1992

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
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We accept this dissertation as conforming to the required standard

Dr. T.D. Johnson, Supervisor (Dep't of Curriculum and Instruction)

Dr. P. Evans, Departmental Member Emeritus (Dep't of Curriculum and Instruction)

Dr A. Preece, Departmental Member, (Dep't of Curriculum and Instruction)

Dr. J. Walsh, Outside Member, (Dep't of Psychological Foundations)

Dr. Margaret Hunsberger, External Examiner, (University of Calgary)

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University of Victoria

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Supervisor: Dr. Terry D Johnson

Abstract

This study examines how well the qualities of good essay writing expressed in the British Columbia Ministry of Education's handbook, Using rating scales to evaluate student writing, are transmitted to teachers and students. In asking how well those values are communicated to teachers and students involved in grade twelve English examinations, the study compares the features demonstrated in the writing reference sets and specified in the Holistic scoring guide to the responses of markers, teachers and students who were surveyed concerning their familiarity with those terms and to their beliefs about what constituted a good essay. Most teachers reported instructional practices which utilized these reference sets, and students supported this assertion. The qualities described by teacher-markers such as "command of language, thoughtful, well structured, interesting argument, depth of understanding, engaging, sense of voice" were also compared to salient features of papers which they had just scored and found to correspond quite closely. Students, however, in describing the features they hoped to produce in writing a good essay, did not use the terms of the official rating scale descriptors, but instead, fell back on a vocabulary expressing the most basic features of the process approach to writing, such as "planning, webbing ideas," and "revising." Survey instruments used in the study were not sufficiently detailed to provide data on student comprehension of rating scale terms. Observations are made on such aspects of large-scale writing evaluations as recommended scoring practices, the need for thorough marker preparation, the vagueness of some criteria such as "voice", and on current approaches to high school composition

instruction with emphasis on modelling theory as the basis for instruction in a jurisdiction which uses reference sets of student work as standards for its rating scales. Shortcomings of the study are noted and suggestions for future research in this area are offered. The appendices include all survey forms used, results of a feature analysis of over 300 highly-rated examination essays, typescripts of student interviews, and a sample writing reference set with scale-point descriptors.

Examiners:

Dr. T.D. Johnson, Supervisor (Dep't of Curriculum and Instruction)

Dr. P. Evans, Departmental Member Emeritus (Dep't of Curriculum and Instruction)

Dr A. Preece, Departmental Member, (Dep't of Curriculum and Instruction)

Dr. Walsh, Outside Member, (Dep't of Psychological Foundations)

Dr. M. Hunsberger, External Examiner, (Faculty of Education, University of Calgary)

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**Congruency of values: A study of the perceived writing values among
students, teachers and markers involved in the summative English
examination in British Columbia**

Chapter 1: Introduction

The Situation

This chapter presents the problem of transmitting specified writing features from criteria created at the jurisdictional level to classroom instructors and through them to the students whose work will be judged against those criteria.

Summative Exam Situation Affects Students, Teachers, and Markers

In many educational jurisdictions, students face the prospect of summative examinations at least once a year. Great Britain holds both regular school-leaving testing sessions and A-levels testing for college and university entrance; many jurisdictions in the United States administer their own sets of exams as well as the Advanced Placement, Baccalaureate Program and S.A.T.s; and in Canada, every province currently requires high school students to write final examinations to both complete their secondary education and to gain entrance to colleges and universities. A major component of the English language arts testing is essay writing which attempts to measure directly students' competence in the preparation of extended prose compositions. Essay writing skill is now tested directly rather than indirectly through exercises in grammar, and it is an area which continues to receive a great deal of critical concern from the academic community. When James Britton and others reported on the marking of essays to the Schools Council in Britain (1966), they said, "A test would be valid if it tested ability in English, but what constitutes ability in English is still largely a matter of opinion" (p. 8). This remains as true now as it was when Britton wrote, and the proof is in the complexity of the process governing the present marking of essays, and even more evident in the

vigour, even acrimony, of the arguments which proceed in marking sessions as teacher-raters reach consensus on the rubric they will apply to the papers they are about to grade. Consensus is but a lay term for reliability, however, and Britton's committee was concerned with validity, or usefulness. The principal characters involved in the determination of that quality each year are the student, the teacher and the marker in any jurisdiction where essay writing is a component of the final English examination and the scenario looks much the same in any senior high school where the English exam is written.

Students

On a day at the close of term, a grade twelve student walks toward a classroom set aside for the writing of examinations. In preparation for this morning's English exam he has worked through two copies of past exams with his class, reviewed literary terms and has written out assignments on common language usage problems. He feels confident in his ability to read and respond to questions on the literature sight passages he will encounter. One aspect of the exam is still troubling him, however. How will he do on the essay? He will have approximately one hour to write a composition in response to a one-word or one-sentence prompt. If it is one that sparks a lot of ideas, he will be fine. The old formula of five paragraphs, spread over two pages at least, will be enough to get him through with a pass of three or four out of six. His teacher has read out some other points that markers would look for, but he can't remember them now. If he can be inspired by the topic or prompt and can communicate that inspiration with some good examples, he may even get up into the superior range of a five. He is certain that his standing on the exam depends on the quality of his essay.

Teachers

Down the corridor in the staffroom, his English teacher is having a second cup of coffee. With no senior classes to teach, he can relax as the year winds down. His students should do all right; they've practised enough. Some of them are naturally gifted writers too, and will impress the markers with their diction and literary style. That ability is a gift, he is sure. It will be nice to get credit for the scholarships they will receive, but he knows that they came to his class articulate and keen, and if their vocabularies expanded and stylistic skills broadened, it was as much a result of the mountain of reading they completed during the term as anything he taught about embedded phrases or the rhyming scheme of a Petrarchan sonnet. The only problem today for the students, bright or dull, will be the essay. Top students before had floundered on that final exam assignment by straying off topic, gushing too much, preaching, or just not having enough to say. He has read them the markers' comments from the examiners' reports and has tried to interpret the terms in the guide to holistic scoring, but he cannot be certain the information has been internalized as the guides were written for professional teachers rather than for students. He will be, as always, in the corridor when the exam is over to ask how they feel they have done, and there will be, as always, the two groups when it comes to a discussion of the essay -- the ones certain they have aced it and the groaners lamenting their lack of ideas on the topic or lack of time to do an acceptable job. Well, with newspapers eager to report the relative positions of all high schools in the province on each set of examination marks, the school's reputation as well as the individual student's graduation standing will be at stake, and both will be determined to a great extent by the essay responses.

Markers

That same morning, about fifty teachers in the district are waiting for the first hour of the exam to go by so that they can ask for a copy of the test booklet. They will sit down together in two weeks to mark this examination, and it will pay to check it over ahead of time to catch any problems. Some remember that when their ministry of education first began this testing programme, all markers received a test copy and answer key in the mail so they could familiarize themselves with the questions and the anticipated responses. Then they would have spent the first morning of the marking session going over exemplars of essays at different scale point values, and then marking a dozen photocopied essays from the exams they would soon be marking in earnest. This calibration process, done in groups of eighteen with a sub-chairperson and with colleagues from across the entire political jurisdiction, brought them into agreement about how to apply the scoring guide, and it created the necessary consensus on the rubric they would use. Lately, the mail-outs had stopped and the markers were now drawn from applicants in only a few urban regions to save the cost of travel expenses. Potential markers were requested to attend weekend training sessions at their own expense to be approved as exam markers, and for the marking session itself they would be separated into groups to mark just one part of the exam.. Usually the experienced markers were selected to score the essay because they could do it faster than novices. First-impression holistic marking was the term for it, which meant read the essay as fast as you could within the bounds of coherence and jot down the grade you thought it merited. The scale-point criteria had to be so well memorized that they were almost never consulted except in the rare cases of disputes between raters. Well, let the experienced markers have it, thought some. It could be a mind-numbingly boring experience reading thousands of

essays by adolescents. But in case they were selected onto the essay-marking team, it would pay to have a look at the essay prompt and to go over the holistic scoring guide one more time.

Focus of Concern for All Groups

The one problematic area then, for the three groups, is the examination essay. The teacher hopes he has taught the students how to write a good essay, the marker hopes his colleagues have taught students how to achieve essays with characteristics close to the published criteria, and the student hopes he can remember what those criteria are and incorporate most of them into his composition. Hope, however, is not a very solid basis for creating, teaching, or marking something as important as this examination item. The descriptors after each of the sample essays in the reference set pointed to specific text features such as "appropriate and precise subordination" as well as the more general qualities of "engaging ... developed with originality, energy and flair" (B.C. Ministry of Education, 1990). How well those attributes were passed on from the document produced by experienced markers for the Ministry of Education to the classroom teachers and from them to the students will or should determine the degree of satisfaction each of those same parties will experience after the teaching-learning-assessment process is complete.

Parties Involved in the Assessment Process

The three groups are more clearly distinguished below.

Students

Students receive some form of instruction in the writing of essays, and the significant question is "How well did they grasp the elements valued in the Ministry documents?" The answer should be given by their results on the final

examinations, but there are intermediaries in the form of teachers who delivered the instruction with a variety of instructional styles, hopefully having conveyed the elements of writing style valued in their teaching guides, and the markers who rated their papers, hopefully with a consistency of standards and consistency of application of those standards.

Teachers

In British Columbia, teachers of English receive a set of publications each September, one of which is the examination specifications describing the types of questions to be asked on the exams, while another is a guide to holistic scoring. The assessment branch also makes available on request, the booklet, Using Rating Scales to Evaluate Student Writing (1990) which contains sample essays at each of the scale points. The instructions in the latter document suggest the sample essays be photocopied and distributed to students in lessons designed to explicate the scoring guide (13, 43-51). If teachers knew of the booklet, ordered it and used it as intended, they may have prepared their students adequately for the essay portion of the exam. Many of these same teachers will become examination markers at the assessment sessions held five times a year.

Markers

Markers represent the jurisdiction's assessment rubric, and although they are individual human beings, they will be one unified cadre for the duration of the marking session. All must be certified teachers, although not necessarily active, and some retirees and substitute teachers take the opportunity to earn extra money this way. If there is a protest boycott of the examination process by the teachers' union, then any certified teacher may be hired whether a

primary or secondary school, English or math specialist, old hand or recent arrival in the area. On the whole, regular, permanent, full-time senior school English teachers make up the majority of the marker cadre, and bring their immediate classroom experience to the task, but whatever their backgrounds, the markers will be applying a grading scale formulated by the Ministry of Education for that jurisdiction, samples of which scale will have been sent to every senior English teacher as part of the exam specifications package at the start of the school year. The weekend training periods and the calibration time at the actual marking sessions will have been used to reinforce an accepted rubric and to promote consistency in the application of what should be a familiar set of criteria for the students and their teachers. Sullivan (1987) noted that "contradictory impulses motivate evaluation of writing in the situational context of placement-testing" (p. 1), but he limited himself to examining sample graded texts for the representation of "new" information and its correlation with scores. A broader examination of the teaching-learning-testing situation is proposed here.

The aspect that seems to have been missed in the research to date has been the degree to which those rating scales, as applied to models of peer writing, are actually used in the classroom, how well understood they are by students, and how consistent teacher-markers are in conveying their standards to students. This question is the subject of the present study. The situation through most of the 1990s in British Columbia, was that examiners gave a one-word prompt to which students responded with a hand-written essay of 300-500 words using whatever combination of narrative, expository, descriptive or persuasive text would suit their purpose. Marking teams trained in the application of an agreed-upon rating scale, worked for no more than five days without a break. These features of the exam process are givens in the present

context. The area of possible educational input appears to be in the interaction between teacher and student during the course of a term's work where the upcoming rater criteria and standards may be communicated. If students comprehend a writing instructor's directions and those directions accurately reflect the values of those who will rate the writing samples, then all will be well. The questions around congruency of understanding of essay standards may be addressed by surveys of student reflections on classroom practice, interviews with classroom teachers and polls of exam markers. The value in the inquiry will be some suggestions for guiding classroom practice and/or marker preparation.

Areas of Testing Program where Incongruency may be a Problem

The set of questions below is presented both to summarize the discussion to this point and to articulate the problems which this study intends to address.

- (i) Are students apprised of the Ministry values for superior essays as described in the writing reference sets?
- (ii) Do the students understand the descriptions of these values (revealed as intended writing strategies)?
- (iii) What are the stated skills and text constructions valued by teachers?
- (iv) To what extent do teachers use the Ministry writing reference sets?
- (v) What are the stated skills and text constructions valued in the Ministry of Education writing reference sets?
- (vi) What do markers say are the features they reward?
... and related to this
- (vii) What are the actual features of highly-rewarded examination essays?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine how well each of the students, teachers and markers involved in the testing programmes understands the standards for excellence for the test; that is, the study examines the degree of congruency in the perception of the values represented by the holistic scoring guide among the key participants. Students, teachers and schools, school districts and the entire provincial jurisdiction are rated either by the formal assessment process or in the public opinion by the outcomes of examinations. A congruency of understanding of the basis for any of the elements of that assessment is important, and a lack of such congruency has consequences for students and for school districts. The students, of course, want the best marks possible, as their entrance to tertiary institutions will be determined by their standing on those exam sets. Scholarships are also awarded to the high achievers and the essay section of the English exam is one place where, because of the scoring procedure, every point on the rating scale translates into four marks in the overall test score. Although there may not be financial reward for teachers, there are advantages for them in having classes do well on the provincial examinations. They will be asked to write a report on the performance of their students and it is always easier to write such an appraisal on a set of scores which are above the provincial average. Continued high ratings of their class grades on provincial exams also ensures that those teachers will likely continue to work with grade twelve academic students rather than the junior grades or less able pupils. With the move in recent years by one of the newspapers in Vancouver to publish the standings of all high schools in the province in all subjects, administrators at the district and school level are seen by the public as providing more or less value for the educational tax dollar. At the source is a ministry or department of education with control over

a large part of that tax money who manage the assessment programs and must generate the tables of specifications for classrooms throughout their jurisdiction. The marker cadre is the group which applies the standards of the ministry in the grading of student essays and whose reports on the grading session will influence the writing of the next year's table of specifications. A graphic representation of the relationship and the forces impinging on the different groups suggests that the consequences have a ripple effect to the broader social context. The figure below is intended only to give a visual summary of the aforementioned stakeholders and influences.

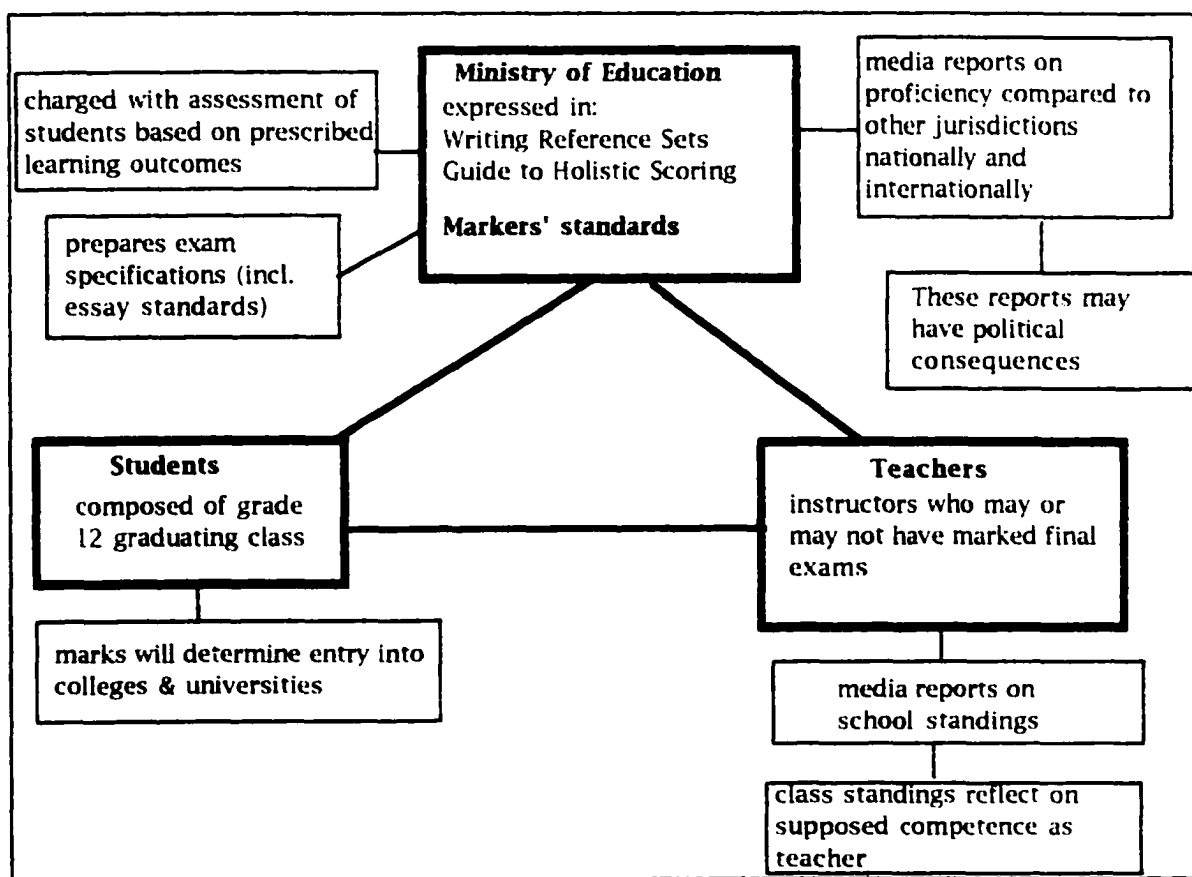


Figure 1. Stakeholders in provincial examination process and attendant influences.

Theoretical Constructs

The study presented here is an examination of practice. The enquiry sought to illuminate the area of written composition in the interaction between student and teacher and teacher and curriculum guide, specifically the scoring guides in that curriculum. It is not a study designed to test a particular theory of composition; however, it may provide some insights into theoretical issues in the course of examining practice.

Classroom composition instruction will be shown to be based on a blend of procedures which Hillocks (1986) termed presentational, process and environmental (Appendix C 5, item 4, page 126). The essential features of these instructional modes are as follows:

Presentation (also called *prescriptive*) describes the teacher-directed lesson and assignment of writing topic with no student collaboration in production or revision. As a product-oriented approach, it placed the authority for instruction and evaluation securely in the hands of the teacher. Emig (1971) was particularly critical of this methodology following the Dartmouth Seminar of 1966. A consequence of this Seminar was the development of a growth model in the romantic tradition which in turn led to a process approach to writing instruction (Christie, 1993).

Process consists of pre-writing activities, production of text, and revisions. The major advocates of this instructional mode have been James Britton (1975), James Moffett (1968), Donald Graves (1983) and Nancie Atwell (1990) From their studies has evolved a

distinct approach to composition teaching which proceeds from prewriting activities such as brainstorming by webbing ideas, freewriting and/or peer discussion to the preparation of a first draft and the subsequent editing and revision to produce a final text.

Environmental incorporates into that process approach a practical incentive for writing on a personally relevant topic and peer input during prewriting and revisions. Hillocks (1986) coined this term to describe the treatments used in a selection of composition teaching studies. The selected works produced the highest effect sizes in the entire body of research studies on writing completed during the period 1963 to 1983. The relevant summary chart from his research analysis is reproduced on page 36.

Hillocks found that the last two approaches produced the most significant gains in student achievement (p. 215) with environmental, as noted, giving the highest scores. The instructions to teachers in the British Columbia Ministry of Education publication, Using rating scales to evaluate student writing (1990) advise a collaborative study of prose models representing the different score points on the holistic marking scale. Thus, modelling and peer interaction are advocated as constituents of the writing curriculum by the specific jurisdiction in which this study took place, and it will be shown that many other educational jurisdictions have similar practices. These facts support a theory of modelling as being efficacious in writing instruction, and imply that the use of writing reference sets are useful tools in that instruction.

The suggestions in the published guide to holistic scoring (B.C. Ministry of Education, 1990) call for a modelling approach in their printing of prose models for student examination and setting out lesson suggestions for having students practice using the holistic rating scale (43-51). This is one instance of the attempt to transmit the values from the Ministry through the teacher to the student. A situation in which an apprentice is rewarded for producing an artifact -- here, a prose passage -- which approximates a standard selected by an expert, is and has been from antiquity, the basis for apprenticeship programs. This study will not itself rest on such formalist theory, but intends to examine the current apprenticeship practices embedded in the British Columbia writing curriculum and finally to offer suggestions which may make the application of the practices more effective.

Modelling Theory

Modelling theory has two connotations: (a) the conceptual framework as an abstract representation of some mental activity such as the linguist's tree diagrams as a model for sentence generation, and also (b) the exemplary sample which demonstrates desirable qualities. The second usage is applicable here as it refers to the use of prose samples to illustrate textual features deemed by an instructor to be significant. Imitation, theory and practice, were the means of acquiring oratorical skill advocated by the ancient rhetoricians (Corbett, 1973) and that triad of activities may be still effective. The imitative practice of studying prose models and then writing in emulation of specified features such as the use of analogy or anecdote, can be efficacious in assisting novice writers if the models are used carefully (McCampbell, 1966; Corbett, 1971; D'Angelo, 1973; Stolarek, 1994; Wiener, 1980). By "carefully" these writers

suggest the selection of a very few specific text features in any one instructional period, an explication of the construction of such features, with immediate practice and evaluation of the student apprentice's work. The critics of modelling theory direct their attacks at the manner in which prose models are used (Eschholz, 1980; Smagorinsky, 1992) rather than their instructional potential. These criticisms focus on the remoteness and therefore the inaccessability of professional models for students, recommending instead that only student writing be used for the purpose of demonstrating desirable text features (Weiner, 1980). This is, of course, exactly what the teachers of the province are given as instructional aids for the teaching of composition writing for the provincial examination.

A survey of the literature on the use of reference sets in small group interactions will be given in chapter two and will suggest that instructional success is dependent on a carefully constructed writing program with attention to the selection of models, and the development of students' skills in emulating text features. Modelling theory as a foundation for composition instruction will be supported but with refinements in the practices deriving from it.

Discourse Theory

The aspect of discourse theory which best resonates with the use of prose models is the construct of text purpose. Various writers have contributed to the development of this construct from the traditional (nineteenth century) genres of narrative, expository, descriptive, persuasive (Bain, 1890) to Moffett's recording, reporting, generalizing, theorizing (1968) to Kinneavy's (1969) referential, persuasive, expressive, literary and Britton's

participant and spectator modes (1975). These last three authors constituted the foundation of the theory of discourse analysis according to Charles Cooper (1983), a pursuit which concerned itself with the rhetorical models of text available to authors and the purposes satisfied by each. There is general agreement from expressivists and cognitivists alike that writing is a response to a problem (Hayes & Flower, 1980), and it is in satisfying this problem-solving purpose that the different modes of discourse are considered and utilized by a writer (Flower & Hayes, 1981).

Within discourse theory there is a debate as to which theory best accounts for the development of writing competencies, or to ask the question from a different perspective, "What knowledge do students need to have to best prepare them to write well on the composition test and can this knowledge be acquired through the use of the available writing reference sets?" At one end are the developmental psychologists whose cognitivist approach demonstrates that timely and appropriate direct instruction can have beneficial influence on the development of writing skills (Piaget, 1926; Bruner, 1966; Flower & Hayes, 1980; Martin & Rothery, 1981; Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987; Ortony, 1975). The Australian manifestation of this theoretical position is the genrist approach to writing instruction which requires a writer's metacognitive analysis of his writing. In a previously published article, this researcher described the genrist approach as follows:

Text, say the genrists, can be described by its genre or purpose following the edict of "form follows function" (Halliday, 1985), and if one wanted to, one could define any piece of text by its genre so that beer case advertising would be "commercial report" and church bazaar notice, "public service announcement," but after a few minutes of such activity, the actual beer or the bazaar would surely become more interesting. Such genre studies are a feature of the composition

teaching which as an instructional model owes fealty to the Language Awareness and Knowledge About Language movements which have received varying degrees of support or tolerance for the past thirty years. ... The transformational-generative language textbooks of the sixties were products of the same faith in linguistic knowledge above the instincts of writers. These movements have been characterized by an approach to language learning based on phonics, word grammar and codified text structures. (Peach, 1997)

This background information is intended to explain the use of writing reference sets in the first place. Their employment requires a belief in the ability of staff and students to derive the standards implicit in the models and to design procedures for replicating those standards in their own text. One construct within this cognitivism is Vygotsky's zone of proximal development which holds that when a community of learners can discuss an issue (such as text production) the quality of learning is enhanced (Vygotsky, 1986).

At the opposite end are the constructivists who believe that more global experiences such as free writing, conferencing and response-to-literature writing will produce the necessary skills (Elbow, 1973; Murray, 1968, 1980; Graves, 1983; Atwell, 1987). Their curriculum suggestions include a great deal of writing in many different genres and in mixed genres with the guiding principle of writing to learn as opposed to learning to write.

A third position has been defined (Faigley, 1986; Donovan & McClelland, 1980; Freedman, Dyson, Flower & Cafe, 1987) as interactionist or socio-cognitivist or simply social, which seeks to accommodate the virtues of both extremes as well as the socio-linguistic context in which writing occurs. Within this approach, students are given direct instruction in a developmental curriculum, but the issues on which they write must be ones which have high

significance in their own lives. Paulo Freire (1970) is perhaps the best-known advocate of this position with his Pedagogy of the Oppressed and his strictures of authenticity of language and "generative themes" (chap. 3).

Explicit attention to discourse theory in the grade twelve curriculum is not as overt as it was prior to 1989 when analytic rating scales were used. At that time, samples of narrative, descriptive and expository prose were available to the classroom teacher along with guidelines for assigning marks in the areas of content, development, organization and mechanics. Since the advent of holistic scoring in B.C., the instruction to students for the composition assignment has been to "apply any effective and appropriate method of development including, exposition, persuasion, description, and/or narration" (Provincial Examination in English, 1993). The authors of the question assume that students will have been taught the genres mentioned and further, that students will be able to prepare a mixed-genre text to present a personal thesis on the writing prompt.

Terms used in this study

Some terms are ambiguous in the literature and so these are the particular meanings with which they are used here.

Feature analysis is the distinguishing of text qualities in student essays. In this study, such things as length, genre, tone and language proficiency were determined for each of the superior essays in an examination session.

Holistic scoring is a first-impression marking technique whereby a scorer assigns a text a mark in accordance with a **rating scale** after one quick read-through.

Markers are those people hired by the educational jurisdiction, here the Ministry of Education for the province of British Columbia, to score the provincial examinations. Although they must be qualified teachers, they may not all be teachers of English 12 classes. The term will be used interchangeably with **raters** and will always refer to the individuals who have gone through a training and calibration process so that they represent a common interpretation of the Ministry of Education standard for essay writing on the provincial examination.

Modelling theory is here used to refer to what is also called cognitive apprenticeship (Collins, Brown and Newman, 1989). It is fundamental to shifting students from "knowledge-telling" individuals to "knowledge-making" ones. (Bereiter and Scardamalia, 1987).

Primary student group were grade twelve students interviewed concerning their learning experience in a class which used writing reference sets as a consistent element in all writing instruction classes.

General student group were grade twelve students in other classes in the school district who filled in survey forms about general perceptions of their preparation for the writing of the provincial examination.

Rating scales are the six-point scales used for assigning marks to essays. The top score is a six and no part marks are given. They are explained for teachers in the publications of particular educational jurisdictions.

Reference sets are the sample essays representing student work at each of the scale points on the holistic rating scale. There are at least five different sets of these papers which were produced at different times for trials with holistic scoring practice and which are available in schools although the two official sets from the Ministry of Education are contained in the documents English 12 provincial examinations; Holistic scoring guide (second edition) 1992,

and Using rating scales to evaluate student writing, 1990. Teachers could use a different set each time they gave a lesson in composition. In this study, teachers were asked if they used any Ministry reference sets in their classroom writing lessons.

Rubric is the agreed-upon standard for evaluating a piece of work and in this case is derived from the guide to holistic scoring as used by the teacher-markers in an examination session.

Teachers are the instructors of grade twelve English classes in their role as teachers whether or not they may have participated as examination markers as well. The term will always denote the individuals as classroom practitioners.

Template will be synonymous with rubric and will refer to the application of that standard to a piece of test essay writing.

Limitations of the Study

(i) Student Sample

There are some limitations in the study as implemented. The students used for interviews in the primary student group were the ones assigned to this particular teacher at a particular time and who agreed to be interviewed. Because of the close relationship with the researcher-interviewer who was also their classroom teacher, there may have been some tendency to give responses which would support the views of that person. This situation was anticipated and students were explicitly instructed to give their own opinions and that no consequences attached to answers which they might consider "right" or "wrong." The standard elements governing use of human subjects such as guarantee of anonymity and freedom to withdraw from the study at any time were also explained.

Also, the students in that primary group who were interviewed were chosen from different ability groups within the one class available to the researcher, and it may appear that this situation restricted the range of responses obtainable; however, as the work now stands, this one-class data, in the form of tape-recorded interviews with those students, does show some trends in their willingness and ability to understand and apply the precepts of the reference set models taught in writing classes. Seidman (1998) addressed this problem in his text on interviewing techniques, noting that "self-selection and randomness are not compatible," but that "purposeful sampling" can achieve the interviewer's goal of finding patterns and links as alternatives to generalizability (44-45). It was the patterns and links in the student interviews which were the important aspect of these enquiries.

(ii) Teacher and Marker Distinction

The teachers sampled in the study were drawn from districts across the province. Some were surveyed in 1996 and follow-up groups were surveyed in January and June, 2000. One potential problem was the collection of a representative sample of opinion from the teachers as distinct from markers and of their application, as teachers, of a ministry standard in the classroom. There may not have been a clear separation of a sample of grade twelve teachers of English composition from a specially selected and trained cadre of those teachers who would be the examination markers in the survey conducted at a marking session in 1996; nevertheless, the group surveyed were all teachers of grade twelve English composition and the questions did apply to them. Whether teacher-markers would be more or less inclined to use reference sets in classroom instruction was a question that was not addressed

in this study. The group of teacher-markers whose views were solicited in 1996 were brought together from all school districts in the province with 90% of them being experienced in the marking process. They responded to questions which addressed both their classroom practices and their application of ministry standards in the scoring of test essays. Another, later group of teacher-markers (Jan. 2000) were those in one of the four marking zones recently established and so it was not quite as large or diverse a sample. They were asked questions about their use of writing reference sets in their practices as classroom teachers. A final group of teachers (June 2000) were surveyed by mail and were asked only whether they had ever been on a marking team before and whether or not they used the writing reference sets in their normal classroom instruction. It must be remembered that two different groups are being distinguished within the adult respondents in this study, and their responses will be clearly differentiated in the reporting of findings. Because the questions were specific, the interviewees answered as either teachers recalling their classroom instructional practices or as markers engaged in applying the ministry rubric and so the results are claimed as valid within those parameters.

(iii) Index of congruency

Finally, the problem of finding some index of congruency remains. It does not seem possible to find a common mathematical formulation which will accommodate the relationships between each of the classes surveyed; however, for each of those classes, a degree of congruence with a set of standards can be described. Students can report on intended writing strategies, teachers can report on use of reference sets and valued aspects of student writing, and markers' products in the form of the scored essays can be

examined for valorized features. This situation will be addressed in more detail in chapter three.

Summary

If a measure of a subject's curriculum importance is the extent to which it is evaluated, then writing has a relatively high status in our schools. In British Columbia, the English language arts curriculum has specified writing instruction by teachers and practice in the forms of factual and narrative writing for students (Curriculum Guides, 1972, 1991), and some proficiency in composition skill is required of students on the school-leaving provincial examination in English. On that examination, essay-composing skills are an important feature of the assessment criteria (Assessment Branch specifications, 1996). Grade 12 students must complete these summative examinations, the scores of which are used by tertiary institutions to determine entrance eligibility.

Approximately 48% of a student's English examination grade is based on essay writing skills, 24% from the grading of a composition written in response to a specific prompt and another 24% from essays responding to literature questions. Other assessment authorities present in B.C. senior school classrooms such as the Baccalaureate Program and the Advanced Placement testing service also require students to write essays in response to literature criticism prompts. The ability of students to compose essay text in response to prompts within the constraints of time-limited examination situations appears to be deemed then, by its long history and widespread use, to be an important educational objective. It is appropriate for stakeholders, especially student subjects, to ask what guides the writing instruction and how best to respond to the essay prompts on the tests which follow such instruction.

The purpose of this study was to determine the degree of congruency in the perception of the values (represented by the holistic scoring guide and the writing reference sets) that exists among the participants in the assessment process from students to teachers to markers. The method of data collection was primarily the survey form, with each of the significant groups responding to questions regarding their use of the above-mentioned essay guides. As well, highly-rated essays were inspected for features which might correlate with stated attributes by markers and with valued features described in holistic marking guides.

The educational theory on which the study rests is that of modelling theory or cognitive apprenticeship theory which holds that the use of prose samples can be efficacious in composition instruction. Consensus, as James Britton observed in his 1966 report quoted at the outset, is at the heart of the matter, and many writers have provided thoughtful examinations of the problem of adequately communicating this standard in preparing young people for the test essay question. Their work will now be presented.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

The literature which pertains to composition writing, teaching and evaluation is quite broad. This chapter presents selections from that body of literature to clarify the theory and practice behind the present work which addresses the perceived values of and the use of the writing reference sets by students, teachers and markers involved in the summative English examination in British Columbia. The specific questions which were derived from that intention concern the transmission of those values defined in the writing reference sets and guides to holistic scoring, from markers as ministry representatives to classroom teachers to students:

- (i) Are students apprised of the Ministry values for superior essays as described in the writing reference sets?
- (ii) Do the students understand the descriptions of these values (revealed as intended writing strategies)?
- (iii) What are the stated skills and text constructions valued by teachers?
- (iv) To what extent do teachers use the Ministry writing reference sets?
- (v) What are the stated skills and text constructions valued in the Ministry of Education writing reference sets?
- (vi) What do markers say are the features they reward?
- (vii) What are the actual features of highly-rewarded examination essays?

The order of development here will be to look first at the context of the question -- the composition exam -- and then to examine what research exists pertaining to the above questions.

Criticisms of Essay Grading Practices

Exams Influence Teaching and Learning

The account of the multiple marking experiment which James Britton and colleagues prepared for the Schools Council in Britain (1966) was interesting for many reasons. It reviewed the preceding half-century of marking practices, it described the validity and reliability factors in the assessment protocol which they were investigating, and it provided some observations about the evaluation process in its largest sense. Those researchers said:

"Examining bodies in this country cannot refuse to take responsibility for the 'backwash effect' of the papers they set upon the teaching in the schools" (p. 3).

That effect is described today as "teaching to the exam," which at its most pejorative, implies spending the greater part of a semester studying copies of past exams, but even in a gentler sense, describes teachers' practice of designing term exercises similar to test questions and giving advice on the supposed preferences of the markers for certain text constructions (Shaugnessy, 1994). Other authors have noted that "testing shapes curriculum" (Eble, 1985, 20) and that "the strongest influence upon activity in the classroom tends to be that of examination requirements" (Britton, Martin, & Rosen, 1966, 3). If the classroom teacher has served on marking committees, then the "backwash effect" may be quite pronounced, but in any event, it seems important to distinguish teaching which alerts students to the criteria measures which will be applied to their exam material, and teaching which consists only of drills on terms or structures to be memorized for such exams.

Many jurisdictions publish their rating scales or guidebooks for student preparation (Michigan, 1998; Missouri, 1998), and there are the publications which give test-taking advice both general and specific to the timed essay (Boone, 1996; Robinson, 1993). The B.C. Ministry of Education also provides samples of the holistic rating scale to classroom teachers and suggests that they photocopy, distribute and conduct lessons on the essays in the writing reference sets so that students will get a good idea of the qualities which define superior work and also that they provide prewriting activities to get students into the writing process (B.C. Ministry of Education, 1990, pp. 13 & 48).

Early Rejection of Direct Assessment

The use of direct assessment measures of writing ability did not always have the high regard of examiners. "The common methods of marking pupils' compositions are from a scientific standpoint worthless" reads Cast's 1939 report, "The efficiency of different methods of marking English compositions" (as cited in Britton, Martin and Rosen, 1966, p. 2). In the same work, Britton et al. also cite Hartog's 1941 study, "The marking of English essays" where the author observes that "inconsistency and conflicting views made it seem doubtful whether there was any rational defence for the use of the essay in an examination" (p. 2). Here were authors suggesting that the examination which could shape the instruction through the preceding curriculum, was worthless as an instrument to measure progress in that very curriculum. Their arguments centered on inconsistencies in applying the assessment tool, and it is inconsistency (or degree of congruency) of values which is the subject of the present study. Much progress in test design, specifically, as Britton went on to

say, in the use of multiple raters and the move to rapid general impression (holistic) marking, produced reliability ratings for large-scale assessment tasks that has now confirmed the place of direct sampling of writing competence in the evaluation of students' writing ability (p. 11). Educational Testing Service (E.T.S.) in America developed a holistic scoring procedure in the late 1960s and early 1970s so that any jurisdiction could implement direct assessment of writing in their test programs (White, 1985).

Holistic Scoring as Response to Criticisms

Problems with analytic scoring.

Prior to the development of holistic scoring procedures, student exam essays were scored by analytic scales in which a series of rating scales for subsets of skills such as content, development, organization, and mechanics were applied to the test sample. Different sets of scales were applied to different genre of text and students chose a topic which implied a certain genre so that papers could be sorted for scoring. An analytic scale is an attempt to get diagnostic information from essay scores, but such diagnoses were not useful in end-of-year exams. There was little agreement on the subsets of skills for the different scales, and poor reliability without that agreement (White, 1985). Moreover, it was a complicated process which took a lot of time to administer, and therefore cost a lot of money.

Development of holistic scoring.

Holistic scoring as formulated in the late 1960s by Educational Testing Service in the U.S.A. was for use in their Advanced Placement Program whereby high school students who could demonstrate test proficiency in various subjects could be given advanced placement at university, thus saving the students both time and tuition (White, 1985). The scoring technique is almost identical to primary trait scoring which was a modification to provide some greater precision in definitions of criterion measures for use in the National Assessment of Educational Progress. Both of these scoring procedures are applied to test writing assignments produced from a prompt. In some jurisdictions, the prompt provides not only the topic but also describes the latitude of interpretation permitted and suggests the mode of expression (Barritt, 1986). In British Columbia, the prompt has varied from a common aphorism (1980s) to a single word (1990s) with no restriction lately on the genre of expression.

Features of holistic scoring.

Most jurisdictions today use holistic scoring of test essays to measure a student's competence in written language (Cooper, 1984; Cooper & Odell, 1977; Hysop, 1992; Brand, 1992) and it is the method of evaluation used with the samples of writing collected in this study in British Columbia. The procedure as described by K. E. Eble (1985, 24-26) requires these constraints:

1. Controlled essay reading with all markers brought together to create a select discourse community.
2. Establishment of a scoring criteria guide or rubric giving descriptors for papers at different scale points.

3. The use of anchor papers as samples of the different scale point values.
4. Using periodic checks on reliability of scoring through the use of "spy" papers where a sample paper is marked by all raters.
5. Multiple independent scoring by at least two raters with a table chairperson adjudicating papers where scores differ by two points or more.
6. Evaluation procedures to identify the most reliable scorers for future marking sessions.

Cautions about holistic scoring.

William McColly's study (1970), "What does educational research say about the judging of writing ability?" focussed on the holistic scoring of essays. Many other educational jurisdictions in Canada and abroad also use holistic marking of essays because the procedure gives a direct assessment of skill in written English rather than the indirect assessment of that complex process through such things as multiple choice questions on elements of grammar. These are the strictures laid down by McColly in 1970 when he questioned the reliability and validity of such a scoring procedure:

"The most important of the reader factors is competence... The kind of competence meant here is scholarship or knowledgeability.

"It is plain that readers must be given the proper training and orientation.

"Practice is indispensable in helping readers work up to the proper speed and rate ... the faster the rate and speed the more valid and reliable the judgment.

"Finally, some mention should be made of the factor of reader fatigue. ... the inter-rater agreement was significantly lower on the fifth day than it was on any of the other days." (pp. 150-51)

McColly went on to discuss two other factors which could skew the results of marking whether done holistically or on the basis of analytic scales, and they applied as much to experienced as to inexperienced markers. If examiners did not specify the purpose of the essay, students might produce a simple anecdotal recount which was "safe" but not representative of their best work, or attempt a sophisticated response which, although weak as a first draft could be exemplary if revised. Handwriting and general appearance of the paper were other aspects on which markers had to consciously suspend judgement.

McColly spoke from having reviewed the research findings, and he urged that the papers of students be graded by competent individuals who had undergone training and practice in using that training so that they could make the kinds of quick assessments called for in the constraints of marking thousands of papers in an economical time frame. Even then, he cautioned that burn-out would set in on day five; and, if the topic or prompt were not carefully chosen and specified, and papers were not typed, there would still be a danger of sacrificing reliability and validity in scoring.

Appropriate use of holistic scoring

Holistic scoring has some drawbacks however, especially when it is taken from the Ministry guidebook and applied in a summative manner to student essays during the term. White (1985) noted that it had no diagnostic value and was thus inappropriate for formative, or mid-course, evaluations where a student should be given guidance to improve his skills. Also, at any given application, the scores will be bound to a particular test group since markers are usually calibrated on anchor papers drawn from the subjects in a particular

grading session. With the weaknesses noted, holistic scoring still remains the vehicle for assessment of school-leaving competence in English writing skills in many jurisdictions including British Columbia. Students can be trained to apply the rating scales as suggested by the Ministry guidebooks, teachers are provided with reference sets and lesson plans for using them, and markers as Ministry agents, can apply the reference set standards at each marking session.

Problems in Student Writing

Writing Quality

When students write these examinations, the markers (drawn from the corps of classroom teachers) grade the papers and send a report to the schools. The criticisms in markers' reports of student authors have noted from time to time that students use inappropriate language, even obscenities in their writing, that they do not "seem aware of their audience," and that "essays were repetitive and predictable" (Ministry Reports to Teachers 1985 - 1995). One survey reported, "the writing that students do in their classrooms is better than that done under test conditions" (Report on Provincial Assessment, 1994). These reports from the markers are considered an important part of the marking session and are co-operatively generated in a round-table discussion before the group dissolves. Markers are urged to keep notes on matters which they want discussed at this final meeting. In most cases, these same markers will be going back into classrooms (immediately, in the case of the midyear session) to resume their role as senior school English teachers and prepare the next population of test subjects. Many teachers volunteered the observation that they considered the marking experience one of the best in-service sessions they had experienced. This seems to speak to the significance of the

consensus-building nature of the grading process and suggests that extending that process to include all classroom teachers (which is the intention of the markers' reports and the Ministry guides) and their students would be a worthwhile endeavor.

Communicating Standards to Students

Some jurisdictions publish guidebooks for teachers and students so that the expectations will be clearly set forth. Both Missouri (1999) and Michigan (1998) provide such guides for their state-wide high school final examination battery. Both contain samples of student writing at different scale point levels as in B.C. and the Missouri document concludes with a section of 48 tips regarding reading writing and test-taking. Another recent publication is the student guide for writing assessments prepared by Robert Boone for NTC (1996), What you need to know about developing your test-taking skills, which also addresses the steps in preparing a timed examination essay.

Two teachers in British Columbia who have both taught the high school English curriculum and graded the examinations on it, raise a key issue which impinges on the main question posed in this study. Janet Giltrow wrote that "Markers are a small discourse community" (1990) in that they create a rubric within a space of a few hours which may not be in complete harmony with the prescribed learning outcomes of the course which that rubric will be applied to. David Fisher in a Ministry of Education-sponsored study of examination essays in 1989 was led to observe, "There may be a gap between what is taught and what is valued" (1989). Both of these writers were concerned that the criteria being applied to students' test essays may not have been adequately communicated to those students during the preceding school term. This

question of congruency of communicated values is central to this study. The question, Are students apprised of the Ministry values for superior essays as described in the writing reference sets? can be answered by simply polling the student population, but more important is the second question, Do the students understand the descriptions of these values? It is sufficient at this point to conclude from the comments of experienced markers in reports following grading sessions that student test essay writing continues to be problematic.

Classroom Context: What has been studied?

Philosophy and Process of Instruction

Although many aspects of essay writing and scoring have been studied, none dealt only with the question of congruency of values transmission. In order to situate this study, it is useful to examine some of the works which have focused on instructional practices. Research into the process of learning to write and modes of writing instruction have dealt with both the student and the instructor. In Lester Faigley's examination of theories of writing (1986), he identified the three main perspectives as follows: cognitivists, represented by Bereiter and Scardamalia, Emig, Britton, Hayes and Flower; the constructivists with the emphasis on process represented by Moffett, Murray, Graves, Atwell, Elbow; and the compromise sociocognitivists of Heath, Barthes, Bizzell. There are many others, but Faigley (1986) observed "the disciplinary claims for writing must be based on a conception of process broader than any of these three views" (528). Also, in these different schools of writing instruction, there was no explicit body of instructions on the writing of essays to students in

examination situations. It is tempting to delve into the field of philosophical stance regarding instruction in written composition; however, that is not where the problem exists. To insist on a distinction in those instructional perspectives is to create a dichotomy tangential to the question raised in this work. Whatever the theoretical basis for the writing instruction, we must ask what degree of congruency was there between the classroom instructions, the student understanding of those instructions and the features valued on the highly-rated examination essays?

Liberal vs conservative teaching styles.

One other aspect of instruction should be noted because of the appearance of some terms used by markers to describe highly-regarded essay features. In British Columbia, writing instruction seems to be done without much awareness of different schools of thought (Fisher, 1991,30). Most elementary school teachers are familiar with the process approach to writing, a descriptive term which has become prescriptive in many jurisdictions, but secondary teachers in general are not familiar with it or do not use it. A short pilot survey of English examination markers showed that many did not have a clearly articulated method of instruction nor a theoretical base for the instructional approach they did use (Peach, 1996a), although all felt that it was important to give formal writing practice in order to prepare students for the examination. Many teachers do not read the current literature on writing instruction, but have instead, a bias in their instruction which may be characterized simply as either liberal or conservative. Soles (1988) used the terms New-Rhetorical and Current-Traditional for these orientations respectively. The liberal or New-Rhetorical group believes that the use of classroom exercises in writing will allow students to develop a personal style or

at least a basic competency in the conventions of written English. They would refer to notions put forward by Peter Elbow in his Teacherless Classroom (1976), where he advocated many writing opportunities with periods of reflection. The more conservative, or Current-Traditional, group on the other hand, would point to the exercises in text analysis and construction, grammar, and usage in any of the textbooks approved for use in senior English classes, and propose that those must be the main elements of a curriculum of writing instruction. Fortunately the efficacy of these two approaches, among others, has been researched.

Mode and Focus of Instruction Studies

In 1986, George Hillocks and a team of reviewers examined approximately 500 composition studies that were done between 1963 and 1982 and after eliminating those of inferior design were left with 125 treatment studies. They ranked the relative effectiveness of the elements in these studies in two clusters of features -- mode of instruction and focus of instruction, the data from which are summarized in Table 1 below. The relative effect size is the difference, in standard deviations, between the mean of all the studies and the mean of the studies in a particular mode or focus of instruction. For instance, the studies concerning the efficacy of focussing on grammar as the principal means of improving written composition scores showed a negative correlation, while a focus on inquiry methods in an environmental mode produced the highest gains. This study is being described here because it uses models of writing as one of the modes of instruction and that mode is advocated by the Ministry of Education for British Columbia.

Table 1.

Summary of Focus & Mode of Writing Instruction by Hillocks (1986) p. 215

<u>Focus of Instruction</u>	<u>Number of Studies</u>	<u>Mean Effect Size</u>
Grammar & Mechanics	5	-.29
Sentence Combining	5	.35
Models	7	.22
Scales	6	.36
Free Writing	10	.16
Inquiry	6	.56

<u>Modes of Instruction:</u>	<u>Qualities</u>	<u>Mean Effect Size</u>
1. PRESENTATIONAL (also Prescriptive)	teacher prescribed, clear objectives	.18
2. NATURAL PROCESS (or just Process)	generalized objectives pre-writing, writing, sharing	.26
3. ENVIRONMENTAL	clear objectives group discussion, real-life purpose	.75
4. INDIVIDUALIZED	tutorial with teacher	.24

Models in Teaching Writing

Of the seven modelling studies analyzed by Hillocks (1986) to derive his data, four of them treated senior high school classes and another two used grade nine students, and so the data seems quite germane to this study.

Although Hillocks found the use of models not particularly effective as an instructional strategy in that analysis, there seemed a possibility for increasing its effectiveness with the addition of some elements of reflective practice (Hillocks, 1995, 178) where students would examine and discuss pieces of professional and student writing. Most experimental studies testing the effectiveness of using prose models in writing instruction found no statistically significant differences between experimental and control groups. Those researchers who did, used brief passages selected to illustrate a few specific points (Hillocks, 1986, p. 154-55). The concern about the method of actually using the prose models, particularly those from the Ministry reference sets, in the classroom was dealt with after reference to researchers who were most favorable toward the practice and who declared the need for well-structured lessons which drew attention to a few specific features at a time of the text being modelled (Weiner, 1980; Eschholz, 1980; Smagorinsky, 1992). That procedure was followed in this study during each of the writing lessons given by this researcher. Although some researchers have used professional authors' texts as models (D'Angelo, 1973; Brooke, 1988), the ones supplied to markers, teachers and, through them, to the students, were all novice pieces composed by grade twelve students. There is abundant evidence and opinion on the benefits of using such student samples.

Considerations about the use of essay models

J. Moffett (1980) warns that professional writing is too daunting for novice writers so that what it becomes is an "uphill" writing exercise as a novice writes for a teacher. Students are intimidated and overwhelmed by the gap in abilities between themselves and professionals and attempted emulation threatens "some students by implying a kind of competition in which they are

bound to lose" (quoted by P.A. Eschholz, 1980, p. 23). Akin to this, were the comments by Escholtz (1980) that the reading of a completed text before engaging in any of the pre-writing activities may short-circuit an important part of the writing process, and that lack of appropriate background knowledge may prevent learners from being able to follow the model for, as Smagorinsky noted, "Without content knowledge, a study of forms is unhelpful" because novice writers are unable to imitate features without teaching aimed at having them recognize and duplicate those particular features (1992, in Irwin & Doyle p. 162). Others such as Murray and Escholtz rejected the professional models more succinctly:

The process of making meaning with written language cannot be understood by looking backward from a printed page. Process cannot be inferred from product any more than a pig can be inferred from sausage. (Murray, 1980, in Donovan & McClelland, p.3).

Instructional time is better spent in writing. Composition courses get turned into reading courses. (Eschholz, 1980, in Donovan & McClelland, p.24).

None of these criticisms presents an insurmountable barrier to the use of prose models provided they are used as brief passages of student writing to illustrate a few specific rhetorical features of the desired text. Paul Eschholz (1980) summarizes the case for using writing models in teaching composition when he states:

I believe that prose models are important to every writer and that *when integrated into the context of the writing process* they become a powerful and effective teaching tool (p. 22) (emphasis added).

Student Writers as Source of Models.

The issue which seems not to have been accounted for in the professional literature regarding modelling theory is the one concerning the source of the prose models. Smagorinsky (1992) states simply that he used "model essays" in his study which found that "students who combined the study of models with instruction in task-specific composing procedures improved more than did students who studied only models" (171). D'Angelo (1973) used a short story by Irwin Shaw as a prose model for the lesson he describes, and Eschholz (1980) provides a long list of his "modest library of contemporary nonfiction ... for use by ... students" (p. 30). Contrast these descriptions of the body of prose models with this statement by one of the students in the present study:

Interviewer: Do you think there was any value in doing the exercise?
[studying prose models]

Student: Oh it certainly does. Like I think reading good writing done by our peers that have scored high will give us a reference to what we should be doing when we write the provincial.

Interviewer: Now, I could use professional authors, or I could use examples by your peers. Which would you feel would give you more value as an improving writer?

Student: In theory, I would say, um, peers. Like from my own peers, because, you know, if they scored higher, obviously it works, on the provincial exam. (Interview #5, first set. See Appendix C)

For this student, and for others, the models which were most useful were the ones which had been rated by a committee of markers as superior. These essay models were also used in the composition lessons in a specific manner in an attempt to maximize their instructional value, as suggested by some

advocates of the modelling practice (McCampbell, 1966; Weiner, 1980) Weiner's comments are particularly appropriate:

Another essential exercise in prewriting for beginners is examining and analyzing student essays written in response to the assignment by others in the past. ... But the examination of models must be more than someone reading and others merely listening, with benign but superficial and unconstructive comments afterwards. For beginning writers, models from students, as opposed to professionals, have special value. A favorite among teachers, perhaps, the professional model is at times more a threat than an opportunity for emulation. Models by students say something important to the novice: "Here is a piece written a while back by someone in a class like this one. It may be better than your writing now, but it's not something you cannot reach if you apply the principles we've been discussing." (p. 93)

One cautionary note must be sounded here as it relates to this question of using student work to train student writers. The selection of essays for the Ministry resource, Using rating scales to evaluate student writing (1990), contains one student model that has caused difficulty in every situation where it was used by this researcher. Following the instructions in that guidebook to "ask students to read and classify photocopied anonymous compositions with the scale," groups of students consistently mis-scored the Ministry sample of a scale value 5 essay or gave no evidence for its placement, rating it as a 4 or as a 5 but with no reason other than that it had to fit there because the other criterion samples were certain. The essay in question was a 241-word composition in two paragraphs. Students knew that their essay section of the provincial exam would require a 300-500 word essay developed by a variety of text genre. The use of the reference sets by classroom teachers requires some careful preparation, even substitution of sample essays at times.

Fortunately there are at least five sets of these reference essays to choose from.

Rating Scales

Demonstrated Usefulness

Finally there is the need to address the value of using rating scales. Hillocks (1986) noted of the analysis of research studies testing such values that "As a group, these studies indicate rather clearly that engaging young writers actively in the use of criteria, applied to their own or to others' writing, results not only in more effective revisions but in superior first drafts" (p. 160). The students in pilot studies done in 1995 and 1996 very quickly achieved proficiency in applying the scales provided by the Ministry of Education (1990), and in the peer assessment and editing sessions they demonstrated their ability to use the terms of reference from the scales in their evaluative comments on their classmates' essays. The question would be whether or not they could emulate the features of the reference sets described in the scoring guide to the satisfaction of the markers.

Rating Scales in Present Study

There has been a lot of opinion and some research then, concerning the teaching of essay writing skills as Hillocks (1986) discovered, but very little on the relationship between classroom writing standards as expressed in the rating scale examples and student representation of those standards on formal essay tests. The concern here is with production of a test essay which is constrained by a time frame of one hour, a brief, one-word or one-sentence prompt and little time for adequate revision of the essay produced. Within that

framework, what specifically, are the criteria for awarding high scores and how effectively are those criteria communicated from jurisdiction to teachers to students? Teachers can read and use the Ministry resources, but some of the terms may be vague as Fisher discovered (1989). The description for a 6-level essay is given on page 21 of the aforementioned teacher resource manual as:

A strong engaging paper is developed with originality, energy, and flair. Strong personal voice. Purposeful and focused; flows smoothly from an effective opening through a series of events or ideas to a strong conclusion. Detail and examples are effectively used to establish mood, develop character, or elaborate an argument. Style is vivid and precise. The writer takes risks and the results are effective. An easy command of sentence structure may include appropriate and precise subordination, and effective use of parallel structures and fragments. Vocabulary is appropriate, precise, and often sophisticated. Few mechanical errors.

Although most teachers would feel comfortable applying criteria of character development and precise subordination, difficulties arise with such terms as flair, voice and mood (Fisher, 1989, p. 25-26). It should be noted in fairness that later editions of the Ministry resource documents have tried to make more definite distinctions, although it would require a separate research study to ascertain how much agreement exists on the meanings of the terms in the descriptors.

Ministry Standards

Markers

Of the elements to be studied -- student, teacher, marking application, -- the only one to represent a relatively stable norm is the marking standard in the person of a teacher hired as a marker. Using Ministry of Education guides which contain sample essays for the various scale points and having participated in training sessions to prepare for the application of those

guidelines, this individual comes close to representing the Ministry standard rather than a personal bias. Overcoming this bias is a real concern, for as Donald Daiker concluded, "certain facets of good writing remain elusive" (1986, p.41) and there is "a wide continuum of emotional response to the central event of the student essay" (1988, p. 136). The index of consistency among markers (the inter-rater reliability) is the number of papers requiring third-party adjudication. Typically, this number will be between 4 and 10% (White, 1985). As noted, these markers are also classroom English teachers and they bring to the marking session the experience of having graded 600 to 1000 essays during the preceding semester, assuming a normal teaching load of 100 students and six to ten essay assignments. Whether or not they have taught specific strategies for achieving the text features valued in the reference sets, and regardless of how cognizant they are of what practices their students will employ in producing a test essay, they have all drilled themselves in the application of some set of standards to a large number of writing samples. During the course of a marking session, there will be periodic consensus-building exercises in which all markers will score copies of identical essays, and typically, as these practices go on through a session, there will be fewer disagreements and greater speed in reaching a common score. They may well constitute Fisher's restricted "discourse community" (1989, 19) or be the holders of Bourdieu's "cultural capital" (1977) or Bernstein's "elaborated code" (1971).

Consistency in Application of Template

Another area which touches on the present enquiry is the scoring standards for the essay test. David Fisher's report to the Ministry (1989) came close to providing answers to the questions raised by this study; however,

Fisher limited himself to a feature analysis of test essays, rather than the communication of standards from teacher to student. As has been noted, he did point to that communication in his conclusion by saying that "there may be a gap between what is taught and what is valued" (14, 29), after agreeing with Giltrow that markers are actually a "small discourse community" (19) whose values may differ from those of the classroom English teacher or the textbook writer. His findings gave a positive correlation of high ratings with such text features as embedded transitions, literary style in diction and structural variety, along with the aspect of "voice." When other researchers asked the specific question: "What do markers look for?" they found that raters rewarded such features as length, literary quality, detail, unity, explicit constructions and the elusive "voice" (Daiker et al., 1986).

Sources of Error in the Marking Process

The marking process has some intrinsic weaknesses, as any large-scale assessment process may have. First, as mentioned earlier, it does not seem possible for the mean scores to rise in a system which standardizes its criteria for grade levels on each session's set of papers. At every marking session, raters are asked to complete a page giving their estimation of cut-points for letter grades based on their opinion of the difficulty of the exam they have just marked. Although school boards and superintendents send congratulatory letters to principals when the scores for a particular district or school exceed the provincial average, that provincial average is determined each session by calibrating to the exemplars chosen from that same session's papers.

Second, if there are many good-quality papers in a particular set, it is possible for a marker to give a lower grade to the next paper which might, if set in a different context, have received a superior rating. Finally, what features impress a marker most when it comes to making the fine distinction between a five and a six? We could no doubt design studies which would address the first two issues, but the fact that most markers have been doing the job for some years, have been cautioned about being influenced by the context of any particular paper and may request a colleague to check the assigned score for any questionable paper (which occurs often enough to be reassuring) may all be offered as reasonable evidence that the scoring process is consistent year-to-year. The last issue -- feature attractiveness -- is a more problematic one, for the genre of the essays may be argument, recount, narration, satiric exposition, description and all of the combinations of these. The register in which the essays are written may also vary from the informal or even substandard (used for particular characterization) to the formal academic voice. When these features are combined with aspects of syntactic and mechanical virtuosity or mere competence, the possibility of differences in scores at the upper range becomes quite real. And yet there is still the fact that adjudication rates remain at acceptable levels.

Feature Analysis Sampling

Characteristics Suggested

It was to examine this question of factors affecting score differences that David Fisher undertook to do a feature analysis on essays from the January 1989 session. His analysis noted features of opening paragraphs,

variety of genre structures, variety of sentence length, qualities of diction and figurative language, reader-engagement strategies and transitions (Fisher, 1992). Although not contained in the final version of his report to the Ministry of Education, he hypothesized (Fisher, 1989) that teachers had an internalized standard from their school days which had been formed during the period of the New Critics which gave a disproportionate respect to forms of exposition modelled on 19th century archetypes; for example, the essay which eschewed the first person pronoun although modern essayists used it freely. De Beaugrande (1984) had also noted the double-bind of students who were instructed never to use the first person pronoun in an essay and then were criticized for employing the passive voice of the verb which was one means of avoiding the problem most frequently used by novice writers. Both authors noted that the subjects of their discussion were otherwise competent although novice writers and that the passive voice was not the only structure possible for avoiding the detested first-person pronoun, but Beaugrande, at least, was pointing out the single-minded pedantry that reacted so strongly to violations of some internalized standard. Stylistic features such as these were too often the focus of the marking, said Fisher, offering as the reason the fact that style analysis gave due attention to the one feature of text available for analysis by New Critics. In its final form, his report, "What makes good writing" (1991), Fisher avoided such speculations and focused on the features of just those essays receiving top scores. His list of these features then became the source of suggestions for classroom procedures which would have a strong likelihood of producing the desired traits in student writing, along with this cautionary paragraph that is worth repeating in full.

The results of the feature analysis should be treated with some caution. First, the fact that certain features correlate with high grades does not establish a causal relationship between use of the features and good writing. Second, the presence of identifiable features in good writing does not mean that teaching those features by themselves in a reductive approach will lead to improved writing. Finally, reading and literary theory informs us that meaning is produced by the reader. What the reader brings to the writing is at least as important as what the writer presents in the writing. Students should know how teachers attach value in writing, as they may not necessarily share the value system of their teachers. (p. 1)

Audience

In his report to the Ministry of Education (1991), Fisher pointed out that good writers "quickly engage the reader's attention" and "have a strong sense of audience" (p. 2) as well as stylistic proficiency. Other researchers have also given increased weight to this sense of audience on the part of student writers (Emig, 1971; Britton, 1975; Daiker, 1986; Arnold, 1991). James Britton's 1975 study, part of which is summarized in table 2 below, found the teacher-examiner to be overwhelmingly targeted as the intended audience. A sum of the two categories "teacher-learner" and "pupil to examiner" gives a value of 87.5% for students writing to the instructor. Some awareness of the value system of that instructor and some strategies for writing prose which will satisfy those values would be of great importance to the student writer.

Table 2.

Analysis of Student Scripts Produced and Analyzed for Audience Target**Britton (1975) n=2104**

self	0.5 %
trusted adult	1.6
teacher-learner	38.8
pupil to teacher	1.0
pupil to examiner	48.7
expert to known laymen	0.0
child to peer group	0.1
group member to working group	0.2
writer to his readers	1.0
child to trusted adult/teacher-learner dialogue	0.6
teacher-learner dialogue/pupil to examiner	4.0
teacher-learner dialogue/writer to his readers	1.0
miscellaneous	1.7

Other Valued Qualities in Text

This sense of audience is certainly the feature of good writing that establishes a bond between reader and author (Arnold, 1995; Britton, 1975; Barritt et al, 1986), and is one that is not dealt with very fully in either the Ministry writing reference sets or the guide to holistic marking. The authors of **Evaluating writing across the curriculum: Using the writing reference set to support learning** (1992) noted in the introduction to their set of descriptors

that, although some features were important qualities of effective prose, they had difficulty reaching "agreement or definitions regarding engagement and voice" (p. 8) and commented on engagement or sense of audience only twice in the following pages. This sense of audience and the engagement of that audience may be significant aspects of good student writing, and moreover are ones which other evaluators of student exam compositions have tried to address. Barritt and others (1986) who set the writing prompts for over 4000 freshmen entering their university each year specify audience and tone in their instructions. It is a practice which we might emulate in B.C. or at least incorporate into writing instruction, for this is one of the qualities mentioned in the writing reference sets although teachers have never been able to specify exactly what they mean by "voice" or "a sense of audience".

Summary

Because exams do influence the teaching which precedes them, students are often given old exams to study in preparation for those summative tests. For writing lessons, the Ministry of Education provides a holistic scoring guide with sample essays and suggests that students practice applying it to compositions of peers. Although some cautions have been voiced by the experts, there is general agreement that the holistic scoring process and the use of peer-produced models are both efficient and worthwhile teaching practices. The examination markers are a small "discourse community" (Fisher, 1989) whose standards are supposed to be those represented by the writing reference sets and scale point descriptors. Although some terms such as "voice" remain elusive of consensus on a precise definition, this group is

engaged in a process that certainly has the authority of numbers on its side as jurisdictions across the English-speaking world employ a similar process to grade writing ability.

In order to gather information from the groups involved in the assessment event, a combination of qualitative and quantitative information was collected. Interviews with students, teachers and teacher-markers as well as a feature analysis of graded essays provided the raw data for an enquiry. The description of the collection and manipulation of that data is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Instrumentation

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine the degree of congruency in the perception of the values (represented by the holistic scoring guide) that exists among the participants in the assessment process from students to teachers to markers. The questions following from that purpose and which guided the design of the study were these:

- (i) Are students apprised of the Ministry values for superior essays as described in the writing reference sets?
- (ii) Do the students understand the descriptions of these values (revealed as intended writing strategies)?
- (iii) What are the stated skills and text constructions valued by teachers?
- (iv) To what extent do teachers use the Ministry writing reference sets?
- (v) What are the stated skills and text constructions valued in the Ministry of Education writing reference sets?
- (vi) What do markers say are the features they reward?
- (vii) What are the actual features of highly-rewarded examination essays?

In answering these questions, the chain of conceptualization of valued essay features from curriculum guide (as writing reference set) to student writer will be made clear, and we may determine the presence or absence of commonly agreed-upon elements in that set of values.

Overview of Research Methodology

If the Ministry of Education publishes reference sets of student essays for each of the scale points on the holistic scoring guide which constitutes the marking rubric, then the text qualities of the highly ranked of those essays should demonstrate to students the qualities they are to emulate and teachers should use those guides with classes to prepare them for exams where those same qualities will form the template that will be applied to the work . It seemed appropriate to ask whether those qualities were accessible to the students even with teacher guidance (i to v above), and then whether those actually were the aspects of text which were valued by examination markers (vi and vii). Because the template for acceptable student writing is the reference set in the holistic scoring guide, the question, in practical terms, became an inquiry into the transmission of that template to teachers and to students. One method of answering the question appeared to be simply asking teachers and students about classroom experience with the reference sets. Another method suggested analyzing the features of superior essays on an examination set, a process which would bring students, or at least their essays, and the template, expressed as a marking rubric, together. These two procedures constituted the major components of this study. Some repetition of group and process descriptions may be necessary in order to attach methodology to each group being considered.

Groups Involved

Students

The first element in the study is the learners themselves, the students who write the test essay, hopefully in emulation of those same best qualities of

the most highly-rewarded sample papers. Based on interviews with the primary student group and examinations of their test scores, some conclusions concerning the degree to which they understood what was expected of them in the production of text will be generated. As well, a survey of a larger, more general student group will demonstrate the perceptions of the general student population towards the writing reference sets and essay-writing strategies.

Primary focus group.

The site of the study for the primary student group was a medium-size suburban secondary school in the Greater Victoria Capital Region with a stable population of approximately 800 students in grades nine to twelve of which about 150 would be in graduation (English 12) classes during a given school year on a semester system. This means that in a given semester there will be three or four English 12 classes. District administrators and university human subjects committee were satisfied with the design of the study and the former requested a summary of initial findings (see Appendix A). Information collected in student interviews in 1997 forms part of the student data in this research for this primary focus group.

The same three teachers have been responsible for English instruction at this level for the past four years at the particular high school site for the primary focus group of students, and two have been teaching senior classes for over fifteen years. Provincial examination summaries indicate the school's mean scores in English have been about 69% for some time (Appendix C). Most students at this school where the primary focus interviews were conducted were from upper middle class families (Accreditation Report, 1994).

General student group.

Some further surveys were held during the spring term 2000 at the target school and at two other high schools in the same school district to gather data on student familiarity with the writing reference sets and to find out how these students anticipated managing the essay question on the upcoming exam. Sample questionnaires used as guides in both the interviews with the primary focus group and for the purpose of gathering information from the general population are included (see Appendix A).

Teachers

The question of whether student writers made use of those reference sets to prepare their essays and to what extent teachers made use of them in their composition lessons became one of determining how effectively teachers interpreted and transmitted the criteria for effective essay construction. Teachers were surveyed in January 1996 (n=94) and in January 2000 (n=20) at marking sessions regarding their use of the writing reference sets. Further inquiries on this element were completed in June, 2000 (n=32). With the latter group, the intention was to collect data from grade twelve teachers not associated with the marking of exams; however, in response to the item "Have you marked exams before?" over 70% said that they had. This finding is reported here to clarify a problem regarding the identification of discrete subject sub-groups.

The questions which guided the data collection are attached (Appendix A), but the fundamental ones with all groups were, "Do you use the Ministry

Writing Reference Sets to teach your composition classes?" If "yes" then, "Do you follow the suggested lesson plan of photocopying and distributing copies of the model essays and the rating scales?" Although these were questions which were being asked of individuals in two of the data-collection instances at marking sessions, the questions were clearly directed to the respondents' experience as teachers. As was noted in chapter one, because so many teachers of senior classes have been employed as examination markers, the questions had to focus their attention on one role or the other and be of such a kind as to be answerable from the experience of either classroom teacher or marker.

Ministry markers

The application of the Ministry holistic marking guide is done by the group of people, almost always practising teachers, who are hired to score the English exams five times a year. These teacher-markers -- the entire marker cadre during one evaluation session in Victoria -- were surveyed (see Appendix A for complete form) concerning the qualities for which they rewarded student essay text in the 3500 exams they had just graded. These values were the collected, separate opinions of those teachers who had come together to grade examinations; however, they were collected at the end of a marking session after the individuals had calibrated themselves on anchor papers and had scored over three thousand essays. At the time of the survey, these markers represented the best expression of one, agreed-upon scoring rubric derived from the guide to holistic scoring and its reference set models.

Procedures

Procedures with Students

The following questions were examined with student groups surveyed in this study:

- (i) Are students apprised of the Ministry values for superior essays as described in the writing reference sets?
- (ii) Do the students understand the descriptions of these values (revealed as intended writing strategies)?

Students who were taught with strategies utilizing the official reference sets should have a perspective on the degree of preparedness they felt as they approached the writing of the exam, and their anecdotal reports on that confidence would form the basis for evaluating their faith in the clarity with which elements of the reference set standards were communicated to them..

Primary student group.

Ten of the students in a regular grade 12 English class were interviewed on tape regarding their planned strategies for writing the examination essay, the qualities which they felt the examiners would be looking for, and the value of the writing reference sets in their preparation for the exam. Tape recorded anecdotal reporting was used in order to create a relaxed environment open to conversational leads so that students could enlarge on responses. It was felt that any numerical values obtained from Likert scale surveys of those students would not give any more precise measurement of their experiences. The

sample of the students interviewed was chosen from the superior, average and weak groups of students as determined by their English grade history; that is, their marks from English in grades nine, ten and eleven were used to assess their general level of achievement in the subject. These taped interviews were conducted at the end of weeks four and sixteen in a twenty-week semester. All subjects were given a copy of the following interview questions shown in figure 3, a day before the session. Altogether there were seven questions; only the last two were designed to get at the fundamental issue of learning based on the use of models in the reference sets, were considered in examining the data. The students were interviewed in a quiet room adjacent to the library where the rest of the class was working so that privacy was assured and students could give their full attention to the discussion. All students interviewed had agreed to the use of their tape recorded conversations in this research and knew that they could withdraw from the process at any time. The questions guiding the interviews were as follows:

How do you rate yourself as a writer?

Where/when did you learn to be a good writer?

or

Why do you believe you are a weak writer?

Do you have any writers you would like to write as well as?

How do you go about planning an essay?

Show me some part of your essay where you put that into practice.

Did the reference sets of student writing make a difference? (expand)

Do you have any strategy in mind for writing the provincial exam essay? (expand)

Figure 3. Primary student group interview questions

Procedures with classroom teachers

With classroom teachers, the study questions addressed were these:

(iii) What are the stated skills and text constructions valued by teachers?

(iv) To what extent do teachers use the Ministry writing reference sets?

For all of the teachers surveyed, the second question was the significant one: "Did you use the official reference sets in your classroom instruction?" The value obtained would give an approximation of the general use of those reference sets by teachers in the wider provincial jurisdiction. The first group to be surveyed was the marking cadre at the January 1996 marking session, but that group because of their dual position as markers also, might not have been representative of the entire cohort of grade twelve English teachers. The considerations which arose were: 1. Teachers who had been selected to mark examinations might not have been representative of the larger cohort in that they may have internalized many of the features of those reference sets and have carried out classroom instruction to cover that knowledge even if they did not actually hand out copies for students to study; or 2. they may have used the reference sets to a greater degree than their colleagues who were not selected (or who were not interested in being selected) to mark provincial examinations. Later surveys were conducted in local schools and in schools around the province as a means of extending the data for this part of the study.

Responses to question (iii) concerning writing competencies valued by teachers were collected at a marking session, but as has been noted, the

question was worded to direct reflection toward classroom practice rather than the session at hand or at least to call upon general standards for good writing. The questions used in the mail-out to 30 secondary schools in the province the week of June 19 to 23 asked for information on number of classes of grade 12 English taught, total number of students, were reference sets used (a) fully (distributed and analyzed), (b) sometimes or (c) never? and had the individual ever marked provincial exams. Fourteen forms were returned reporting on twenty-two teachers who taught sixty-one classes accounting for 1661 students.

Procedures with markers as Ministry standard

(v) What are the stated skills and text constructions valued in the Ministry of Education writing reference sets?

(vi) What do markers say are the features they reward?

(vii) What are the actual features of highly-rewarded examination essays?

The question concerning valorized text constructions was approached by inspecting the descriptions given in the writing reference sets and the guide to holistic scoring since these would be the standards with which markers would be calibrated. The present English 12 exam consists of test items in editing, poetry analysis, prose comprehension, and essay writing. The latter component was scored by the use of analytical keys with two markers until 1989, when a switch to holistic marking was instituted. Although holistic scales may have varying ranges, the B.C. Ministry of Education decided to use a six-point scale for the essay component of the test. The scores from two "blind" markings are added and their sum is then doubled to provide a raw score out

of 24. The general descriptors for different sections on the scale are given below in the document Using Rating Scales to Evaluate Student Writing, 15 - 17 years old (1990). There are other detailed descriptions specific to each point on the six-point scale, and the criteria for the top two grades are excerpted from the same booklet.

Holistic Scale: Extended Writing.

Papers at the top two-scale points are well-developed and reflect a sense of engagement with the topic. Writing is focused and purposeful, and displays some originality. There is a sense of voice. The writers demonstrate control of sentence structure and vocabulary and, while there may be some minor mechanical errors, these do not interfere with the reader's comprehension or enjoyment.

Papers at the middle two-scale points are generally competently written, with concern for the conventions of standard English, but there are few instances of originality or individuality and little evidence of sophistication in thought or language. Focus is usually clear, but development is often naive (immature) or incomplete. Writers demonstrate some control of basic sentence structures and vocabulary, but mechanical errors may detract from effectiveness.

 Papers at the bottom two-scale points have a weak sense of purpose, structure and development, and frequent problems with the conventions of standard English. Content is thin and often difficult to follow, and there is no sense of voice. Sentences tend to be simple and repetitive, and contain frequent errors in usage. Vocabulary is limited. These papers are often difficult to read and understand.

6: A engaging paper is developed with originality, energy, and flair. Strong personal voice. Purposeful and focused; flows smoothly from an effective opening through a series of events or ideas to a strong conclusion. Detail and examples are effectively used to establish mood, develop character, or elaborate an argument. Style is vivid and precise. The writer takes risks and the results are effective. An easy command of sentence structure may include appropriate and precise subordination, and effective use of parallel structures and fragments. Vocabulary is appropriate, precise, and often sophisticated. Few mechanical errors.

5: The paper is competent and well-developed, but there is less apparent sense of personal voice, energy, and originality than in level 6 papers. Purposeful and focused, and moves logically from an effective opening through a series of events or ideas to a conclusion. Detail and examples are effectively used to establish mood, develop character, or elaborate an argument. The writer takes some risks but the results may be uneven. Sentences are controlled and varied; subordination is generally appropriate and precise. Vocabulary is appropriate and accurate. Few mechanical errors.

The marking guide contains criteria of both the Current-Traditional (product-centered and quantitative) and the New-Rhetorical (process-centered and qualitative) approaches which Soles (1988, 37) distinguished in his study of instructional methods in writing classes. In this study, the terms qualitative and quantitative will be used. Lists of terms can be drawn from the above descriptors for each category, so that under quantitative would be terms such as "control of sentence structure, precise subordination, few mechanical errors" and under qualitative would be items such as "a sense of voice, takes risks, energy and flair". To extend these lists of terms, the comments of markers were solicited at a regularly scheduled marking session in January of 1996. The complete list of terms which these individuals wrote down was sorted into two lists headed as "qualitative aspects" and "mechanical competence."

Typical Marking Session Procedures.

A great deal of attention is given to what is called the calibration of the markers in the process, since it is important that they internalize a shared valuation system. Sample papers are pulled from the set of completed examinations and photocopied, with committee remarks, as "exemplars" for each of the scale points. Other papers are chosen and put into sets of six and

given to each marker for standardization exercises in each marking cadre, usually a room of 18 teachers under the direction of an experienced marker-supervisor as sub-chair. The process of reaching agreement on a value for each sample paper is one of comparing scores awarded by each marker with much discussion of text features and reference to exemplars and the rating scale given above. This establishes what David Fisher (1991) terms the rubric or the immediate evaluative standards for the session. Anyone participating in this exercise must be impressed by the thoroughness and fairness of the calibration process, and would be assured that a fairly consistent assessment would result. Indeed, the consistency is quite high. When the sub chair in charge of each room collates the marks, s/he must re-score or adjudicate any paper on which the two markers have disagreed by more than one point. As mentioned, the adjudication rates will be typically between 4 and 10%. (White, 1985). The entire process seems designed for efficiency and fairness.

This low adjudication rate is significant when the procedure for arriving at a final essay score is examined. With the scores from both markers being added and then doubled to give a final value out of 24, simple arithmetic shows that the variance may be as much as four points, i.e. $(6+6) \times 2$ or $(5+5) \times 2$. If both raters award a six, the total is 24; whereas if both give a five, the result is 20/24, representing a 17% difference and 4 percentage points on the total examination score. It would be advantageous to students to know what exactly distinguishes a perfect essay from a five or a four.

Marker survey.

Exam markers were surveyed because the particular information needed was the degree of congruency between the qualities stated as significant by the surveyed group as compared to the qualities noted in the feature analysis of papers which that group actually graded. These markers were asked to respond to a survey, (a full copy of which is included in Appendix A) which asked them to state the features which they found in essays to which they gave superior scores, i.e., five or six out of a possible six points. The survey was conducted as noted above, at the end of a scoring session when the group had been working together for seven days to score over three thousand essays. From the responses on this survey, a list of valued features was derived for use in a follow-up analysis of the essays graded by this group. Part of the survey is given below in figure 5. Some of the responses were used as teacher data because the question was clearly expressed as an issue relating to classroom instruction rather than exam-scoring practice.

1. What feature influences you most when you give top marks for essays either in class or on examination papers?

2. Do you share the Ministry booklets on student assessment -- either "Using Rating Scales to Evaluate Student Writing" or "English 12 Holistic Scoring Procedure" -- with students; i.e., **do you photocopy samples and go over them?**

Yes

No

3. What are the features you **most often see** in an essay that merits a 5 or a 6?

Check one from each column.

narrative form

humour

expository form

impeccable mechanics

descriptive form

unique perspective

personal narrative

control of development

Figure 4: Key questions regarding valued writing features on the marker survey form

Selection of Essays for Feature Analysis.

(vi) What do markers say are the features they reward?

(vii) What are the actual features of highly-rewarded examination essays?

After the session during which these markers were surveyed, the examination papers were stored in a warehouse in Victoria. Permission to examine these test papers was obtained from the Ministry of Education, and in July of 1996, a feature analysis on the highest-scored essays from that same marking session was carried out. All of the top-scoring papers from the January session were inspected to see which of the features by genre and quality they possessed. To do this, a small team of three experienced markers

went through the 330 essays which received scores of 22, 23 or 24 out of a total possible 24 marks. Because of the procedure for calculating scores whereby the marks from two raters are added and the result doubled, a score of twenty-two was the lowest possible score for a paper which had been assigned a perfect grade by at least one of the markers. The normal procedure for resolving discrepancies of more than one grade point was for the marking sub-chair to change one of the two scores to the average value. A paper which had received scores of six and four would be reread and adjudicated to six-five or five-four. The 330 papers in this 22+ category represented approximately 10% of the entire set of essay exams graded in the January marking session.

Procedure used in feature analysis.

This component of the survey was designed as a check for internal consistency of application of the reference set criteria by providing a comparison of markers' stated criteria and features evident in top-rated essays as judged by the panel of teacher-markers. The members of this team had been classroom English teachers and members of the provincial marking cadre for the previous five years. The day before starting in on the feature analysis, they met to calibrate themselves on the terms on the analysis sheet. Again, during the day-long session of examining the three hundred and thirty essays, they conducted three spot checks on themselves by all checking one essay and then comparing their notes. There was minor discussion on the first such self-check and unanimity on the remaining ones.

The results of the feature analysis were entered onto bubble forms and analyzed using an optical scanner and an item analysis generator. The complete coding sheet is included in Appendix A; however, one of the procedures for one of the elements -- predominant genre of essay -- is described below. A mark was placed on the bubble sheet to indicate the presence or absence of a particular quality. For instance, feature #1, "Genre of essay" had the choices on the coding sheet designated as follows:

- A Expository: argument, position, persuasion
- B. Narrative, recount/report format
- C. Narrative, unusual format or viewpoint
- D. Descriptive, traditional format
- E. Mixed genre

When all 330 essays had been examined, the bubble sheets were scanned by an optical scanner using the Columbia School Administrative Package of software which treated the data as test results and prepared an item analysis using each of the features on the coding sheet as a test question. For feature one, for example, the results were:

A Expository: argument, position, persuasion	117	35%
B. Narrative, recount/report format	140	42%
C. Narrative, unusual format or viewpoint	46	14%
D. Descriptive, traditional format	0	0
E. Mixed genre	27	8%
total	330	

In order to accommodate all text genres in the analysis by optical scanner, the following procedure was used. An essays was read by a member

of the research team who decided to which category it belonged. This information was entered by pencilling in the appropriate letter bubble beside question one on the data collection form (or bubble sheet). When the next items were considered, some means of accounting for all of the papers had to be designed without sacrificing the ability of the optical scanner's computer program to generate summaries of the data. Question two provides an example of this situation. The item was set down in this form on the researcher's master survey form:

2. If exposition:
- A. traditional 5-paragraph construction
 - B. strong variation from standard format
 - C. unique perspective
 - D. not exposition

The elements designated A, B, and C are the features being inspected for in the expository text, but in order not to leave the whole question blank as might happen if the researcher were examining a narrative composition, the final option, D, would be filled in. So, with a narrative essay, the researcher would simply fill in item D and move on to the next question on the survey form. For each such question where particular features of particular genre were sought, the researcher selected the D option if the essay was not of the genre being analyzed. This gave a quick check each time by simple addition of responses to ensure that all papers were being accounted for. With 330 test papers, the results for each item should sum to 330.

Collating and Analyzing the Data

Student data

The search for degree of congruency among the three groups of the study was accomplished by direct examination of the reports from those groups. The student interview transcripts and survey forms were inspected and instances of reference set use were counted. Strategies for writing the examination essay were also examined for any clusters of methodologies which could be attributed to a study of the reference sets or rating scales. In the Ministry booklet, for instance, highly-rated narrative writing is described in these terms:

- a sustained voice or tone
- a sense of economy
- the effective use of repetition
- effective use of dialogue and visual detail
- a clearly established setting
- resolution of the problem or goal

(Province of BC Ministry of Education, 1990, p. 12)

These terms are, for the most part, too vague for student authors to apply to their own writing in progress. There are undefined terms such as "sustained" and "effective" that beg the question of "How much?" In section three of that booklet, however, there is a summary of the writing process which does give very clear, simple steps in the production of essay text, so that if a student responded to the survey question concerning strategy s/he would use in writing an examination essay by saying that s/he would begin by brainstorming a cluster of ideas on the prompt and then select and arrange the ones s/he found significant, those strategies would be ones suggested in the booklet (47-49) and whether they came from student reading of that booklet or

his teacher's, they would still be elements of prewriting valued by the standards of the jurisdiction.

Teacher data

Three groups of teachers (some of whom were also markers) were polled and a simple count of those using writing reference sets was made on the basis of responses to survey questions. The teachers interviewed at the marking session also answered a survey form which had more details about their opinions of the qualities of superior student essays, and that information was summarized under the different category headings of the survey instrument. Statistical values such as percentages of group responses were calculated for the occurrence of certain terms reported in interviews or on forms. An example is the first two questions shown above in figure 5 where teachers were asked, "What feature influences you most when you give top marks for essays either in class or on examination papers?" and "Do you share the Ministry booklets on student assessment -- either 'Using Rating Scales to Evaluate Student Writing' or 'English 12 Holistic Scoring Procedure' -- with students?" The responses were divided into two clusters, one designated "qualitative aspects" and the other, "mechanical competence" and these groups of terms were then totalled.

The anticipated difficulty of finding some common numerical index of congruency among the groups remained; however, this element would be perceived differently by each of the respondents and so it was the qualitative data in the form of summaries of interviews and surveys that was deemed important. Students may have felt that they had been given adequate

preparation by their teachers if they had seen the reference sets and had some of the features pointed out to them, and those teachers may have felt they had a good grasp on the Ministry rubric after having read over the descriptors of essays at different scale values (pp. 21-30).

Summary

Information on writing practices was collected by interviews with a primary focus group of students and by survey form with a general student group. Writing teachers were surveyed to discover the extent of their use of writing reference sets and their instructional practices. Teacher-markers were asked about the features most often found in superior test essay texts and then the essays on which they based their responses were subjected to a feature analysis. Altogether, a large and varied amount of data from the three significant parties was available for examination, and this examination is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Findings of the Study

This chapter presents the information gathered from surveys of students, teachers and markers pertaining to the study of the perceived values and the use of the writing reference sets involved in the summative English examination in British Columbia. The questions which constituted that study were as follows:

- (i) Are students apprised of the Ministry values for superior essays as described in the writing reference sets?
- (ii) Do the students understand the descriptions of these values (revealed as intended writing strategies)?
- (iii) What are the stated skills and text constructions valued by teachers?
- (iv) To what extent do teachers use the Ministry writing reference sets?
- (v) What are the stated skills and text constructions valued in the Ministry of Education writing reference sets?
- (vi) What do markers say are the features they reward?
- (vii) What are the actual features of highly-rewarded examination essays?

Student Data

Primary Student Group, February to June, 1997

Students in this primary focus group were members of the class at the high school where the mode of instruction involved the use of the writing models in the reference sets and training in the application of the rating

scales. Student interviewees were drawn from the superior, average and weak achievement levels of the class on the basis of previous English grades, and they were interviewed at two points during the term, once after the first week of formal composition study and once after the third such week. In a twenty-week semester, that would place the interviews at week four and at week sixteen. Their responses to the two key questions were tabulated in the results shown in Table 4 below.

Table 3. Responses of Students to Questions about Use of Writing Models

Did the study of the reference sets of student writing help you to write essays?

	week 4 of term				week 16 of term			
	number	yes	no	unsure	number	yes	no	unsure
superior	2	1	1	0				
average	2	2		0	-- not asked at this time			
weak	4	2	1	1				

Do you have any strategy in mind for writing the provincial exam?

	week 4 of term				week 16 of term			
	number	yes	no	unsure	number	yes	no	unsure
superior	2	2			1	1	0	
average	2	2			2	1	0	1
weak	4	1		3	2	0	1	1

Of the weak writers interviewed concerning strategies they intended to use on the examination, one answered "no plans" and two responded that they would write their essay over again if time permitted. These were all classified as "no strategy."

General Student Group, May/June 2000

The next group of grade twelve students surveyed were class groups from the three high schools in Saanich in May and June of 2000. These general student groups had been taught by a variety of methods and were not under any of the constraints of the more formal classroom protocols of the study which used the writing reference sets as the primary vehicle of instruction. These students were asked about their familiarity with reference sets and about strategies they anticipated using on the upcoming provincial English exam. They were also asked to describe themselves as belonging to the top, middle or lower third of the class in the area of writing competence. Table 4 below is a summary of the 65 responses to the survey questions and shows that all of the students had been exposed to the reference sets. Although the categories of competence may be suspect because of the self-selection process, the classroom teachers did collect the forms and agreed to do a spot check on that particular response as the papers were handed in. No revisions were reported by teachers.

Table 4. Responses of General Student Group to Questions about Use of Writing Models n = 65

1. (A) Have you used/studied the Ministry of Education writing reference sets or rating scales in your studies this term?

	Yes	No
superior	24	0
average	31	0
weak	10	0

(B) If "yes" did the reference sets of student writing help you in your writing?

1

	Yes		No	
superior	20	83%	4	17%
average	26	84%	5	16%
weak	7	70%	3	30%

2. Do you have any strategy in mind for writing the provincial exam essay? (expand)

	Yes		No	
superior	18	75%	6	25%
average	17	55%	14	45%
weak	6	60%	4	40%

The purpose in conducting these student surveys was to check for student exposure to the writing reference sets and to determine if there was a relationship between pattern of preparedness for writing, use of those reference sets, and ability level. In general, more superior students than weak ones stated they derived value from using the writing reference sets and

expressed a greater confidence that they had a strategy in mind for writing a response to the essay question on the exam. One other finding of note was that proportionately more of the average students than weak ones said that they had no strategy for test essay writing.

If those subjects were grouped into two sets of data rather than three so that those who identified themselves as being in the middle third and the lower third of the class in writing ability became one data set and those identifying themselves as being in the top third became the second set, the results would be more pronounced as demonstrated in Table 5 below. There, although both groups perceived value in having used the reference sets about equally, the superior group believed they had strategies for writing the provincial exam to a much higher level than the weaker students.

Table 5. Re-ordered Set of Responses of Students to Questions about Use of Writing Models n = 65

1. (B) Did the reference sets of student writing help you in your writing?

	Numbers	Yes		No	
superior	24	20	83%	4	17%
average/weak	41	33	80%	8	20%

2. Do you have any strategy in mind for writing the provincial exam essay? (expand)

	Numbers	Yes		No	
superior	24	18	75%	6	25%
average/weak	41	23	56%	18	44%

Teacher Responses: February 1996

The teachers surveyed came from all areas of the province and were at a marking session in Victoria where 3,500 exam papers had been graded. Most of them had been involved in marking sessions for some years. Of the 120 teachers present, ninety-four completed questionnaires, of which ten were novice or first-time participants at a marking session and eighty-four had graded exams at least once before. Although the venue in which the information was collected was the site for an exam grading session, the participants were questioned on their practices both as classroom teachers and as exam markers and the types of questions made clear reference to those two domains. For instance, question #2 asked about the use of Ministry publications with your class, clearly calling for a response from an individual as a teacher, while question #3 on the other hand, asked for the "features ... you most often see in essays receiving 5 or 6?" a question which related to the scoring rubric they had just been applying to thousands of exam essays. The data from a survey of these individuals are presented in Table 6 below.

Table 6. Selected Responses to Questionnaire Items
Directed at English Teachers

Total number of individuals at session	120		
<u>Forms returned</u>	<u>94</u>	<u>78%</u>	<u>of possible</u>
Experienced markers	84	89%	of sample
Novice markers	10	11%	of sample

Question #2 Do you use rating scales or the guide to holistic marking with your class, i.e. the Ministry publications on marking essays?

	yes	%	no	%
experienced markers	70	83%	14	17%
novice markers	9	90%	1	10%
totals	79	84%	15	16%

Note. All percentages are calculated on the basis of numbers in the particular group. Seventy of the eighty-four experienced markers, i.e. 83%, used rating scales with students and a total of seventy-nine of all respondents, i.e. 79/94 or 84%, answered "yes"

Responses to February 2000 survey

In February, 2000, a second survey was conducted at a regional marking session in Victoria. These teachers were no longer drawn from all districts in the province, but rather were hired to mark in one of five regional centres in order to eliminate travel and accommodation expenses. There were still a large number of experienced teacher-raters in the group from Victoria and as teachers, they were asked whether they still used the published sets of model essays and rating scales for instruction. The data are given in Table 7 below:

Table 7. Teachers' Responses to Reference-set-use Questionnaire, February, 2000.

Total number of participants at session	21	
<u>Forms returned</u>	20	95% of possible
Experienced teacher-markers	18	90% of sample
Novice teacher-markers	2	10% of sample

Do you use rating scales or the guide to holistic marking, i.e. the Ministry publications on marking essays in your classroom teaching?

	yes	%	no	%
experienced markers	11	61%	7	39%
novice markers	1	50%	1	50%
totals	12	60%	8	40%

Teacher responses on June 2000 survey

Forms were sent to a selection of thirty schools across the province during the final weeks of the spring term, 2000 and English staff were asked about their use of the Ministry writing reference sets. The schools selected provided a mix of urban and rural, large and small. Fifteen forms were returned, some listing data for more than one English instructor, particularly those sent from schools with large populations so that altogether 22 teachers instructing a total of 61 classes were provided. Of the 22 teachers reported, Table 8 indicates the numbers who used the writing reference sets in their classroom writing instruction.

Table 8. Teachers' Responses to Reference-set-use Questionnaire, May/June 2000.

<u>Forms returned</u>	<u>22</u>	
Experienced teacher-markers	16	73% of sample
Novice teacher-markers	6	27% of sample

Do you use rating scales or the guide to holistic marking, i.e. the Ministry publications on marking essays in your classroom teaching?

	yes	%	no	%
experienced markers	15	94%	1	6%
non-markers	5	83%	1	17%
totals	20	91%	2	9%

Summary of Teachers' Data

In response to the question which asked, "Do you use rating scales or the guide to holistic marking with your class, i.e. the Ministry publications on marking essays?" 84% of respondents in 1996 said that they used one or more of the Ministry publications. Although the rate dropped to about 60% in February, 2000, there was still a majority of teachers who used the reference sets in their classes. Of fourteen schools with twenty-two grade twelve English teachers surveyed in June of 2000, the percentage saying that they used the reference sets was ninety-one. The discrepancy may be accounted for by the fact that the members of the former group were all markers but possibly not all teachers while the latter group were all teachers. The data in the tables above may be summarized as follows:

Table 9. Responses to Items Directed at English Teachers: Do you use rating scales or the guide to holistic marking with your class?

February 1996	yes	%	no	%
experienced markers	70	83%	14	17%
novice markers	9	90%	1	10%
totals	79	84%	15	16%

<u>February 2000</u>	yes	%	no	%
experienced markers	11	61%	7	39%
novice markers	1	50%	1	50%
totals	12	60%	8	40%

<u>May/June 2000</u>	yes	%	no	%
experienced markers	15	94%	1	6%
non-markers	5	83%	1	17%
totals	20	91%	2	9%

Because the instructions for these holistic scoring guides suggest that the sample essays be photocopied and given to students with the scores removed, and that students then arrange them in order of rank using the descriptors for each scale point given in the guide, it is clearly the intent of the assessment branch that students be given at least this much training in the application of the marking rubric to essays so that they might understand what features of essays will be highly regarded by the markers who will later apply that same template to their test essays.

Markers responses

The two significant questions on the survey (see Appendix A for full survey form) which was given to markers at a grading session in Victoria in February, 1996 were numbers 1 and 3 which are given as subheadings in tables 8 and 9 below. The table shows the responses of markers when queried about features of superior essays and the two questions were intended to provide opportunity for markers to express themselves in their own words on the

qualities of superior essays as well as to collect their impressions of the essays they had just finished marking.

Question 1 asked, "What feature influences you most when you give top marks for essays either in class or on examination papers?" The complete set of words used by the subjects in response to question #1 is given in Appendix A and the results are summarized in Table 8. This is a small sample of the terms used by the respondents.

risk-taking	depth of understanding
well written	engaging
creativity	insight
word choice	sense of voice
different perspective	control of language
use of figurative language	details
command of language	well written
thoughtful	controlled voice
well structured	originality
unusual approach	descriptive
descriptions	originality of thought
interesting argument	creativity & humour

These terms were divided into the two categories of quantitative or structural proficiency such as in the case of "command of language" or "well structured" and qualitative or overall quality of expression as with "well written". Many respondents went beyond the requirements of the question and put in more than one answer, often using terms appropriate to a different category than that of the first response. Table 10 below attempts to capture this "hedging" activity. All responses were coded to show that the subject used a term describing the other feature as this second response (see Appendix A). The ascribing of terms to one category or the other was done by the author in consultation with two other experienced teacher-markers. Some did not respond to the question at all.

Table 10. Markers' Terms Used to Report Influences for Top Marks for Essays

Total Responses = 83 (73 experienced + 10 novice)	
Experienced choosing structural feature as first term	30 = 41.1%
Experienced choosing structural feature as second term	14 = 19.2%
Novice choosing structural feature as first term	2 = 20%
Novice choosing structural feature as second term	2 = 20%
Total choosing structural features as first term	32 = 38.6%
Total choosing structural feature as second term	16 = 19.3%
Experienced choosing quality as first term	43 = 58.9%
Experienced choosing quality as second term	4 = 5.5%
Novice choosing quality as first term	8 = 80%
Novice choosing quality as second term	1 = 10%
Total choosing quality as first term	51 = 61.4%
Total choosing quality as second term	5 = 6.0%

Note. There were only 83 usable responses to this question, 73 from experienced markers and 10 from novice markers.

Question 3 asked subjects to select one feature from each of two columns denoting four of either genre or text features; however, many respondents ticked all that they felt applied. The summary of data in Table 11 reflects the total number of marks on response sheets.

Table 11. Features Most Often Reported in Essays Receiving Scores of 5 or 6

	experienced marker		novice marker		total	
narrative	37	44%	4	40%	41	44%
personal ^a	18	21%	1	10%	19	20%
narrative total	55	65%	5	50%	60	64%
narrative	<hr/>					
exposition	10	12%	3	30%	13	14%
description	3	4%	0	0%	3	3%
humour	15	18%	1	10%	16	17%
mechanics	16	19%	2	20%	18	19%
perspective	48	57%	6	60%	54	58%
development	29	35%	5	50%	34	36%

Note. All percentages are calculated on the basis of numbers in the particular group. Fifty-five of the 84 experienced markers or 65%, said that some form of narrative compositions most often received scores of 5 or 6.

^a Although these markers seemed to be able to distinguish between narrative and personal narrative, the distinction seemed too vague and so for purposes of this report, the two will be combined as simply "narrative."

Feature analysis of top papers

The markers passed the graded papers in to education officers of the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Education granted a request to conduct an examination of some of those papers and provided assistance to remove the 330 top-scoring essays for a feature analysis by a team of three experienced markers. These were the essays which had received a score of at

least 22 out of a possible 24, meaning that at least one of the raters had given it a score of 6. The template for recording essay features, as described in the previous chapter, was then applied to each paper with the following results:

Table 12. Summary of Features of Top-Ranked Essay Papers (N=330)

1. Genre of essay: All (N=330)	A Expository: argument, position, persuasion	117	35%
	B. Narrative, recount/report format	140	42%
	C. Narrative, unusual format or viewpoint	46	14%
	D. Descriptive, traditional format	0	0
	E. Mixed genre	27	8%
2. If exposition: (N=117)	A. traditional 5-paragraph construction	95	81%
	B. strong variation from standard format	4	3%
	C. unique perspective	17	14%
	D. contains narrative elements	23	19%
3. If narration: (N=186) omitted "C"	A. outcome predictable from opening	46	25%
	B. outcome unpredictable	119	64%
	D. contains expository elements	28	13%
4. If narration: N=1286	A. satisfies societal expectation	162	49%
	B. violates societal expectation	32	10%
5. If description:	A. detail rich, denotative language predominates	0	0
	B. figurative language predominates	0	0
6. Treatment of subject: All (N=330)	A. very original	162	49%
	B. somewhat original	131	40%
	C. not original	36	11%

7. Tone of essay:	A. sympathetic	68	21%
All (N=330)	B. satiric/caustic	13	4%
	C. sentimental	42	13%
	D. amusing	50	15%
	E. serious	157	48%
8. If humour used:	A. human foibles	62	81%
N=77	B. suggested violence	3	4%
	C. sexual	3	4%
	D. economic/political	9	17%
	E. not used	253	77%
9. Sentence length & style variation:	A. little variation	7	2%
All (N=330)	B. some variation	183	55%
	C. great variation	140	42%
10. Diction:	A. wide & precise	170	52%
All (N=330)	B. average	157	48%
	C. limited	3	1%

11. Outstanding feature:	A. original thesis	51	15%
* more than 1	B. strength of imagery	21	6%
feature may	C. use of humour	18	5%
be selected	D. language competence	59	18%
	E. voice	83	25%
12. Voice:	A. strong	235	71%
All (N=330)	B. Moderate	93	28%
	C. weak	2	1%

The purpose of the feature analysis was to check for congruency of standards with the marker cadre, i.e., did the highly-rated essays exhibit the features which that group had stated as being most influential? The opportunity to inspect this select group of student examination essays would also provide comparison data for the only other feature analyses of British Columbia student essays, the work of David Fisher (1989) and the Ministry of Education in 1988 as reported in their booklet, Using Rating Scales to Evaluate Student Writing (1990, 12). With all of the data collected, the search for connections proceeded, and the report on that data and the relationships discerned are the material of the next chapter.

Summary

This chapter reported the findings of a number of measurements which solicited opinion and ratings on a number of questions. Two groups of students gave evidence on their familiarity with writing reference sets and their assessment of the value of those materials with intended strategies for writing the test essay on the provincial examination. Different groups of teachers were

asked on three different occasions to report on their use of the writing reference set as instructional aids. Finally, markers of the provincial examination were asked about their ratings of student essays, specifically the text features regarded most favourably. This last piece of data was cross-checked with a feature analysis of some of the essays which those markers had scored.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

Summary of Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to determine how well each of the parties to the writing examination process --students, teachers and markers -- understood the standards for excellence for the test; that is, the study examined the degree of congruency in the perception of the values represented by the holistic scoring guide among the key participants. Although students did not demonstrate a high familiarity with terms in the reference sets and rating scales by which their essays would be judged, all stated they had used those documents in their writing classes. The great majority of teachers surveyed also affirmed their use of the exemplars in composition classes and gave a variety of expressions to describe excellence in student writing. There appeared to be a high degree of correspondence also between the qualities markers stated as features of good writing and the features found on highly-rated test essays. Although the study has some acknowledged design flaws in the data-gathering instruments, it does point to a congruency of standards between Ministry of Education essay examination markers and the teachers of the jurisdiction. A similar congruency in values transmitted between teacher and student could not be stated with certainty owing to some uncertainty as to the familiarity students had with the specific language of the curriculum guide booklets. The methodological critique will note the need for greater precision in questionnaire design for all parties in the study and offer suggestions for future research areas.

Purpose and Questions

This study was designed to determine the degree to which students, teachers and markers involved in the summative English examination in British Columbia understand the terms of reference and make use of the writing reference sets which the Ministry of Education publishes. The questions which were derived from that intention are as follows:

- (i) Are students apprised of the Ministry values for superior essays as described in the writing reference sets?
- (ii) Do the students understand the descriptions of these values (revealed as intended writing strategies)?
- (iv) To what extent do teachers use the Ministry writing reference sets?
- (iii) What are the stated skills and text constructions valued by teachers?
- (v) What are the stated skills and text constructions valued in the Ministry of Education writing reference sets?
- (vi) What do markers say are the features they reward?
- (vii) What are the actual features of highly-rewarded examination essays?

James Britton commented to the Schools Council in Britain (1966) that, "A test would be valid if it tested ability in English, but what constitutes ability in English is still largely a matter of opinion" (p. 8). With the data collected in this study, especially that from the marker cadre, we may begin to put forward some responses to this challenge. Each group will be addressed in turn with the questions raised for that group and conclusions will be presented. The

review of theory, methodological critique, and recommendations for further study will complete the chapter.

Student Responses:

In this section the questions examined were: (i) Are students apprised of the Ministry values for superior essays as described in the writing reference sets? and (ii) Do the students understand the descriptions of these values (revealed as intended writing strategies)? The short answers are "Yes" and "No" respectively. The primary group of students surveyed were under the direct instruction of the researcher and all used the writing reference sets and the guide to holistic scoring in all composition classes; they were most thoroughly immersed in the models of those reference sets.

In determining whether or not other students in the school district also were made aware of Ministry standards for effective writing, a second or general group, surveyed by questionnaire was asked simply whether or not they had used the writing reference sets in their composition classes. A second question concerning strategies they intended to use on the examination essay was intended to get additional details about that experience by looking for terms from the instructions in the reference sets and the suggested lessons to be based on them.

Groups of students then, were surveyed by interviews and by questionnaires at different times. The results of the interview process (with the primary group) were based on eight students in a class of twenty-five. An examination of the student responses does not indicate positions which are

clear and consistent. Generally, superior students felt that they had a strategy for approaching the essay component of the provincial exam. Either they would "do some webbing" or "write a rough draft first" (Appendix B, student interviews, 1997), but even some of the weaker students would "definitely have to do webbing" or knew enough to plan by "writing down thoughts on the topics" before composing the essay.

When the general and much larger student group which was a sample of the District 63 graduating class of June 2000 was surveyed, some more definite trends manifested. In that group, a tendency to find value in the use of the writing reference sets and to have a strategy for writing the exam essay were more clearly, although by no means exclusively, associated with the more able students. The tables of data in chapter four (pp. 73-77) give the totals of boxes checked on survey forms. A visual inspection of the responses, however, reveals some more precise information on the attitudes which the form attempted to assess. After the question, "Do you have any strategy in mind for writing the provincial exam essay?" the students were asked to expand if they answered affirmatively. The written comments showed that many who believed they had a plan in place for writing the essay were really responding as if the question had concerned the whole examination experience, for they wrote such things as, "write the composition first, study the poetry terms, think creatively when writing the prompt essay," or "study a lot." When responses were sorted to extract just those which used writing plans employing strategies suggested in the reference sets, i.e. brainstorming by webbing, classifying, referring to literature, semantic mapping, then the results showed that there was very little difference in the groups in their intended use of strategies for writing. In the tables of re-ordered data (p. 75), two-thirds of the superior

students did not have a strategy for addressing the essay question as opposed to three-quarters of the average/weak students who placed themselves in a similar position.

The finding reported above still does not provide a definite answer to the question of whether or not students understand the descriptions of these values (revealed as intended writing strategies) for two reasons. First, the students were asked about intended writing strategies which were then compared to terms from the "lesson suggestion" portion and the rating scale descriptors of the publications in question. Some students used terms found in the lesson suggestions part, but none used wording found in the rating scales. The real values to be sought, however, were the ones expressed in the rating scales of the holistic marking guide. It may well have been that brainstorming to prepare a "semantic map" (lesson suggestions, p. 48) would produce an essay which was "purposeful and focussed" (rating scales, p. 21), but students did not use the language of the holistic marking guide in their responses. Even students in the first group -- the interviewees who had used the reference sets and rating scales intensively and as suggested in those booklets -- did not use the language of the marking guide. Second, it seems in retrospect that the actual question was not well designed to get at that piece of information, directing, as it did, student attention to personal writing strategy rather than the language of assessment standards. A future study might be designed to more accurately assess the correlation between student articulation of their writing practices and the language of the holistic scoring guide.

Although it was not one of the specific elements in this research, the question of relative merit of professional as opposed to student writing samples arose in some of the interviews with student writers. Students had mixed reactions to the use of reference sets of student models. At other periods during the term's composition lessons, they had worked with excerpts from professional authors. Some said it was easier to see a writing technique in a professional author while others felt the student work showed them what they needed to do to get a passing grade on the exam. The following comments were typical of the responses:

Student 1 (lower third): Professional models ... they use lots more quotations from other sources, from personal experience. It's a lot more structured.

Student 2 (middle third): I liked the professional work myself, based on just the general language that they used ... the diction.

Student 3 (top third): I find it hard to read other students' work just because it feels like we're all trying to ... perfect this kind of lesson. And so it's easier to see it in a professional writer than in a student.

Student 4 (middle third): I think reading good writing done by our peers that have scored high will give us a reference to what we should be doing when we write the provincial ... because, you know, if they scored higher obviously it works on the provincial exam.

Student 5 (top third): It [student models] gave us an idea of how the Ministry of Education marks us.

Teachers' Responses Regarding the Use of the Ministry Writing Reference Sets

Information gathered in this section of the study was for the purpose of answering the two questions: (iv) To what extent do teachers use the Ministry

writing reference sets? and (iii) What are the stated skills and text constructions valued by teachers? Responses to the surveys show that a majority of the English teachers in British Columbia do make use of the student writing reference sets. In three different surveys, 84%, 60% and 91% said "yes" when asked, "Do you use rating scales or the guide to holistic marking with your class, the Ministry publications on marking essays; i.e. do you photocopy samples and go over them?" The results were presented in Tables 6, 7, and 8 in chapter four and summarized in Table 9 (pp. 79-80).

Without more precise data, particularly on the background of the subjects, it is not possible to account for the lower value obtained on the second survey (60%, down from 84%). The teachers' backgrounds, especially their length of service as grade 12 English teachers could have an effect on their responses, as one possible explanation for the lower figure on survey two lies in the nature of the hiring practices for markers between the 1996 and 2000 sessions. In the 1995-96 school year, the Ministry marker application form stated that aspiring markers should be currently teaching a grade twelve English class in order to be considered for a position and so the cadre for that February, 1996 session were all practising grade 12 English teachers and would have at least seen the reference set and holistic marking guide booklets in their curriculum guides. By 2000, however, after some disputes with Revenue Canada which saw the after-tax remuneration for markers drop significantly and a number of experienced markers stop participating in the process, the Ministry of Education made some changes in their hiring practices. Any applicant for the marking teams was required to attend a weekend training session but was not required to be a practising grade 12-English teacher. In responding to the

above survey question then, an experienced marker would be one who had received a weekend's training and may have worked on a previous marking session, but that person could have answered "no" to the question regarding use of reference sets with a class because they may not have been presently teaching a class. The data for May/June 2000 were gathered by mail from survey forms sent to English department heads in high schools across the province and therefore specifically targetted the grade 12 classroom teacher. In summary though, the data, and particularly that of surveys one and three which came from classroom teachers, support the conclusion that a majority of English teachers in the jurisdiction make use of the relevant published instructional material.

What are the Skills and Text Constructions Valued by Teachers?

The information written on the survey form in response to the question, "What feature influences you most when you give top marks for essays either in class or on examination papers? was used to determine text features valued by teachers as a means of addressing question (iii): What are the stated skills and text constructions valued by teachers?

Although not everyone provided an answer, the 83 who did were divided 32 to 51 (39% to 61%) when their responses were distributed into the two categories of quantitative or structural features and qualitative, respectively; that is, a substantial number of the respondents pointed to qualitative features as being most significant in earning high scores. This finding is supported by the results of the question (#3 on the survey instrument) which asked the group to select a feature from a given list as being most frequently present in high-

scoring essays. There the terms "humour" and "unique perspective" may be collapsed into one quality category, while the other two, "impeccable mechanics" and "control of development" may be combined under quantitative or structural features. The results showed that the ratio of subjects choosing structural features to qualitative was 52 to 71.

This question (number 3) concerning the features most often seen in essays receiving the superior scores of 5 or 6 seemed to be confusing (or too restrictive) to some of the surveyed individuals, and instead of selecting one feature from each of the columns denoting either genre or text features, many respondents ticked all that they felt applied. The summary of data in table 9 in chapter four shows the total number of marks on response sheets. On the genre side of that checklist in table 9, the total for narrative genre at about 65% is similar to what David Fisher found in 1989. The value of 65% is obtained by adding the responses for narrative to the responses for personal narrative. The technique side of the features checklist showed almost equally strong attraction to essays delivered with a unique perspective -- an original point of view -- as to those displaying skill in paragraph development and proficiency in the mechanics of writing.

An examination of the data revealed no apparent differences in selected values made by experienced markers and first-time markers and, indeed, the information sheet was not well designed to examine any distinction in choices that may have been present. One would want to know a number of other factors such as length of time spent teaching English 12 or experience marking other provincial exams; and of course, the sample size of novice markers at 10 is not really large enough to generalize from.

The information gathered in response to this question where options were provided showed two distinct opinions as to what constituted good writing, even though a number of respondents wanted to "hedge their bets" with more than one choice. Overall, 61% of the markers came down on the side of qualitative factors such as "mature style, creativity, unique perspective" as the more indicative of superior prose in the test papers they had just graded. It should be noted again that the terms "qualitative" and "structural" are terms applied to collected data and that the survey instrument (see Appendix A) was either a completely open-ended question, "What feature influences you most when you give top marks for essays either in class or on examination papers?" (#1) or it provided eight options for respondents to check (#3). The survey form could have been more accommodating of markers' personal biases and permitted free response to this latter question. Another possibility would have been to use the language of the rating scales as the material for a checklist. This issue will be dealt with under the suggestions-for-further-research section of this chapter.

What do Markers Say They Reward, and the Feature Analysis

The portion of the study dealing with the marker component was designed to answer the questions: (v) What are the stated skills and text constructions valued in the Ministry of Education writing reference sets? (vi) What do markers say are the features they reward? and (vii) What are the actual features of highly-rewarded examination essays? The complete survey results of a group of nearly one hundred examiners at the January 1996 marking

session were given in Table 12 of chapter 4. Some summary observations are made here.

Question (v) concerning the stated skills and text constructions valued in Ministry documents may be answered by quoting from the booklet Using rating scales to evaluate student writing:

A strong engaging paper is developed with originality, energy, and flair. Strong personal voice. Purposeful and focused; flows smoothly from an effective opening through a series of events or ideas to a strong conclusion. Detail and examples are effectively used to establish mood, develop character, or elaborate an argument. Style is vivid and precise. The writer takes risks and the results are effective. An easy command of sentence structure may include appropriate and precise subordination, and effective use of parallel structures and fragments. Vocabulary is appropriate, precise, and often sophisticated. Few mechanical errors.

In Table 10, the data show that two-thirds of the markers suggested qualitative features such as "sense of voice". This seems quite consistent with the descriptors in the Ministry guidelines which contain mostly qualitative terms such as "engaging, mood, risks".

A survey of the examiners at a marking session revealed a preference for narrative writing, or at least the belief that the compositions which received top scores would be narratives, with 65% saying that superior papers would be narrative or personal narrative (obtained by adding 44% for narrative and 21% for personal narrative) and only 14% favoring exposition. When their exam essays were analyzed, narratives comprised 56% of the sample and mixed genre, 8%. Because there were no samples of purely descriptive writing, these last two quantities represent narrative and mixed text of narrative (usually as illustrative anecdote) and exposition. They may be summed to determine the actual frequency of narrative writing. Doing so gives a value of 64% for essays containing narrative features, virtually as predicted.

Also in the genre findings, the marker-anticipated percentage of excellent essays which would be exposition was 14; that is exposition was selected by 14% of the marker cadre as the predominant feature of superior essays. In the feature analysis, expository essays comprised 35% of the sample of 330 papers. This does not mean that twice as many essays as had been anticipated turned out to be expositions, but only that it was selected as the important feature of superior papers by a small number of markers and turned out to comprise about one-third of the actual superior papers by genre. Of the 117 expository essays (35% of the 330 papers), 81% were of the standard five-paragraph format so reviled by Janet Emig (1971), and so it would seem that the basics of expository structure had been well internalized by student writers. These essays were, "Purposeful and focused; flowing smoothly from an effective opening through a series of events or ideas to a strong conclusion" in the words of the six-level descriptor.

There were no essays among the highest scoring sample from the exam session written purely as descriptive prose and even markers had anticipated that only 3% would be written in that genre.

Some further research could ascertain the relative amounts of instructional time in secondary schools devoted to teaching the distinct genres and the amount of time instructing in the methods of writing mixed-genre text. The school experience of this researcher suggests that it is almost nil, with the greatest percentage of high school composition-writing instruction time being given to the factual genres of opinion, themes, persuasion, and report. Students in one class did show themselves quite able to use instruction in mixed-genre

writing to perform far above the mean scores of the jurisdiction (Peach, 2000), achieving a class average on the essay portion of the exam of 80%. Fisher (1991) also found in his feature analysis that "students who wrote effective essays incorporated the structures of more than one genre" (p. 2). This issue will be explored more fully before closing this report.

Humour did not seem to be a major feature of superior student writing. In the record of markers' anticipated features of top-scoring essays, humour was selected as a significant feature by 17% of the group surveyed, and in the feature analysis, instances of humour were found in only 23% or 77 of the 330 essays. Its presence also, did not mean that it was the most attractive quality of the prose. When raters of the feature analysis decided on the outstanding feature of each essay, humour was selected in only 5% of the cases.

The final item on the feature analysis was the determination of the quality called "voice." Other researchers had stated that it was the most difficult feature of writing to describe (Fisher, 1991) although its presence or absence could be readily agreed upon by teachers and markers. There were no instructions in the guidelines for using the reference sets or holistic marking scales which dealt with promoting voice in student writing. Those involved in the feature analysis were agreed that 99% of the highly-rated papers they were analyzing had a distinct quality of voice, and furthermore when the papers were examined for the most outstanding feature, the most often selected aspect was voice at 25%. It seems that more exploration is merited in this area if teachers are to be given practical suggestions for developing the quality of voice in writing which they can pass on to their students, and this issue will be addressed before concluding the present work.

Conclusions

Generally then, the teachers do use the writing reference sets and they do score in a manner which acknowledges the elements valorized in the documents given to them by their Ministry of Education. It is difficult to tell from the data whether or not students grasp the criteria on which they are being graded. Most of the responses showed a reliance on process approach strategies such as making lists or webs of ideas and making time for corrections, two activities derived from the brainstorming and revision parts of that process approach which is almost universally used in middle and elementary schools across the province. The students may not have used the vocabulary of the holistic scoring guide because it was from an unfamiliar domain; i.e., that of teacher-markers, and so it was not possible with the present investigative instruments and protocols to ascertain the degree to which they had internalized the holistic scoring rubric.

One piece of information that was revealed in the process of gathering data was that there was almost no distinction between marker and classroom teacher, as fully 73% of classroom teachers surveyed indicated that they had served on a marking committee. Those markers surveyed as markers at the conclusion of a grading session had of course, been given some immediate training in the application of the holistic scoring guide and had completed a number of consensus-building exercises just prior to their marking session, and so the responses they gave in regards to important essay features may be taken as representing that rubric which they had just spent two weeks applying to thousands of papers. The fact that so large a body of classroom practitioners has had that same exam-marking experience suggests that the

standards expressed in the Ministry of Education guides are likely to be well known by the teaching staff in the province.

This collapsing of the teacher-marker distinction presents the possibility of redesigning some of the methodology and the instruments used in this study. There were some weaknesses in design which should be noted and there are some possibilities for future research which the present work implies. Also, there are questions which were raised, but not fully dealt with. Some are specific to the use of certain elements in the holistic scoring guides that proved difficult to define in any meaningful way, while others are of a broader nature concerning the practice of reliably testing a large educational jurisdiction, and still others, derived from those areas of difficulty, are speculations on the possibility of further lines of research.

Review of Theory

The theory underlying the composition program in this province's schools is that of modelling or cognitive apprenticeship. The curriculum support materials for teachers contain models of student writing intended to be shared with pupils, and the calibration of markers at training sessions is pursued through repeated multiple markings of model essays. This study detailed the use of modelling at classroom and marking sessions and affirmed the widespread use of writing models in composition lessons. It also attempted to trace the transmission of valued text features through the educational hierarchy. The implementation of a writing program based on a theory of modelling will require a program of lessons on particular text features with acknowledgment of the individual expressions of students in order to avoid the lifeless text product of a mere stimulus-response imitation process. The

reference sets which served as the medium of this transmission represent the jurisdictional commitment to modelling theory as an instructional framework, but the value of that theory was not tested. It is the speculation of this researcher, based on lengthy classroom experience, that comparative longitudinal studies would demonstrate the robustness of this theory.

Methodological Critique

Instrument Design

The survey forms for gathering data from students and from teachers both suffered from too general a design. They determined the use of writing reference sets by both parties but failed to gather information in sufficient detail to ascertain how those teaching aids were used and to what degree they served the purpose of preparing students to write the provincial examination. The booklets do contain suggestions for using the reference sets and rating scales in classroom lessons to familiarize students with the assessment standards, and some questions might have elicited useful data on the perceived degree of value in such exercises and suggestions for other lessons that could be based on those resources.

Student surveys

A student survey form could include specific descriptors of text quality from the rating scales and a Likert scale to determine the degree of familiarity and perceived competence to reproduce that each subject felt for that quality. The primary focus group interviews also could have been modified to ask fewer questions of a much larger sample. Although the relaxed, conversational tone may have elicited authentic responses, some focus could have been introduced

by using standard pieces of text to test recognition of valorized features from published reference sets.

Teacher surveys

The teacher questionnaire, instead of merely asking if the reference sets were used "as suggested," might have enquired into the actual practices by including a checklist of teaching scenarios, and Likert scales to determine the perceived value of such scenarios and frequency of instructional use. More information could also have been derived from a teacher survey form which permitted more open-ended response to questions regarding text features most often present in superior essays rather than limiting the choices to the two areas of genre and rhetorical devices with predetermined elements in each. Instead of the question appearing as it did (Figure 5, ch. 3, p.64), it might be have been designed to capture a more complete picture of the valued features by giving more choices, perhaps by using excerpts from the rating scales used by those teachers, and by including a space for personal expression.

Timeline of study

This study collected information over the period from January 1996 to June, 2000 during a period of a relatively stable examination process. The primary student group of interviewees wrote exams of three hours duration in which they were given a single word writing prompt for the essay question and required to prepare a 300 to 500-word response to it. Now, the English examination format has changed to require a 300 word essay in response to a longer, more directive prompt with illustration in a shorter test period of two hours, and new support guides with exemplars and rating scale descriptions

have been put into use. This fact should not limit the applicability of the findings of this study, however, as the focus was on the degree of congruency in the transmission of values in text, and it is that set of findings which led to the following criticisms of the teaching and testing program and to suggestions for possible areas for further research.

Problems in the Present Teaching-Testing Program for Writing

The Marking Process

Vague terms

There is a problem in defining some of the qualities given as valued features in the guide to holistic scoring and the booklet Using rating scales to evaluate student writing. The first three sentences in the latter guide describe a six-level essay:

An engaging paper ... developed with originality, energy and flair. Strong personal voice. Purposeful and focused; flows smoothly from an effective opening through a series of events or ideas to a strong conclusion. (p. 21)

The words, "engaging, originality, energy, flair, voice, focused, flows smoothly" are all subjective terms which cannot be satisfactorily defined in linguistic terms; that is, defined so that a teacher can drill high school students on the text constructions which will produce those features. Of the teacher-markers surveyed in this study, both those scoring essays at a marking session and those assistants completing a feature analysis on the same papers later, there was agreement about the need for a strong personal voice in superior essays; however, no one offered any elaboration or definition of the term. Because it represents the problem of elusive definition so well, it is worth examining the term voice.

It seems to be a quality synonymous with personality which has not been defined in quantitative language, although some groups have tried. The Northwest Regional Writing Educators Laboratory has published a rubric called the 6+1 Analytic Marking Guide (1998) which they say was developed in response to dissatisfaction with the holistic scoring rubrics in national use. One of the six traits is voice, but they define it in such non-quantitative terms as, "not like an encyclopedia entry, expressing a real person who cares about the topic," expressions which defy linguistic interpretation into actual lessons.

Textbooks offer no more practical criteria for identifying voice. Spandel and Stiggins (1997) cite voice as one of the six traits in their analytic scoring rubric and then define it as, "Liveliness, passion, energy, awareness of audience, involvement in the topic, and a capacity to elicit a strong response from the reader" (p. 45). In their section of teaching practices, the authors suggest bringing in models culled from many text genres which have "voice" and using these models in lessons where students attempt to emulate the writing style.

Only a few writers have been found to date who have attempted to give a definition of voice in terms of the text constructions which embody it. One group was the authors of Women's Ways of Knowing, (1997) where the use of tentatives and hedges such as "perhaps, sometimes, if possible" were identified as being constituents of women's voice as distinct from the more definite constructions of men's speech. Another was Freed (1993) who claimed that a colleague had presented a "robust heuristic for determining and constructing voice" (p. 480); however, he was writing about the development of an image which a consultant might want to project for a client and selecting particular parts of speech to tailor that image to the client's interpersonal needs for

financial gain. This is interesting, but not easily applicable to the average classroom setting.

From this writer's experience, it may not be necessary to trouble ourselves with a precise definition of the term so long as we can give coherent instructions for students so that the quality of voice will manifest itself in their writing. Those instructions should include the use of writing assignments which allow the student to express strong feelings on some issue of personal importance and then to practise articulating that issue with a peer group. These strategies form the basis of a sociolinguistic orientation to a writing program which uses the Vygotskyan principle of extending one's zone of proximal development through interaction with a peer group (Peach, 1999). As the conversation in such a group progresses, and repeated expression both written and oral, takes place, the student finds the "originality, energy and flair, strong personal voice, purposeful and focused" which the rating scales require.

Exam Marking Practices

Beginning in April 1997, English exams have been marked regionally and only markers who can travel from home to the designated centres in Victoria and Vancouver are employed. Although this innovation reduces the cost of the evaluation process, it also concentrates the responsibility for that evaluation in a small pool of markers. There are some strategies which could be invoked to assure reliability in the face of this move to regional marking centres.

First is the Australian "moderation" process where teachers from schools in different regions gather to create a standardized marking rubric in much the same manner as is currently done at the evaluation sessions. The

process in Australia has English teachers from across the state gather three times a year with collections of senior students' portfolios. These are evaluated by all on the basis of agreed-upon elements. The enterprise requires little extra cost, as professional development times are often used and accommodation expenses are usually limited to one overnight stay.

Second is the possibility of having the Ministry make a recognizable commitment to the professional development of writing instructors. Markers do need to be trained, and because the markers are also the ones delivering instruction in the content that is being marked, these people need to be apprised of the best instructional methods on an ongoing basis. This inservice training could be accomplished by a provincial ministry with adequate staff and the funding to train them.

Formative versus Summative Assessment

Last, there is a need to distinguish formative from summative evaluations. Barritt (1986) questioned the predictive validity of the mass essay examination even while acknowledging the high reliability indices of holistic marking. The best reliability scores are surely meaningless if the writing test does not provide some measure of the probability of future success in writing. Many teachers use the ministry reference sets to give a single mark out of six for essay work their students do. This mark tells the student little about how to achieve higher scores or even what features were valued in a particular piece of writing. Course work must be considered formative and given analytic evaluations. Further, course assignments should reflect the philosophy that all written work is work-in-progress. It is appropriate to sample this material from time to time for diagnostic and remedial purposes. It is even appropriate to

sample it for a summative evaluation if there has been opportunity for the student to sum up his works-in-progress as two or three selected pieces for such an evaluation. Until the political and professional will is expressed in progressive actions rather than editorializing and posturing for elections, there will be not satisfactory evaluation methods applied, and in such a climate, determining the features of successful writing and composing strategies becomes greatly obscured.

Suggestions for Further Research

What genres are taught in high school?

The eighteenth century genres of narration, exposition, description and persuasion are still used in the instructions for the composition on the provincial examination and students are encouraged to use whatever combination of these genres they find suitable. It could be instructive to survey the forms of text construction explicitly taught in our high schools. Especially, we might wish to know if students are shown how to construct mixed-genre text and what instructional practices are efficacious in this pursuit. The results of such a survey would prove helpful in developing curriculum guides, additional reference sets and rating scale descriptors.

What conditions will produce voice?

As noted above, this researcher has used one method for encouraging the development of voice in student compositions (Peach, 1999). It is best described in Hillocks' (1986) terms as "environmental" with its reliance on peer support and repeated trial expressions. There must be many other instructors

in high school English classrooms who have also addressed this issue, and a study of their best practices would certainly be rewarding.

Can students understand in a functional way (reproduce) valued text features?

The fact that not one of the students surveyed in this study used any of the terms from the holistic scoring guide or rating scale descriptors for reference sets as strategies for writing test essays suggests only that they are not familiar with those terms, not that they do not know how to create text which emulates those descriptors, for students continue to perform at acceptable levels on national and international surveys. Some research into this area with more focussed investigative tools might shed light on the pedagogical practices which would encourage articulation of these valued text features. It might also aid in the development of writing reference sets and rating scale descriptors which were more functional; i.e., could actually be used independently by students as guides to develop their composition skills.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine the degree of congruency in the understanding of each of the parties to the writing examination process of the standards for excellence for the test. Although the study has some weaknesses in the data-gathering instruments, it does assert a congruency of standards between Ministry of Education essay examination markers and the teachers of the province. A similar congruency in values transmitted between teacher and student could not be clearly demonstrated. It is intended that this work contribute to the ongoing conversation concerning the best theory, practices, and assessments to encourage developing writers in our schools.

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1. Human research ethics committee and school district approval
 OFFICE OF RESEARCH ADMINISTRATION

UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA

Certificate of Approval

University of Victoria
 Human Research Ethics Committee

Principal Investigator

Derek Peach
Grad Student

Department/School

**Communication & Social
 Foundations**

Supervisor

Dr. T. Johnson

Co-Investigators:

Title: *Advantaging Student Writers*

Project No.

113-96

Start Date

1 Apr 96

End Date

30 Apr 96

Approval Date

1 Apr 96

Certification

This is to certify that the University of Victoria Ethics Review Committee on Research and Other Activities Involving Human Subjects has examined the research proposal and concludes that, in all respects, the proposed research meets appropriate standards of ethics as outlined by the University of Victoria Research Regulation Involving Human Subjects.

 Michael Corcoran,
 Associate Dean, Research

 Alex McAuley,
 Associate Vice-President, Research

This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the procedures. Extensions/minor amendments may be granted upon receipt of "Request for Continuing Review or Amendment of an Approved Project" form.

Saanich Schools

2125 Keating Cross Road, Saanichton, B.C., Canada V8M 2A5 (604) 652-7300 Fax: (604) 652-6421

March 1, 1996

Derek Peach
5309 Westhome Road
R.R. #5
Victoria, B.C.
V8X 4M6

Dear Mr. Peach:

I am pleased to inform you that at the regular meeting of the Board of School Trustees on February 26, 1996, your request for research entitled "Advantaging Student Writers" was approved, subject to the following:

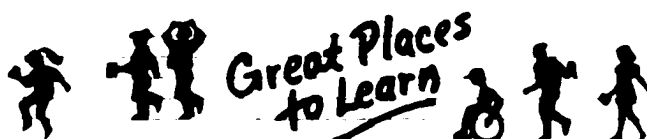
- a) that the participation be on a voluntary basis as previously requested;
- b) that the identity of all participants be kept confidential;
- c) that part of the project involving students be carried out with a minimum loss of instructional time;
- d) the results of the research project be shared with School District 63; and
- e) that University Subjects Approval form be filed with School District #63.

We wish you every success with your project.

Sincerely,

Judy Turner
Executive Secretary
Office of the Superintendent

/jet





University of Victoria

Office of Research
Administration

Alex McAuley, Ph.D.
Associate Vice-President,
Research

Michael Corcoran, Ph.D.
Associate Dean, Research

Certificate of Approval

University of Victoria
Human Research Ethics Committee

<u>Principal Investigator</u>	<u>Department/School</u>	<u>Supervisor</u>
Derek Peach Grad student	Communication & Social Foundations	Dr. T. Johnson

Title: *Advantaging Student Writers*

<u>Project No.</u>	<u>Start Date</u>	<u>End Date</u>	<u>Approval Date</u>
7-97	1 Feb 97	30 Jun 97	23 Dec 96

Certification

This is to certify that the University of Victoria Ethics Review Committee on Research and Other Activities Involving Human Subjects has examined the research proposal and concludes that, in all respects, the proposed research meets appropriate standards of ethics as outlined by the University of Victoria Research Regulation Involving Human Subjects.

Michael Corcoran,
Associate Dean, Research

Alex McAuley,
Associate Vice-President, Research

This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the procedures. Extensions/minor amendments may be granted upon receipt of "Request for Continuing Review or Amendment of an Approved Project" form.

Room B115.
Sedgewick Building
P.O. Box 1700
Victoria, BC
V8W 2Y2
Telephone (604) 721-7973
Facsimile (604) 721-8960

Saanich Schools

2125 Keating Cross Road, Saanichton, B.C., Canada V8M 2A5

(604) 652-7300 Fax: (604) 652-7360

January 16, 1997

Mr. Derek Peach
5309 Westhome Road
R.R. #5, Victoria, B.C.
V8X 4M6

Dear Mr. Peach:

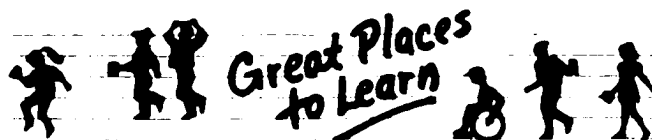
I am pleased to inform you that at the regular meeting of the Board of School Trustees on January 13, 1997, your request for an extension to your research project entitled "**Advantaging Student Writers**" was approved. As before, the following conditions apply:

- a) that the participation be on a voluntary basis as previously requested;
- b) that the identity of all participants be kept confidential;
- c) that part of the project involving students be carried out with a minimum loss of instructional time; *and*
- d) that the results of the research project be shared with School District 63.

Please do not hesitate to contact me at 652-7330 with any further enquiries. Good luck with your project.

Sincerely,

Judy Turner
Executive Secretary
Office of the Superintendent



2. Interview Questions for Primary Student group

I am asking you to take part in a short interview about your essay writing. The transcripts of these interviews will not identify you by name, and they will be useful, I believe, in improving my teaching and the the way in which other teachers instruct composition classes. Please take a few moments to read over the questions below and to reflect on the responses you would give. Feel free to write on this paper to make any notes which might assist you in speaking about your writing. Thank you for your contribution to this study.

How do you rate yourself as a writer?

Where/when did you learn to be a good writer?

or

Why do you believe you are a weak writer?

Do you have any writers whom you would like to write as well as?

How do you go about planning an essay?

Show me some part of your essay where you put that into practice.

Did the reference sets of student writing make a difference?

Do you have any strategy in mind for writing the provincial exam essay?

3. **Survey of General Student Group**

Survey Form for Grade 12 English Students

Please do not put your name on this survey sheet.

1. (A) Have you used/studied the Ministry of Education writing reference sets or rating scales in your studies this term? Yes No

(B) If "yes" did the reference sets of student writing help you in your writing?

Yes

No

2. Do you have any strategy in mind for writing the provincial exam essay? (expand)

Yes

No

3. Please rank yourself as: top third of writers here ----
 middle third of writers ----
 lower third of writers ----

4. Teacher Survey June, 2000

English Teachers

This survey is self-explanatory. There are no "right" answers, and if you don't want to fill it in, don't. I'm collecting a final few pieces of data for a doctoral dissertation and I'd like to know how many of us/you make use of the writing reference sets and with how many students. If you could fill it in right now and put in the mail basket, I would appreciate it. If you are in a school with more than one teacher of grade 12 English classes, please ask for their responses before returning the form.

If any of you want to know the survey results, put an address on the form somewhere and I'll let you know.

Thanks for your time.

Derek Peach

Teacher Use of Writing Reference Sets Survey

Tchr. No.	Marked Provincials before?	Number of classes Total students	Use of Reference Sets in Guide to Holistic Marking		
			Yes (I distribute & analyze them with the class)	Sometimes	No
1					
2					
3					
4					

5. **Marker Survey February 1996****Marker Survey**

Teachers: I am collecting data for a research project. Your assistance in completing this form would be greatly appreciated. The Ministry of Education has approved this survey, and it is voluntary.

These questions deal only with the essay part of the exam.

1. What feature influences you most when you give top marks for essays either in class or on examination papers?

2. Do you share the Ministry booklets on student assessment -- either "Using Rating Scales to Evaluate Student Writing" or "English 12 Holistic Scoring Procedure" -- with students; i.e., **do you photocopy samples and go over them?**

Yes

No

3. What are the features you **most often see** in an essay that merits a 5 or a 6? Check one from each column.

- narrative form
- expository form
- descriptive form
- personal narrative

- humour
- impeccable mechanics
- unique perspective
- control of development

4. Which modes of instruction do you use most frequently? These are the names used in the literature these days. **Please number them 1 -3.**

___ A. **PRESENTATIONAL:** I give a lesson on some feature of writing or help students analyze features of sample essays and then they write one on their own.

___ B. **PROCESS:** Students go through the writers' workshop process of brainstorming, outlining, writing, editing, revising. I mark the essay after it has been revised a few times.

___ C. **INQUIRY/ENVIRONMENTAL:** An issue arises from readings or news or personal lives which is discussed in groups, responded to in writing. The group gives feedback and the work is polished and delivered, i.e. something is actually done with it such as mailing or publishing.

5. Are you: a first-time marker or experienced marker

6. Marker Survey February 1999
Use of Writing Reference Sets Survey

No. them)	Marked Provincials before?	Use of Reference Sets		
		Yes (distribute & analyze)	Sometimes	No (never use
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
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11				
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Appendix B

1. From A guide to holistic marking in English composition, 16 to 18 year olds (1993) Victoria, B.C.: Queen's Printer.

Papers at a given grade point show some or all of the following qualities:

Papers at the top two-scale points are well-developed and reflect a sense of engagement with the topic. Writing is focused and purposeful, and displays some originality. There is a sense of voice. The writers demonstrate control of sentence structure and vocabulary and, while there may be some minor mechanical errors, these do not interfere with the reader's comprehension or enjoyment.

6: A strong engaging paper is developed with originality, energy, and flair. Strong personal voice. Purposeful and focused; flows smoothly from an effective opening through a series of events or ideas to a strong conclusion. Detail and examples are effectively used to establish mood, develop character, or elaborate an argument. Style is vivid and precise. The writer takes risks and the results are effective. An easy command of sentence structure may include appropriate and precise subordination, and effective use of parallel structures and fragments. Vocabulary is appropriate, precise, and often sophisticated. Few mechanical errors.

5: The paper is competent and well-developed, but there is less apparent sense of personal voice, energy, and originality than in level 6 papers. Purposeful and focused, and moves logically from an effective opening through a series of events or ideas to a conclusion. Detail and examples are effectively used to establish mood, develop character, or elaborate an argument. The writer takes some risks but the results may be uneven. Sentences are controlled and varied; subordination is generally appropriate and precise. Vocabulary is appropriate and accurate. Few mechanical errors.

Papers at the middle two-scale points are generally competently written, with concern for the conventions of standard English, but there are few instances of originality or individuality and little evidence of sophistication in thought or language. Focus is usually clear, but development is often naive (immature) or incomplete. Writers demonstrate some control of basic

sentence structures and vocabulary, but mechanical errors may detract from effectiveness.

4: Focused and clearly organized, but there are few instances of originality and the content does not reflect depth or insight (naive). Some sense of personal engagement. Logically sequenced, and includes an introduction and conclusion; however, ideas are not well-developed or elaborated. Some risk-taking may be apparent, but the result is often ineffective. For example, hyperbole may be used excessively, or an inappropriate narrative introduced as support for an idea. Paragraphing, sentence structure and vocabulary tend to be simple and correct, but there may be some mechanical errors.

3: Clearly attempts to deal with the topic, but development is weak and often immature. Little originality or individuality or risk-taking. An introduction and conclusion are included, but the sequence and relationship of ideas and events may be vague or illogical. For example, writers may offer examples or details which do not complement the focus or fail to integrate these into their stories or arguments. Sentences lack variety and may contain problems with pronouns, verb tense, and punctuation. Vocabulary is limited, repetitive, and often colloquial. Errors in mechanics may hinder comprehension.

Papers at the bottom two-scale points have a weak sense of purpose, structure and development, and frequent problems with the conventions of standard English. Content is thin and often difficult to follow, and there is no sense of voice. Sentences tend to be simple and repetitive, and contain frequent errors in usage. Vocabulary is limited. These papers are often difficult to read and understand.

2: Some attempts to focus on the topic or tell a story is indicated but there is little or no development of ideas. May include an introduction and a conclusion, but these are typically weak. Some attempt at logical sequencing and paragraph development. Content is thin and may consist of one very specific example or event. Vocabulary is limited and often inappropriately colloquial. Sentences may be repetitive. Frequent errors in usage and

sentence structure impede the flow of thought, but the writing is comprehensible.

1: Little or no sense of purpose, focus or structure. Development (if any) is illogical and confusing. Sequence is obscure or illogical and there are few transitions or links between ideas. No apparent control or deliberation in sentence structure or word choice. Vocabulary is extremely basic and often misused. Errors often include shifts in verb tense and point-of-view and problems with idiom. In some cases, mechanical errors are so severe and frequent that meaning is lost.

2. **Exemplars from pilot study of BC ministry of education (1989)**

Essay Prompt: **Labels**

Essay #1 at scoring guide 3

Labels People Put on Themselves

People put labels on themselves because they feel that they are not good at something that other people are good at. This can be something like not being very creative or not being able to remember something that somebody else can or just the plain idea that they are stupid.

People who place these labels on themselves really believe what they are saying is true even though you can tell these people that it's not true, they will not listen to you. In order for a person to believe what they tell you they must be willing and able to see the change. I had a friend who for the longest time felt that she could not do math and it just wasn't for her, she used to despise going to math class. But she decided to try an accounting class and see how she liked it and by golly she just loved her accounting class so much that now she wants to go to BCIT and get her degree so that she can become an accountant. She was proof that even though you may feel that you are terrible at something, if you are willing and able to try at that again you may just find out that, that is really what you wanted to do all along.

People put labels on themselves because they are not up to the standards that the people around them have. Just because a friend is really creative doesn't mean that you're not it just means that you're different from your friend.

I'm Stupid

When people describe themselves with the self-fulfilling label of "I'm stupid", it is usually caused by people constantly telling them exactly that. After a person has been continuously called "stupid" for long or short periods of time, they usually come to the conclusion that, "if everyone says and thinks I'm stupid, then I must be stupid." This is not always true and the constant pressure of other people voicing their opinions can really set a person in the wrong decision about who they are and what they're going to do with their life.

Sometimes the over reaction of parents can cause harmful damage to their son or daughter, by calling them stupid because of events that usually do not deserve such harsh criticism. When a child comes home from school with a low test result a parent or both parents may over react and begin the cycle which may ruin their child's life. Comments, for example like, "Hey stupid, why don't you pay attention in class." or, "That was pretty stupid of you, why don't you study more, Stupid." Terms like the ones mentioned can really damage a young person's opinion of him or herself. Soon, from the harsh, unnecessary criticism of their parents, the child may begin to think of him or herself as exactly that, stupid.

The amount of times a teacher can get up set with a student is astounding and the harsh verbal harassment can become very damaging to the student. There are times when a teacher may be teaching in a manner that can confuse young minds and lead them to think about or do other things instead of listening to the teacher. The outcome of this can be very unrewarding for the student. However teachers do, from time to time, "blow their tops" so to speak and the outcome of this can be crushing to a young child's spirits to achieve. Comments ranging from, "Hey Stupid, Why don't you listen," or "Don't ask such stupid questions." really damage a young child's self opinion of him or herself.

The verbal abuse that can come from society is appalling. This can damage a person young or old. The comments from police and other city employees can be as following "Hey stupid, don't you try lying because I'll figure out your plan." or "You stupid goof, get the hell outa here." Comments like these damage people of all ages all the time.

There are many causes to the self-fulfilling label of stupid. However the causes mentioned here-in can be most damaging. When you are called stupid by your parents, a teacher, or a city official the damaging effect on yourself can be astronomical. The overall result can usually lead a person to believe the opinions of other people and their opinion of themselves can ruin their life because they begin to believe maybe "I'm stupid". Think for yourself, the opinion that counts most about yourself is your own opinion of yourself. Therefore think positive and you'll be positive.

Bring Negative - Not!

People are known to be very negative. Being negative is a natural part of everyday life. People constantly hear say or are told negative thoughts. This is shown through childhood experiences, competitive experiences and how being negative is passed down to other generations.

Everyone has had their good and bad childhood memories. Children often do things they shouldn't, not necessarily "bad" things but potentially dangerous. Parents do scold their kids. Sometimes the right way sometimes not. One often sees a mother and child at a supermarket buying groceries. The toddler uninterested in mother's job of completing her shopping likes to pull things down from shelves. The mother scolds the child and he cries. This could've been avoided if the mother had moved the cart away from the shelves. Children need love and discipline, not public scolding.

People have the natural desire to compete and win. Sometimes that desire is a bit low, like self-esteem. Kids, and people see others do well, and all of a sudden a negative thought appears; "Forget it, I can't do it. He's better than I'll ever be."

This put down has been built up by parents, friends, ect and after hearing a negative statement like the one above many times, one begins to believe it. It's very hard to bring self-esteem up after its hit rock bottom.

Parents may not think that when they say a negative statement to their child, that it effects them. But it does. And can be passed down too. Their child in turn gets in the habit of saying negative things and their children are effected.

In the supermarket example the mother in a way, is showing her son that yes, it's not good to pull down things from shelves. Yet the toddler is young and won't understand fully perhaps until another year.

Negative parents have "negative clones" of themselves. These negative people never really learn to appreciate and be grateful for what they have in life.

Although being negative is a natural thing in people, they should try not to pass it down to children.

Kids pick up negative thoughts very early in life. If love and discipline were used instead of negative comments, the children perhaps would learn to be more positive.

Essay #2 at scoring guide 4

[No Title]

Just decades ago, labels, such as stupid were commonly used to describe children who possessed learning disabilities. However, these names are proven to have detrimental effects on the childrens' lives. One who had been called stupid for most of his childhood was almost certainly bound on a dead end street in terms of self respect and ambition and occasionally has spent years in therapy to correct or compensate for his broken ego.

Once a child has been called degrading names continually by family members and peers, that child is conditioned to think that way in that manner, resulting in low self-esteem and lack of respect for both himself and the people around him. His low self-esteem makes his disability much more difficult to over come; and because his ambition and confidence in himself are is so low, he is ambitious enough to want to change his situation. He has problems relating to others and tries to withdraw from society.

Loss of ambition results in low grades at school and jobs that involve no risks because the adolescent is afraid to try and reach a goal, for fear of falling. Most people who possess slight disabilities settle for much less than they deserve, because their self-esteem was torn from them when they were young. As an adult, they experience feelings of regret and as a direct result of those feelings they go to therapy. Some people have spent thousands of dollars to discover feelings and talents they had inside of themselves since childhood but have been afraid to reach inside and experiment with them. Yet many people still believe they are stupid and will always be stupid; and they never find that confidence they are born to achieve.

Labels such as stupid, are degrading and sometimes create unsurmountable problems for people who are connected with these terms. Their lack of self respect and ambition holds them back from life, and often, they need rehabilitation to over come these feelings. Labels should be eliminated from society, so people can feel equal. After all, its written in the charter, right?

State of Mind

When you put a label on yourself you may be putting yourself in a mind frame that can have lasting consequences. If you say to yourself over and over again that you cannot do something, then you will not be able to do it. This label may hinder you further on in life when you want a career but don't believe in yourself enough to do it. The label you have chosen for yourself may not even be true. You might just need to try a little harder and apply yourself to the task to reach your goals.

If you tell yourself that you are not creative or that you are stupid, then you will not be creative or smart because you don't believe in yourself enough to try. You may even be creative, but if you don't try then you will never know. The world may have lost a great artist or a great thinker.

Later on in life your progress may be slowed by your lack of faith in yourself. You might not try to get the job you want because you fear you are inadequate to the task. If you do not say to yourself that you can do it or that you will at least try then you will go nowhere other than where you are.

If you do not try to break out of the mold set for you then you cannot achieve your goals or even make the attempt. You must stretch yourself to the limit, and then go beyond those limits if you are to be successful in life. If you set your limits now then you will grow no further. You become a statue, something that never changes and never grows into something better. If you play the same old game in life, even if you won before, the game will change and you will lose now, and for the rest of your life.

Essay #2 at scoring guide 5

[No Title]

He sits on the couch for another hour, a stack of peanut butter sandwiches on the chair beside him, crumbs all around. In his mind he knows that Mom will be mad, she'll yell about the crumbs, she'll yell about him watching TV again instead of doing his homework. She'll yell the same things as she has for as long as he can remember, but her mind will be shut off, her mouth will be moving but her ears won't hear what she's saying & neither will he. It doesn't matter what anyone says anymore. He hears her talk to her friends, "he's such a bright boy & so good with his hands, maybe this year now that he's in college he'll apply himself." She says these things but she doesn't expect him to do it because she knows as he does that he can't, that he's stupid, & a slob so why bother trying, right? Besides 'the Simpsons' is on now & he can't possibly miss that.

I think perhaps my brother's "complex", if you can call it that, started the year my other brother and I were born. He had been the only one to be loved & adored by my parents for 15 months but then we came along & the two of us got all the attention. We were the twins who were so cute & so well behaved & so quick to learn. Although he was older he was told by our parents & his teachers that he just couldn't measure up. He was always too noisy & too messy & why couldn't he be helpful like the twins were? We earned straight As in school while he always had problems just passing. Report card day would come & we'd get the praise but he would be told resignedly by my parents that if he'd work just a little bit harder he'd get marks like ours. But they never put their hearts into it, they didn't expect him to get good grades they just went through the spiel automatically.

Nothing was ever really expected of my older brother, we all just believed that he wasn't smart or motivated & so now he believes it too. He's going to college but because he never got good marks in high school he doesn't even bother trying to study. Sure, there have been things he's been good at, drawing cartoons, waterskiing, caring for sick animals but we never took him seriously when he'd announce his plan to make millions as the next Jim Davis, or when he decided to become a vet. I think it was Mom who talked out of that last one. "You would have to go to school for 7 more years you know & we're not paying for that if you don't even get good grades now," she said to him so he dropped it.

I don't know what he's going to do now if he doesn't pass this year in college it will just confirm what everyone has told him all along & what he's said to himself, that he is just naturally irreversibly stupid. Maybe some day he'll find something that he can really do well & he'll get up enough courage to not let anyone talk him out of doing it but until then it's easier for him to just live up to everyone's expectations & continue to watch TV & act 'stupid.'

Humility

Our society is based on the judgement that boasting is bad. Those who are humble are far more respected. Their work is often more admired as nothing is expected from a humble person. Because of this conception, some people are obsessed with humility. This causes some to go to the extreme of putting ourselves down for the sake of humility. We have all done it, but no one seems to consider the consequences of such statements. Self-stated negative labels can have lasting consequences. A person may begin to believe in these labels. Others will form warped impressions of the person from these negative statements. A person may lose out on many opportunities in their life because they believe in these limitations.

Believing in negative labels such as I can't write, I'm not creative and so forth, can cause low self-esteem making a person feel that he is somewhat inferior to all others. He may lose confidence in his ability to do other things he may be good at. He may never discover who he xxx since he has xxx already set the guidelines of who he isn't. If he spends his life dwelling on who he isn't, will he ever take the time to face what he is?

Others that he encounters will make their first impressions not on who he is, but on who he says he is. If later he shows himself to be good at what he says he cannot do he is seen as a hypocrite, a liar. Another negative label begins and many potential friends are immediately turned off. A negative label can only lead to negative feelings and more negative labels.

Above all else, however, is what a person may lose through these negative labels –opportunities will be lost to him because of these negative labels. Whether it is because he thinks he can't do it, or because someone else thinks he can't do it, he will lose out on many opportunities.

Great harm can be done by labelling yourself negatively. You may never know who you really are. More negative labels and negative feelings will result. You will lose out on many great opportunities. To solve this problem, society will have to change. Humility can be good, but if we take it to extremes it is simply lying. We are sending mixed messages to our children when we tell them not to lie and then we tell them to be humble.

Self-fulfilling Labels

People of all ages sometimes find they have trouble accomplishing various things because in the back of their minds, they are telling themselves they cannot do it. Some people go about their particular problem task half-heartedly, and others try to avoid it at all costs. Usually, these people are capable enough, but are subdued by a psychological barrier of their own making. Sometimes this psychological barrier is that the person is afraid of embarrassment. Other times it might be a lack of self confidence and motivation. Some people even feel that if they set themselves low standards, they will not have to exert themselves to achieve that standard. If someone keeps telling themselves they cannot do something, it usually comes true.

A friend of mine has a problem with Math. When he does poorly on a test, he uses the excuse that he is "not good at Math," or he is "not a math person." Unfortunately, every time this happens, his self confidence and motivation drops and his attitude becomes a "why should I try? I will only do poorly again" attitude. His parents have an effect on his motivation as well. He feels that if he starts doing well in Math, his parents will expect him to do well all the time. If he could only overcome his psychological barrier and tell himself that he can and should be good at Math, and that he should do it for his own benefit, not for anyone else, he could overcome his problem.

One of my sisters has a problem similar to my friend with the Math problem. She has trouble paying attention inschool, and as a result, her grades suffer. The reason why she has trouble paying attention in class is because she, like my Math friend, lacks self confidence and motivation. She always says that she is stupid, and she uses that as an excuse for her poor marks. Her psychological barrier is that she never puts enough effort into her work, so she does not realize that effort has an effect on the final result. If she would just, for once, try her hardest at something, she could get a better mark, thus boosting her self confidence and motivation. Unfortunately, this will never happen unless she takes the initiative on her own.

One example of a self-fulfilling label in my own experience is with the high jump. When I was in the seventh grade, I could do the high jump with fair competence. I tried out for the track and field team, but I hurt my foot on the day of the try-outs and did not make the team because I could not jump high enough. Since that point, I have been telling myself that I can not do high jump. Now, I avoid doing the high jump and will probably never know if I can. My psychological barrier was, and still is, a fear of failure; I did not make the track and field team in the seventh grade, therefore I am not good at high jump, and I refuse to try again. If I practised enough now, I could probably overcome my weakness, but I lack the motivation to try.

All people at some point in their life have to overcome a personal weakness. My friend has to overcome his weakness at Math, My sister has to overcome her

school weakness, and I have to overcome my high jump weakness. These weaknesses are always related to lack of self-confidence and motivation as a direct result of telling ourselves that we are unable to do something. Perhaps we could overcome our personal psychological barriers if, instead of telling ourselves that we cannot do something, we tell ourselves that we can and are able to do anything.

Labelled Limitations

"I'm just not artistic -- I can't draw!" This statement is a self-label, and it's something we're all guilty of saying, some more than others. Labelling ourselves in such a manner, however, can have long-lasting consequences. It is a type of self-criticism in which we point out our limitations and label them. Recognizing our short-comings and faults has never hurt us, but laying a blanket statement in our minds based on one failure and dwelling on that thought can do far-reaching harm.

Rebecca has always struggled with anything to do with writing - creative or otherwise. Essays are a huge source of stress and frustration for her because writing simply does not come easy for her. Talking to her best friend about her troubles always brings up this one statement over and over again, "I'm not a writer, Jess, and I never will be. I'll just stay away from anything to do with major writing assignments!" Rebecca has just labelled herself, and by doing so her view of who she is has been limited. She is not a writer ... that limits her perspective of herself. When people label themselves like Rebecca did, they cut out portions of who they may become simply by saying that they can't do something. These limitations give them a rather narrow view of themselves that will not be easy to overcome ... or work around.

These labels of our own limitations will always be in the back of our minds. People who constantly criticize themselves and point out what they are unable to do, will, if they do it constantly, find it hard to forget. Like a snake coiled waiting in a corner, when they intrude upon that region of themselves they'll be bitten by the memory that here is something they can't do! Scott despairs that he will ever be able to play football for he can't remember all the rules and mixes up the signals. He decides it's his memory, it's nothing he can fix, and he gives up on football altogether. Years later, Scott is a successful accountant. He takes his son to a football game one day and as he sits waiting in the bleachers, he is reminded of his own failure in the game. Later, when his son asks Scott to teach him the basics of football, Scott declines, knowing full well that he CAN'T PLAY FOOTBALL. Dramatic? Maybe. But think about how a limitation of our own design may hinder us later on.

This pre-occupation with labelling ourselves and highlighting our disabilities is a self-centered thing to do. Not only is it harmful to us as a whole person, but it can affect others as well. For we will be constantly be concerned with ourselves -- who we are or aren't, instead of perhaps considering others. These labels, such as "I can't sing" , limit our view of ourselves and will remain in the back of our minds for a very long time. Those are long-lasting consequences, when you think about it, and all for the sake of pointing out the areas in which we've limited ourselves. Is it worth it?

[untitled]

If negative self-fulfilling labels had lasting impression on our psyche, we would be surrounded by failures and hopeless shells of unrealized potential. Many times I have walked down our school hall listening to a chorus of negativity ringing amongst my peers. The opinions of others, the need for our friends' affirmations, and the fear of appearing 'too big for one's britches,' compact our self-esteem into a minute possession that we hide from others.

The opinions of others are not often regarded as truthful when they are derogatory or unjust. As small children we grew used to the NERD labels that we spat as insults. The results, I have found, of that labelling are not negative though. Instead we become aware that we all have fortes but that they are also accompanied by faults. Because peers are often blunt, we realize our own faults and then strive to overcome them. These negative labels compel us to work harder for the sake of revenge or to prove the scoffing peers that they were wrong.

Albert Einstein was dismissed by his friends and teachers as being retarded and extremely stupid. As a result he was kicked out of school which must have caused second-thoughts, on his part, about his intelligence. Instead of accepting this label, he decided to prove the world wrong, and in doing so, built up the reputation of being one of the most brilliant scientists in history.

As a wise Jedi master, Yoda, once stated, "Not 'maybe,' but I can." People can do anything, it's just the level of accomplishment that varies. As we grow older we learn to accept our deficiencies and strive to excel in our stronger skills. Every school has the skinny, pimple-faced genius that has the low-self-esteem -- compliments of the mockery of the student body. These people often turn out to be brilliant surgeons or corporate leaders. Because the genius figured out he would never become an NBA star or model for Calvin Klein, he aspired to hone his mental abilities instead.

It is often someones's disagreement to your negative comments that you are looking for when you put yourself down. You may be ready to grace the cover of Vogue but before you convince yourself of your beauty, you need another's affirmation of the fact. To fish for these compliments we can use the sharp, barbed hook of negative labels.

Many are scared to announce their faults to the world so as not to appear "full of themselves." Society has registered "thou shalt not brag" as the 11th commandment. We are intimidated by those who can proudly display their talents. They are jealously labelled "Braggarts" and "Show-offs." Unfortunately it is these jealous people that will become fragile shells of the people they have the potential to become. It is those who are strong-willed and determined who use their negative comments as building blocks to a better self-image.

If you have ever walked into a kindergarten class and asked, "Who can sing?" every child we excitedly proclaim this talent. Walking into a highschool and inquiring of singing talent brings silence. At this age we are unsure and have yet to use our negativity for positive life building blocks. If you visit an old folks home or a bar of the middle-aged, and request your favorite Goldey Oldey you will probably be serenaded full-heartedly as they have learned to disregard labels.

Through our life we will be bombarded by negative images from our peers and ourselves. If we can learn to look at these comments constructively we can try to overcome a deficiency or channel our efforts into a skill with more promise. If everyone could learn from the negative comments, we would have a society proud to brag and ready to accomplish anything they put their minds too.

Appendix C: Data Collected During the Study

1. Interviews with Primary Focus Group of Students

Student #1 (weak)

Int: When you looked through this, did you have a look at the questions?

Std: Yes.

Int: OK. So, how would you rate yourself as a writer, generally?

St: Like are we, numbers 1 to 5?

Int: Yes.

St: Um, four.

Int: OK. And, when would you say you became good?

St: I don't think I ever became good. Like I mean I remember doing it all in grade...like the proofreading and...like that stuff and then I never really went up from there. Trying to put my ideas down on paper has really been difficult.

Int: It's been hard for you all along?

St: Yes. I've got so many ideas in my head it's really hard to put them all down and what I want to say, like I can feel sophisticated in my head, but I just, I can't write sophisticated.

Int: What is "sophisticated" for you?

St: Well, it's like, I guess the idea of trying to write the words that are sophisticated, like, I don't know. I read a lot of books so I can understand to read it. I just can't write it myself.

Int: Is there any author that you sort of think that that's the model of the writing?

St: Um, no, I mean, I'm interested in more like real stories like autobiographies and stuff like that so, I don't know. I'm reading a Danielle Steele right now.

Int: OK. Now we used the reference sets. Do you remember these?

St: Yes.

Int: Good. Did they work? Were they useful at all?

St: No. They just kind of proved the theory that I already knew, that you had to be more sophisticated at writing to do better on it, and that's where I get frustrated in doing it.

Int: I don't know if we're coming down to, like, are good writers born, or can they become good writers?

St: Um, I think they can become good writers. It's just a long process that they have to go through.

Int: What do you need? Is there anything missing in your schooling that if we had taught you this or done this you might have had a chance at being an excellent writer?

St: Um... It has a lot to do with, like, how you think and what you feel and the different ideas. Like the essays that we've done so far, like on risk and things for your own ideas. You just have to learn how to sort your ideas out and put them out in the right way. I don't know if that makes sense.

Int: OK. So, what I'm trying to get at is, is there anything in our schooling system or anything that I should know as a teacher that this is what you want to do at the grade nine level, or you ought to do this here or just try this. Is there anything...?

St: Yeah. I think a lot of emphasis has to be taught on how to write an essay. I've never really done that. People have just always thrown essays at me and said, "Write this" and I, we've never really had, like, interaction with this, like with the teacher, to tell you, like, what you're doing wrong and how you can improve and...

Int: You mean like going through your essay...

St: Yeah. I think that if they'd started that in grade nine and gone up, I mean, that would have helped me a lot I know.

Int: Whereabouts in here (in this essay) did you...

St: Well, I mean, when I wrote this I didn't...I wrote it like five times 'cause each time I read it, I'd read it over again and then add something new or think of something different. Like I start off with like, that, and then I write down all my ideas in kind of a paragraph form and then I just kind of, as I go through it I usually think of different things and add them up. Even when I do the finished copy I add different things in.

- Int: So when you rewrite, do you sort of rewrite the whole thing or do you just change a few words, or is it, what do you call it, is it a major rewriting?
- St: Well, um, the final write or the rewriting?
- Int: The final.
- St: Um, no, just a few things I usually rewrite. Not everything.
- Int: OK.
- St: Usually it's like the introduction and the conclusion that are the most changed just 'cause, just to make it feel right.
- Int: I wanted to get at this too. Do you have any sort of plan for tackling the provincial exam when you sit down there and you're faced with an essay topic?
- St: Well, hopefully I'll have enough time to do it. So I'll have to either rush the first part of it or, like, make sure I have enough time to do it, and then...
- Int: Now I'm trying to get at sort of a, given you have to write an essay, is there any method that you anticipate using or that you've used in the past if you have a test, -- a test essay -- to write?
- St: No, I just kind of go at it...
- Int: So you just start writing?
- St: Try and do it as fast as I can. Yeah.
- Int: Ok. I just wondered. On this one, of course, you had lots of time to do this sort of stuff.
- St: Yeah.
- Int: So you're saying on the, on an exam, you just kind of pick up your pen and get going?
- St: Well I'll probably write a rough draft first. That's how I always work. Or else my whole paper would just be a complete mess if I did it like that.
- Int: So that's usually what you get, a rough draft of some point form or...
- St: Yeah, well that's the way I've always been taught, never write something full at first, you always ...

Int: Now. I forget, what mark did I give you on this?

St: I think a four.

Int: OK. And we're still waiting for our other marker to come back. Did you intend to rewrite this or are you going to take that or not?

St: Um, I don't know. I thought it was, like I thought it was pretty good myself so...

Int: Yeah.

St: I don't know if I can do better. That's fine.

Int: Well, if you're sitting on the sundeck on your luxury liner and you think of a change, then pull it out.

St: Like, yeah. I don't know, a lot of the topics like some, like this one, kind of fuels me, but the relationships one, I didn't really know what to write so I didn't choose the topic. If it hits you, it hits you.

Int: Yeah, that is a concern of people setting the exam. They always wonder whether they choose the right one. Ok. Thank you. This was my first time too, so I appreciate it.

Interview—Student #2 (weak)

Interviewer: OK. Have a seat Carl. OK, this is questions on your second essay. Let's go over it. How do you rate yourself as a writer?

Student: Average, I guess. 'Cause, I don't think I'm a bad writer, but not a good writer.

Int: And what are your weaknesses and your strengths? What...

St: Um. I know I'm not good at spelling and, and, wording.

Int: OK. Have you marked some of the other work in here, you know when we did the mark around?

St: Yeah.

Int: Did you mark any essays that you thought were particularly good?

St: Um, yeah.

Int: What was it about them that attracted you, that you said that's a good essay?

St: It was, flowing, easy flowing, easy to read. It just kept on going along smoothly.

Int: Yeah.

St: And I didn't notice any spelling mistakes that ...

Int: Now, are you able to do that, to make something flow along easily when you write?

St: Um, after I rewrite it.

Int: OK. Well that's really the next question is how do you go about working at an essay?

St: I just start writing 'cause I don't have time to do anything else. I can't work fast so...

Int: So you get this and you see the topic is "Risks" you...well what do you do? Pick up your pen and...

St: Um, with this one it wasn't that sort of situation, so I first made some key points. But normally on a test I just start writing.

Int: Yeah, so, on the front page here I see you did a web...

St: Yeah.

Int: And you put some points. OK. And then did you decide which of these, like you have three areas down here. Did you...? How did you make that decision where to start?

St: I just didn't really know so I just picked one.

Int: At random and just...

St: Yeah.

Int: Started writing. OK. Um, do you remember the reference sets that we looked at? Where I gave you a set of essays that the Ministry had said are threes and sixes and so on?

St: Yes.

Int: Um, did that have any effect on your writing? Did it, did you get any value out of it is what I'm asking.

St: Um, a little

Int: Can you tell me anything about that value or what it was?

St: It just helped me look for what they're marking for.

Int: What do you see that they are marking for. What do you think you have to do to get a good mark?

St: Well I know length is one. Um, and it has to uh, sound good. They're looking for something challenging, that you're challenged, your writing.

Int: OK. Now here's the question. Do you think you're going to be able to do that, come the test?

St: No.

Int: What kind of mark do you expect to get?

St: Two, three.

Int: So you're looking to pass.

St: Yeah.

Int: If you just get a pass you're...

St: I'm happy.

Int: And, I'm coming back. I know I've sort of asked this before, but what kind of strategies are you going to use when you come to the essay section?

St: I know I'll look at it before I do any of the test, and then think about it, while I do the other part, and jot down points as I go along, if I think of any.

Int: Yeah.

St: (?)

Int: OK. Um, this last question, "Do you have any strategies in mind?", is really the important one I think for you to look at. We will do some more work on that as well. Alright, thanks for talking to me.

Interview—Student #3

Interviewer: Alright. Ed. So, on this paper, I notice you didn't do any webbing or did you just, how did you start writing? How did you begin the essay?

Student: Um, I just thought in my head before I started writing and I just thought about the points that I was going to make. I tried to think of as many points as I could and then, uh, I just started writing.

Int: Would you say that you're a good writer or a weak writer?

St: Uh, I'd say that depends on the topic. I'm a good writer if it's a topic that interests me, that I know a lot about, I can write well.

Int: Ok.

St: If it's a topic that doesn't interest me and is, uh, fairly vague, it'll probably be a weak topic, a weak essay.

Int: When you start, when you begin writing, what you do is you just think, you reflect on the...

St: I usually just brainstorm in my head.

Int: Um...

St: Sometimes writing down things on paper.

Int: One of the questions that I've been asking people is this one. Do you have any plan or any strategy in mind when you write the provincial exam that's coming up in June? Is there any, say, OK, I know, this is what I have to do?

St: Yeah. Well I know that I have to, I know the proper essay format like you have to have the introduction and then the three paragraphs of body and then the conclusion that sums, basically sums up most of the essay and makes the point at the end.

Int: OK. So you have a format in mind. Now, just have a look through your essay. What I'd like you to do is to show me some parts of it that you think, "Here's where I applied that strategy. Well right here is where I did..."

St: OK. Well, um, this is my opening line right here, my introduction here, the body (?) one, two, three, and then here's my conclusion.

Int: So you definitely indented to demonstrate the paragraphs. I also notice in the first, in the very first line you used the word define, so you started off with

defining the topic for us. OK. Uh, do you remember the reference sets we used, where you looked at the ones from the Ministry that were sixes and fives?

St: Yeah.

Int: I've just got to ask the question, and give me your honest answer. Was there any value in that for you. Did it work at all, or... ?

St: Um, not really because I knew before what a one or a six essay was and uh, --I don't know,-- it's sort of I know what the essay looks like when it is a six.

Int: What are the qualities of that?

St: It's a perfect essay. It's got all the punctuation's right, the grammar's right. It gives a sense of going somewhere, and all the points are, I don't know how to say it, but...

Int: Yeah. Perhaps a better way to, you know in class we took one another's essays and I took them from this group and, you know, passed them around and you marked somebody's. Did you mark any fives or sixes or a paper that you thought were a five or a six?

St: No, most of the papers that I marked were threes or fours.

Int: So, this is a hard question now because we're talking about something that you didn't see. What was it you were looking for, that would've attracted your eye and you would've said, "That's a six" ?

St: Um, maybe just something that stood out in the essay like a uh, like a good point and uh, usually big words, uh, meaningful words, I guess. Not really just a sort of a chit-chat sort of an essay. Just, somebody looks like they put a lot of effort into it.

Int: What makes a, --what was your word, -- a strong point or a good point?

St: Um, uh, it's direct, I guess. I can't really....

Int: You know one when you see it.

St: Basically.

Int: OK. Uh, I'm just collecting information on this because I want to know first if what I'm doing is working, and if what we're doing is working, and uh, what else I have to emphasize when it comes to writing the provincial exam. So thanks for giving me some time.

Interview—Student #4 (middle)

Interviewer: Now. First question. How do rate yourself as a writer?

Student: As a writer?

Int: As an essay writer.

St: What we did, um, not very well.

Int: And, I gave a list of your marks through grade nine, ten, and that, didn't I? Did I tell you or show you what they were?

St: Uh huh.

Int: Because you come in at about average to low.

St: Yeah.

Int: Sixty percent, I think.

St: Yeah. It's usually a C+.

Int: OK. So, the question that I have is, what is it that makes you an average to poor writer? What is it you need or you don't have or you...?

St: I usually don't come up with an idea right away for what I'm supposed to write. Like, for example, I had no idea what to write about "Risk". I need something with an experience of myself or...

Int: Hm. Other students have said that; that's interesting. So the topic is a problem? OK. How was the last one, uh, the topic was "Relationships."

St: That was a bit better. I got a better mark on it 'cause I could...

Int: So...

St: I've had relationships.

Int: So you're hoping that the topic that you get on this exam ... What would be good topic for you?

St: Well I don't know.

- Int: OK. Now, the next area that I want to focus on with this, is what you do when you get a topic. You've got "risks" and it's not a great topic. So how do you go about getting into this essay?
- St: Well this one I just started thinking about risks (?) Like I was wondering if I should start with the definition, or just go into it vaguely, or, and then think if there was something that happened to me that I could write about that I had to take a risk. And I tried writing a little thing but it didn't work, so I just start.
- Int: Picked up your pen and started writing, eh?
- St: Uh huh.
- Int: Have a look at the first bit. So you just started driving your pen across the paper...Did you go back and do any revisions when you'd finished this? Corrections or changes?
- St: Not on this one. On the other one I did.
- Int: And, whereabouts in here did you follow some of the rules or instructions that you'd learned for essay writing? Any places here that you could point to and say, "Well see here I followed... "
- St: Well I think the paragraph, like the normal paragraph structure. I made it the right length. I knew that was a big thing for an essay.
- Int: Yes.
- St: I'm not sure about much. Not that I can think of, anyway.
- Int: Alright, do you remember those reference sets we used in class?
- St: Uh huh. Like the one to six?
- Int: Yes. Were they of any value? Did they work at all for... ?
- St: Well I could see how a really well essay is written. (?)
- Int: Now you read them and you said, "That's a good essay," and you pretty well got them sorted out, didn't you?
- St: Yeah.
- Int: What was it about the good essays that you thought made it a good essay?
- St: It flowed together, made sense, it was easy to read.

Int: Unhuh. And then, this is the question. You read them, you said that's a good essay, flows together, it's easy to read. Are you able to do that yourself after you've read that? Are you able to do it and, what I'm saying is did you learn anything doing it?

St: Maybe. I'd like to think I could.

Int: OK. So, when you come to write the provincial exam, are there any strategies or plans for doing the essay?

St: Uh, not at the moment, really.

Int: OK.

St: (?) I'm going to try writing stuff down about it. That usually helps me get my thoughts together and just...

Int: OK, that's what I wanted to know.

St: And that's it?

Int: Great, thanks.

Interview—Student #5 (good)

Interviewer: Now, Max, you wrote this essay. And, what I wanted to know first was, how you rate yourself as a writer, how would you say you stack up?

Student: I'd say just above average.

Int: Now I think your marks over the, grade nine, show you're ...

St: Um, I don't think so because I just didn't really try in English during those times, but this year I wanted to do good.

Int: Yes, and your marks are coming up, you know, five out of six, six out of six. So the kinds of questions that I'm asking as a teacher then, are what is it about your writing that places you above average? What do you think you're able to do when you write that works?

St: Um, I feel that maybe I have a wide vocabulary and I've done a lot of reading over the summer and what not, reading more experienced authors. (?) especially, and I've been sort of mimicking his style of writing, using more complicated words.

Int: Ah, OK. Now in here, so in this essay that you've got here, how did you go about planning when you sat down to write it? Is there anything that you used...?

St: Well, I just wanted to do something, like the topic's about risk and I wanted to take an idea that no one, no one would think of that would be, no one would just think of, they'd just contradict it, contradict, um, the general ideas about. So I just thought about Michael Jackson and the, you know he's someone that he won't, that people, a lot of my peers anyway, make fun of and what not and I figured, you know, I'd idealize him.

Int: Ah. So you took an opposite stance to what you thought the average would be.

St: Yeah.

Int: Alright. Um, the one thing I did want to find out as well, so that's your philosophy for writing, was there any structural things that you did in here, any writing strategies or techniques?

St: I just pretty much, I used a web, that's what you taught before, talking about this essay, and uh, I pretty much came out with a whole bunch of ideas and uh, I originally had a first plan that I was going to take, but then I thought that I couldn't find enough ideas to support it so I switched to another plan, and then another one after that, and that's how I wrote the whole thing.

Int: So you went through about three planning stages on this.

St: Yeah.

Int: Do you know the reference sets that we used in class, where you had to sort them out from a six to a one and so on?

St: Yeah.

Int: Um, I'm just trying to find out, was that worth anything, was it a valuable exercise...

St: I just gave up on it.

Int: OK. So were you unable to determine what a six or a one was or was it...what was the?

St: Oh, where we read a whole bunch of different essays?

Int: Yes.

St: Oh, that one. Well what was the...?

Int: I gave a, I said here are some ones that the Ministry of Education has rated...

St: Right.

Int: A one, a four, a six, and so on, and I took the marks off so you didn't know what they were, and then I had you in a group sort them...

St: Right.

Int: What you thought was a six and so on.

St: Uh huh.

Int: Were you fairly accurate with your...

St: Uh. I found I was a little bit generous with the middle range marks and then I was a little bit conservative with the high end marks.

Int: Ah, OK. Now, so what was rated as a six, you thought was...

St: Would be a five, and what would be a three, I gave them a four.

Int: I see. Do you, was there any value in doing the exercise?

St: Oh it certainly does, like I think reading a good, good writing done by our peers that have scored high will give us a reference to what we should be doing when we write the provincial.

Int: Now, I could use professional authors, or I could use examples by your peers.

St: Uh huh.

Int: And you may have seen both samples. Which would you feel would give you more value as an improving writer?

St: In theory, I would say, um, peers. Like from my own peers because, you know, if they scored higher, obviously it works, on the provincial exam.

Int: And what is it that works? Like when you looked at a paper and said this is a high paper, even if you were conservative, what was it that attracted your attention to it?

St: Uh, vocabulary, sentence structure, um, just the way the ideas are organized so that it leads from one point to the other.

Int: OK. And I guess the last thing I need to know is when you sit down in June you're going to write the provincial exam. Is there any, do you have any plan, any strategy in mind that you're going to use?

St: Well, no. I'm pretty much going to, well unless you teach a better preplanning technique, um, I'll have to stick with this. Hopefully (?).

Int: Oh, so you're going to use, that's what I'm saying, you're actually going to use the same preplanning...

St: Yeah.

Int: That you've always used, which is this webbing.

St: Or maybe if you teach something then I'll probably use that.

Int: Hopefully. We'll see. I've got one more shot at things. OK. What you've said is valuable and it's important for me to know this as a teacher, so thank you for your time.

St: I have some concerns though.

Int: Yes.

St: Like, I timed myself on the writing of this essay. It took me about an hour and 55 minutes to write it. So, that may account for it.

Int: Now, was that counting the three previous stabs you made at it, or...?

St: Yeah.

Int: Oh, I see. And you rejected the first two and then finally went with this one.

St: Yeah.

Int: OK. So, my, one of my suggestions is that you go to the essay topic before you start the exam, so that ideas can percolate through your mind as you're writing...

St: Uh huh.

Int: And then when you get an idea, you can turn back to this page on the exam and write your notes, like this, and you let your subconscious mind, if you like, work on it while you're answering the questions on the literature. Now that's just one strategy. I know, it's usually with good writers that this problem arises, because they have a lot of thoughts and they want to do well so they start writing and then they get a better idea and then they get a better...

St: Yeah.

Int: So that may be a concern that you'll need two hours to write this. To offset it, I would say, if you read fairly well, you will do the literature section much more rapidly. Three hours is the outside time. Many people will only need an hour and a half, two hours to do it. So you'll buy yourself some composition time there. And the other thing, as I said, is to use that strategy of going to the essay topic first. Look at, and then go on back to the literature.

St: I see.

Int: And, I think you'll do fine. Mostly it will depend on the topic.

St: Yeah.

Int: You're going to look at that topic and if you use your approach of finding the radical, finding the unusual and going with that, you've got a good chance of coming through with a five or a six.

St: Great.

Int: OK. Thanks.

Interview—Student #6 (weak)

Interviewer: This is Colleen, and we're going to talk about, what was the topic on this one?

Student: Risks.

Int: OK. Now, the first thing that I want to know is, how do you rate yourself as a writer?

St: Um, I'd probably rate myself as good to weak. I don't have a very good strong, like, opinion or voice in my writing, but I know what I want to write but I don't know how to express it very good.

Int: So it's in the expression that you have problems.

St: Yes.

Int: Just sentence formation, or finding the right words?

St: Yeah, finding the right words and making it sound like it kind of flows with the next sentence.

Int: Ah, OK. Now, how do you, when you sit down to write then, I give you a topic, you know, or a teacher says here, write about this. How do you start out? What do you do?

St: Well I do like a web. I write down the main, like the word that we have to write about and then I branch it off into little sections, like little topics about it and then from there I try and, like each one of those is going to be a paragraph and then I try and get a couple more fragments so I can see what will be within my paragraph.

Int: Where did you learn to do that?

St: Um, from Mr. H-- last year.

Int: Oh, OK. So that was in grade 11.

St: Yes.

Int: You didn't get that in elementary school? Grade five or six?

St: No.

Int: OK. Alright. Just, it's a little late. Do they teach this down in grade four or five?

St: Yeah.

Int: Um, can you show me in here, in "risks" where you applied that strategy, you know, how you went about...

St: Um, yeah. I wrote down at the bottom what each, I wrote each paragraph and then the main topic and then in here I used words...

Int: This is like right in the second, there, yeah, OK.

St: Yeah, the second one would be stress. Um, like will you get caught, will you be able to do it. And then up here, under stress it says, "worried about getting caught," "worried if you can pull it off," and what your family and friends think.

Int: So you actually used the wording from your web here and you took it right into...

St: Yeah. It's easier to write it once it's all written down so I can see what I have to write about.

Int: Yes. OK. Because I have had people say, "I just put my pen on the paper and start going."

St: Yeah, I can't do that 'cause it just, it's all, it'll all just be a big mess.

Int: Alright. Now, do you know those reference sets I used? I gave you. I said, "Here, the Ministry of Education has made these up..."

St: Yeah.

Int: And I took the numbers off so you didn't know what was a five, and you sat around in a group and...

St: Yeah.

Int: How did you make out in that exercise?

St: I did, I got them all correct.

Int: Ah. And what was it about a six or a five paper that made you think, this is superior?

St: The language, mainly. Just the way they, like, not just used big words but the way it all kind of flowed and all of it made sense. Like there wasn't any, like no sentence fragments or...

Int: Ah.

St: It was very easy to understand.

Int: OK. Are you able to do that now?

St: Um, I don't think I'm able to write a six. I have really weak writing. I've always had trouble writing. I'm not a very good English student, but...

Int: What's your weakest part?

St: Um, essays, just essays in general.

Int: Because of the vocabulary?

St: Yeah. And the flowing and...

Int: Ah. Well, given that, like, you know what attracts you to a six but you're not quite able to generate one yourself.

St: Yeah.

Int: Do you have any plans, any strategies, like in June, two months from now, you're going to sit down and you're going to do well.

St: Yeah.

Int: What's your plan of attack for the essay?

St: What I want to do is, if I don't do good I'm going to rewrite it until I feel that I've done good, and then once that I feel that I've done good then I think that I will have done good.

Int: So, you're looking to do a rough draft?

St: Yeah, and then...

Int: And then hopefully be able to recopy it. OK. So do you intend to use any of these strategies that you've talked about, you know, webbing, you're going to...?

St: Yes. Yes, I definitely have to do webbing.

Int: Ah, alright. That sounds like a fairly straightforward process for you.

St: Yeah.

- Int: Now, you're going to need some time if you hope to do two drafts. Um, do you have any plans for giving yourself that time?
- St: Um, well, it doesn't take me that long once I web everything out I, it doesn't, it's not hard for me to write the essay because I've got everything planned out so I just, it comes really easily after that, but then it's not so much that I'll have to rewrite it. I'll just have to go back and make sure everything's flows and use better, like find better words, like maybe with a thesaurus.
- Int: OK. If you're asking whether students can use dictionaries or thesauruses on that, so far they haven't allowed it.
- St: Oh, really?
- Int: But, we keep asking, because after all, math students can use calculators.
- St: Yeah.
- Int: But so far they've said "No". But that one strategy of just doing this will probably assist quite a bit, and I'll give you a few more aces up your sleeve before you go in. OK, thanks.

Interviewer's Comments

In the interviews so far, what seems to be true is that the bright kids, the ones who are scoring in the five-six range are saying that they have a plan of attack. Mike said that he had done some reading the past summer, picked out challenging authors, said that when he came to write he was looking for the unusual idea, the unusual approach, and that he had preferred the student writing in the reference sets, so that contrasted with the weaker students who say basically they just start writing and hope that something occurs to them and they may jot some ideas down, you know, but they're basically writing and hoping. So there's that contrast that seems to be coming out and I'm going to check it out with the next two students.

Interview—Student #7(weak)

Int: OK, so , now, first thing, Marty, you have a look at it and, um, I wondered how you rate yourself as a writer?

St: Not very good.

Int: OK. Was there any, what are your weaknesses, I guess, is what I want to know.

St: Uh, I have all the ideas, I just have a hard time putting them down in the right way. Like they're all just bunched together but they're spread out, like I jump from topic to topic and then back to the first topic and then...

Int: So when you start to plan an essay, such as this one, where did you do some planning? Did you, how did you go about...?

St: I don't write, I don't really do the planning. I write it out, and then I try, and I look at it and I try to put all the same ideas in the same spot.

Int: OK. Now I see on the first page you had sort of a web of ideas. Did you use that as you wrote?

St: Um, kind of. I remembered everything that I wrote down 'cause it wasn't very many things.

Int: It wasn't much.

St: No.

Int: Just a couple of points there. Alright. And, so you basically start writing?

St: Uh huh.

Int: OK. And how do you revise or add to it or do whatever is necessary to make it a finished product?

St: I just expand the, like, the paragraph. Like, I look at it and see if there's anything else I could add on.

Int: OK. Now the last one I'm concerned about. At least, there's two last questions. One of them is, do you remember those reference sets that we used, where you looked at sample essays from the Ministry of Education, went through them with your group of two or three people?

St: Yeah.

Int: Did you manage to get those sorted out from the best to the worst?

St: With my group, yeah.

Int: Yeah. With your group?

St: Yeah.

Int: OK. And, when you looked at them, what made a good essay? What helped you to decide, well that's a six, or that's the five?

St: Well, I can, I sort of compared the way I would write to the way it was and if it looked, like, bigger than...

Int: So, size...

St: Yeah, and, um, all the ideas went together and it runs nice, like you don't, it's not just a bunch of ideas. It's ideas that are combined with, I don't know what you call them, but, better sounding words. Like. I use lower words so I think that's why mine are lower, but the good ones used, sort of, more "sticky" words.

Int: OK. Good, good. Now, here's the last one. When you sit down in June, that's a couple months away, you're going to write this provincial exam. I think you're going to be all right, but did you have any plan in mind, or any sort of strategy when you get to the essay?

St: Not really.

Int: OK. One thing I'd suggest is that you look at the essay topic first.

St: Yeah.

Int: And then think about it while you're writing the rest of the exam.

St: Yeah. I think I'll be able to make a better web when I'm writing the essay 'cause I, with this, I did a copy and then I looked back and I had time to look back but on that one I won't have that much time, so...

Int: Yeah. So you're hoping you'll get a more complicated web or a more complex...

St: Uh huh

Int: Webbing of ideas first. OK. And we have two more lessons that we're going to do on this so hopefully there'll be a chance to, uh, do that. If you needed any particular type of instruction... I'm saying that, if someone could just teach you this, you'd feel more confident, what would it be?

St: I've never really been taught the exact layout of an essay, like, not the exact layout, but if someone could just sit down and explain everything that needs to be in it, how it's done, and then just take one of mine and outline the entire thing and see what was wrong and what wasn't then, I could . . . instead of just a mark.

Int: Ah, OK. Good. So to actually go through one of your pieces of written work and take the thing apart and show you this is what it's lacking or here's where you did the right thing...

St: This is where this has to go.

Int: OK. Thank you. I'll remember that.

Interview—Student #8 (good)

Interviewer: This is your essay that you wrote.

Student: Uh huh.

Int: OK. Now, and this is what I'm going to go through. First of all, what kind of writer would you say you are? How do you rate yourself?

St: I don't know, not a very good one, I guess. That's how I'd rate myself. OK.

Int: What are your strong points?

St: Um, I think probably academic writing, 'cause I worked a lot with Mr. S-- doing academic essays so I think that's probably what I'm best at.

Int: So I notice you usually get a score of five or six, so, someone else out there, Mr. Stack, myself, the other teacher who graded these, they're telling you this is good writing coming from a student. You should probably buy into our ideas of how good a writer you are rather than your own, so you're doing fine. Um, when you sat down to plan this essay, or to write it, did you have, -- that's actually what I want to know,-- did you have some plan in mind or some strategy to... ?

St: To writing it?

Int: Uh huh.

St: No, I just sat down and wrote exactly what I felt like writing.

Int: And the ideas just came to you as you wrote?

St: Yeah.

Int: Did you, did you ever get specific instruction in writing, in the elementary grades, you know, five six or seven?

St: Um, yeah we had the usual, you know, write, you know, write a story and then they'd correct it and say no, this isn't, you know, creative and, you know we have this creative writing style (?)

Int: Did you have, what? the brainstorming and pre-writing?

St: Yeah, yeah, we'd go through all those stages, and write a rough draft, write another rough draft, write a third rough draft (?)

Int: You didn't think too much of it? -

St: No, I don't know (?)

Int: What was wrong?

St: Um, I guess it was too formal by the end of it. You know when you write four or five rough drafts it just, you become sick of your own story and it's too stiff after a while. It's just, you know if you sit down and just write exactly what you feel like writing, then it's, I don't know, it's just, it's better. It's a little more personal, I think. People like it better.

Int: Now, someone might say well just sort of writing ideas as they come to you makes them a little disjointed, but your writing isn't disjointed. How do you sort of keep it on track or keep it organized?

St: Um, I don't know how I do that, I just...

Int: It is.

St: I just do, yeah.

Int: Yeah? OK.

St: It's my writing style.

Int: Do you read a lot?

St: Yeah.

Int: Is there any particular writers that you would say are your kind of guides to how good writing should go?

St: I have guides to how I should not go.

Int: Oh.

St: But...

Int: So there's things to avoid.

St: Yeah, that's it.

Int: What are those?

St: Danielle Steele is definitely one.

Int: A bad writer?

St: Bad writer.

Int: What are the sins of commission or omission that she (?)

St: Uh, too repetitive. Everything in her story happens, it's the same plot, like three times in the same story.

Int: I'm not a fan, so that's OK. Now, do you remember the reference sets we used? You had a group and I said, "Here, these are from the Ministry of Education. They say these are a six and a five and a four..."

St: Oh yeah.

Int: And I took all the numbers off so you wouldn't know. Were you able to rate them fairly well, figure out which was the six?

St: Yeah.

Int: OK. What were the attributes that you said, that's a six.

St: With the six, I think that was, um, clear and concise and not too many grammatical mistakes.

Int: OK. And, so you were actually using the key to decide, this essay is a six?

St: Uh huh.

Int: OK. Now, was that a useful exercise? There's no right answer to this question.

St: No, I think it was. It kind of gave us an idea of how the Ministry of Education marks us.

Int: Hm. That was my intention so I just wondered if it actually, you know, fulfilled that purpose.

St: Yeah, I think it did.

Int: OK. If there's one piece of instruction that if you could just get this you would feel confident that you could produce a superior paper every time, what would it be? What do you need? That's a hard question.

St: That's a really hard question. I really don't know the answer to that one.

- Int: OK. Another way at it is, say, in two months time when you sit down to write the provincial exam, is there, do you have any kind of strategy or plan that you...?
- St: Um, yeah. When you were marking the essay you said it went from general to more specific and then personal, and I think that's kind of how I feel I can get through some of that.
- Int: Hm.
- St: And a lot of what Mr. S-- said I'll go with too, -- the academic.
- Int: Yes. What was the best thing you got from Mr. S--?
- St: From Mr. S--? Um, probably how to write an academic paper, like how to do it properly without making it boring, but not making it flowery, you know?
- Int: So, something about control of diction or language?
- St: Yeah, basically. I think that was the best thing (?)
- Int: Good. OK. I like to steal other teachers' ideas as well. Alright, thank you. This has been valuable for me. I've got now, nine or ten different ideas from strong writers to weak writers so I shall, uh, I'll use it all two weeks from now in our next set of lessons. Be ready.

Interviews (2nd set)
Student #1 (weak)

Interviewer: So, Carl, we've got 2 essays, and this was the one on communicating. Now, which of the two was your better essay?

Student: Communicating.

Int: Ok, do you want to say something about that?

St: Well, I think it's because I had more time for it, and I could take it home and work on it instead of doing it in class. 'Cause in class it makes it more like a test and I can just, I just clammed up. I couldn't think of anything.

Int: Oh. This one?

St: Yeah.

Int: Now, there were two different methods as well. For instance, this was the metaphor.

St: Yeah.

Int: And this was the genre study. I'm interested in whether you were able to use the ideas that we talked about in class.

St: No. Um, well which ones?

Int: For either of them.

St: Well this one, the "communication" [metaphor] one I used the ideas from class, but the "confidence" [genre] one I couldn't, I couldn't think of anything.

Int: So you just, really just clammed up.

St: Yeah.

Int: OK. We spoke about using propositions or a series of propositions in your essay for this one [genre]. So, was it that you couldn't generate some propositions around that?

St: I just can't, no I couldn't.

Int: OK.

St: I can't with any, really.

Int: Now, on the essay part of the examination you're going to be time limited, so any plans for how you're going to handle that time, if that's a problem?

St: Uh, save it 'til the end. So I don't take up the whole three hours for the essay.

Int: Uh, and is there, I guess because you've got three hours to work on it and they suggest one hour for the essay, you're just going to leave it 'til the last hour and then?

St: Yeah.

Int: OK. My suggestion is you look at the topic first.

St: Yeah.

Int: You remember that?

St: Yeah.

Int: OK. And make some notes so that if you come up with some propositions or you come up with a metaphor that you're able to do it. Uh, I'd like to know what your best part of your best essay is.

St: Uh, I don't really know.

Int: Are there any lines in there that you really felt good when you had written them?

St: There were, yeah, but I can't think of them right now. 'Cause I didn't have time to go over it before this.

Int: Just take a moment and skim.

Int: Does anything stand out as being, you know, when you wrote it you felt that was effective or you'd said it well?

St: Um, at the time, yeah, but I don't remember what now.

Int: OK. OK. And I'm still trying to dig at strategies you might have when you come to write this provincial exam. "I'll leave it 'til the end." Now is there anything from your composition classes which you're going to remember or you're going to try to apply when you come to this?

St: I'll try to apply the metaphors and other things, but I'm sure that I won't think of anything.

Int: So you're kind of hoping that you're able to do well but you don't have a plan.

St: Yeah, yeah.

Int: Alright. That's what I needed to know. Thank you.

St: Yeah.

Interview—Student #2 (middle)

Interviewer: Have a seat. You sit in the comfortable seat. There we go. OK. Now those are your two essays, Kris and, let me see, this was the one I think on metaphor, generated by metaphor?

Student: Right.

Int: And this is the one generated from the genre studies approach? You know the propositions, argument, proposition?

St: Mm Hm.

Int: So the question I'm trying to get at is, which one do you consider your better work?

St: I like the one with the metaphors.

Int: OK. So when you look at it, -- you can do that now, is there anything in there that you consider, well, this, this is an example of good writing, or here...

St: Umm, I'm not sure I used metaphors in this metaphor one even though, I did in this one, 'cause I missed the metaphor class that, when you just said here, here's your essay and write it, I missed the whole metaphor thing.

Int: So was it, what was it that allowed you to write a better essay on that one?

St: Well, I think I did better on this one. Then I used metaphors, I just decided to start using them then.

Int: Oh, OK.

St: And I (?) And I think I did well on it.

Int: Right. This one, you did the genre study for...

St: Right.

Int: Um. OK. What I'm, I guess I'm trying to get at is, was there some technique or strategy that you were able to use, so you felt you were able to use metaphors in here?

St: Yeah, a little.

Int: OK. Any other strategies or places you were able to use something from the class in here? Did you remember propositions or...?

St: Not really, except for like thesis statement (?).

Int: Alright. Pick out a part of this that you think is effective.

St: (Pause) Well, I don't know... (pause) I'm not sure. I like using that saying right there, just the "confidence is the feeling we get that says I can do this." I started to use quotes and I've done it a couple more times in there. I try to get a lot of quotes going in.

Int: What's the effect of that?

St: Of using those?

Int: Yes.

St: Just seems like you're actually reading something that's someone's ... that's been said maybe or it's been, like, through us all.

Int: It gives it, just so you know that this is the language that you're using, gives it a sense of immediacy, like being right there.

St: Yeah.

Int: Um, do you have, I've asked this before, I'm going to ask again. Do you have a plan for handling the essay on the provincial exam?

St: No, I'm just going to try to get three points down, you have to write three paragraphs so I'll probably just write a bit about each point. That's what I did last time. So I'll use metaphors, -- three different metaphors -- and just write about each one, try to get some points for each one and just write your thesis (?) and go from there.

Int: OK. We have one more set of lessons coming up and we'll take three days to work on that and then after that we'll do another essay so, we'll review the steps we've already learned about metaphor and hopefully give you one last strategy. Has your writing, -- how would judge it over this past semester,-- the last three months? Stayed the same...

St: I think it's gone up a bit, 'cause I never really wrote essays before except for like, on a test. So, I think I'm doing better.

Int: Yeah. That's what the outside marker says too. That's great. OK. Thank you.

Interview—Student #3 (middle)

Interviewer: Hi Ed. Come in, have a seat. I pulled the two essays. This is the one that we did after the metaphor...

Student: Yeah, I read that one before.

Int: Yeah. And this is the one you just finished writing on using the genre approach. So the question...

St: The genre approach?

Int: Well, the argument and propositions, that series. Now, what I'm after, and I'm just asking people about this, is which one do you feel is your better essay?

St: First

Int: OK. And that was the one that you did on, with the metaphor. Now you used what, the bridge idea?

St: Unh Huh

Int: OK. So what is it that makes that stand out for you?

St: Um, well the first thing is it's longer. It's more neatly printed. Uh, I spent a lot more time on it.

Int: Is this the one where you got to... ?

St: This is the home one.

- Int: Yeah, OK. So the qualities of neatness and length work.
- St: Well, and uh, I used a lot more metaphors in it. I had a lot more time to think what I was writing down.
- Int: Uh. Alright. Now, were you able to use those strategies about creating metaphors when you came to do this in class time?
- St: Yeah, somewhat.
- Int: OK. And, just to remind you, this was the one we did after the genre study which was creating an argument and picking out propositions and that. Were you able to use any of those in class time?
- St: Um, yeah, I read through them all and did all the questions and it didn't really help me all that much though.
- Int: OK. And then when you came to write the essay, did you spend much time planning or generating propositions?
- St: Uh, no, not really.
- Int: OK. Good.
- St: I did all the questions so...
- Int: On the exercises before?
- St: Yeah (?)
- Int: So when you come to write the exam, what I'm trying to get at is what works to make you more able at the exam. Is there anything that you've picked up as a strategy?
- St: Well, I guess reading other essays y'know, reading other people's essays. I can always write down thoughts on topics such as these, just sort of...
- Int: Now, this is a good thing you've raised because you've seen examples of student work, from all those exam sets. Those were all student work, and for this one I had to use some professional writers, the one on the Finns battling the cold and the other one on the oil and water thing (?) I used some professional ones...
- St: OK.

Int: (?) you remember it. What I'm trying to discover is, which helped students more? Using the student work or using the professional models?

St: Uh, professional models.

Int: OK. What is there, is there anything about them you can identify?

St: Uh, they use lots more quotations from other sources, from personal life. It's a lot more structured too. At least 10 points in each paragraph and well-structured points.

Int: Good. It's just a question that I have whether to use professional writers or to use student models and I'm just checking that out. Alright, so just sort of in conclusion, you're going to come to the provincial exam, they're going to sit you down and say, "Eric, you have 3 hours." Any strategies that you have that you say, "I'm going to do this for the exam, for the composition part of it?"

St: Um, mostly I'll probably just sit down, I'll look at it and I'll think about it for a while and I'll try and solve everything that I can. I'll write it down on a piece of paper...

Int: So you're going to make a plan first, or...

St: Yeah. I'll just write down my thoughts when I think (?)

Int: You've got 3 hours with one hour for the essay, -- they advise you to take one hour for the essay. Well alright. We have one more strategy before the end of the year and one more essay, so hopefully you'll pick up some more ideas. Good, thank you.

Interview—Student #4(good)

Interviewer: OK. Marty. Yeah, come in and have a seat. Mike, I've got your 2 last essays. This is the one that we did after you studied metaphor.

Student: Yeah.

Int: And this is the one after studying the genre theory, where you learned how to make propositions, make an argument by composing three propositions and structuring.

St: OK.

Int: I've said that to people and they look at me and go, "Did we do that?"

- St: Well I used anecdotes instead of (?).
- Int: Uh, OK.
- St: That's my perception of the lesson for that...
- Int: Now, when you look at these, which is your better work, do you think?
- St: Well that's difficult to say. I'd say this one is, the latter one's better.
- Int: Anything you can pick out that made it, -- just in your own mind -- a good piece of work?
- St: Um, I felt my introduction was attention-grabbing. Sets up the situation and it accurately describes the general character.
- Int: And you said that there was anecdote that you wanted to use in this one.
- St: Yeah.
- Int: And I think you're right. You've effectively done that. You got people's attention.
- St: Did it work though?
- Int: Yes it did. We both gave this a five. I gave it a 5/6; the outside marker gave it a 5+. So what you're doing is working.
- St: Yeah.
- Int: And I'll certainly give you some more detail and feedback on the structure of it. Now, what I'm interested in, what I'm asking people here, is what strategies are they picking up that they can use in writing essays? So, is the use of metaphor something that you've now got as a strategy? Is this using anecdotes now a strategy, are you able to...
- St: Um, I don't like the use of metaphors because it's um, you can go so many ways with it; you can get carried off with it or you can just carry it off with it, you know, so I just decided to use anecdote because I -- based on the professional essays that you made us read -- I like the, some of the styles of it so (?) it must work.
- Int: Now, using those examples, I used some students and I used some professional work. Which did you think was more effective?

St: Uh, I liked the professional work myself, based on just the general language that they used, and the diction. But that's my preference so, that works for me.

Int: So it may be an unfair question, now I ask well, which did you like better? The professional models have better diction and that. Were you able to learn from them, and that's a difficult...

St: Oh definitely.

Int: You did. OK. So what was it you were able to put into practice? Can you identify that?

St: Um, (?) Isaac Asimov was able to relate, to go from a trivial part of his life and write a large essay on that, you know, I tried to copy that. I thought that was interesting. Uh, the one on "My Wood," I remember using that as a reference when I was writing this essay. But I don't remember what part of it. I do remember using that sort of like a stepping stone

Int: Because in each of those cases they took some personal event and then generalized from it.

St: Exactly.

Int: Alright, good. Now lastly, do you have some strategies, -- you may already have answered this question, -- do you have some plans in mind now for when you come to write the provincial exam?

St: I'm just going to tackle it head on.

Int: OK. Any time management practices you're going to use?

St: In terms of the time limit, um, I find that I use up more time than everyone else in the class. Like I was the last one to leave the class, you know, like. Um, with this one, on my conclusion I just wrote a pretty crappy one I guess.

Int: You felt rushed at the end?

St: Oh for sure. Um, I don't know in terms of time management. I'll probably use what you suggested. You know, like, take a look at the topic, and go and do the rest of the work and my plan is probably to tackle the other stuff quickly, ahead of the rest of the class and then I'll have more time to do the essay.

Int: Fair enough. Good. Thank you.

Interview—Student #5 (good)

Interviewer: Come in and have a seat. OK. What we've got, June, I've got the two essays, the last two that you did. The essay that we did on metaphor, and this is the one, the last one we did, I call it genre theory. People are wondering what I mean by that. We studied the professional essays...

Student: Yeah, I thought of it as like, like making clear statements. Like in paragraphs.

Int: Yeah, and it looks like you've done some planning here which leads into that. OK. So, that actually comes into my next question: Did you find some strategies, some things you could actually do in the writing of them?

St: Yeah.

Int: Alright, and which one do you want to talk about? I should say, which is your better...?

St: Um, I like the metaphor one. Just 'cause by thinking of it from that angle, thinking of a metaphor and thinking of words and things you can say to do with that, that you pick, like I chose the corridor for communicating with doors and it just seems to open up to more topics that you can talk about.

Int: So, if it was a matter of length you were able to extend it or...?

St: Yeah, and, yeah.

Int: Good. Now, here's the question. Is there any one part of this that you can point to and go, "Right there I got off on a good start, or there was some place in here that was particularly effective?"

St: Um, well I usually just say something in the very beginning, like a list of like communicating (?quotes from essay) to knowledge, understanding and connection with others, and then I go, knowledge—paragraph, understanding—paragraph, connection with others—paragraph.

Int: OK. So that strategy has... It sort of did work for you here.

St: Yeah.

Int: You did get a fairly good mark on this one.

St: Yeah.

Int: By the outside marker. Alright, this was the one, the more structured one, or my intention was to have it more structured. And, my question about this one is, did you, were you able to do that kind of breakdown for yourself when you got the thesis and then a series of propositions?

St: Um, yeah. For this one I think I chose to go with (?) confidence through growing up. Like I did a section on how it's important to instill confidence in the child by the parents and then how confidence relates to school and stuff, and then confidence when you're in the work world.

Int: So your development also had a direction to the development.

St: Yeah.

Int: Good. (?) Of the practice, or the models that we used, -- practice essays,-- which ones sort of stand out that you remember or were...?

St: The "My Wood" one, just 'cause each paragraph, each new section of it started with, um, the first sentence was the thing he was going to talk about. Like, my wood makes me feel happy.

Int: Yes. Yes, OK. Now, we used professional models for this. These were all accomplished authors. And then you had one set of student essays to look at as well. Was there anything, I guess I'm looking for which one was more effective for you?

St: I find it hard to read other students' work just 'cause it feels like we're all trying to, trying to perfect this kind of, the lesson. And so it's easier to see it in a professional writer than in a student's.

Int: They're all novices so you're all learning.

St: Yeah. So it's less clear of the, what you're looking for.

Int: Good. Do you have any sort of plan in place (?) when you go in to write the provincial exam, any kind of things that you're planning on doing?

St: Basically I just look at the topic and then I either choose between the development through growing up or the other way with what it can do for you, the topic, sort of. Like on the first one I did like, growing up, like relationships and things...

Int: Yes. You used a chronologue

St: Yeah. For risks, and the communicating I used just a statement at the beginning that I can build on, and then I try and find a metaphor 'cause it seems to help me.

Int: Alright. Before we finish the course we have one more strategy session that we use, one more three-day session, so we'll see if we can give you one more tool to use going in. Alright. Thank you for talking to me.

St: OK.

2. Experienced Markers' terms used to describe "Good Writing"

command of language		insightful	**
word choice		unique perspective	**
well structured		original ideas	**
control of language		creativity	
descriptive details		quality of expression	
descriptions		intelligent discussion	
well written		mind at work	
use of figurative language		original content	**
vocabulary		fluency (control of tone)	
style & vocabulary		originality	
vocabulary & structure		creativity & humour	**
command of language		thoughtful content	
sentence structure & diction		ideas	
precise/interesting use of language		different perspective	
use of language		unusual approach	
coherence		insight	
clear expression		controlled voice	
diction		depth of understanding	**
sophisticated vocabulary		originality of thought	
control of language		thoughtful content	**
diction		interesting argument	
fluency	--	engaging	**
purposeful manipulation of language		delightfully interesting	
structure		fresh voice	
control of language	--	sense of voice	
control	--	originality	
organizational fluency		sparkle	**
organization		approach	**
mature style		risk-taking	
highly competent	--	sense of voice	
creativity & figurative language		creativity	
originality		sense of voice	
engaging		voice	
quality of thinking		insight	
creativity	**	sophistication of ideas	
creativity		engagement & voice	**
quality of mind		awareness of task/voice	**
tone (esp. humour)		fresh perspective	**
		clarity of thought	
		strong voice	
		eloquence	

Novice Markers' terms used to describe "Good Writing"

quality of expression --
control of language
voice **
humour
originality
artistic unity ***
insight
consistent voice
originality/voice
intelligence of response

Total Responses	83
Exp'd choosing structure	30 = 41.1%
Exp'd choosing quality second place	4 = 13.3%
Exp'd choosing quality	43 = 58.9%
Exp'd choosing structure second place	14 = 32.6%
Novice choosing structure	2 = 10%
Novice choosing quality second place	1 = 50%
Novice choosing quality	8 = 80%
Novice choosing structure second place	2 = 25%
Total choosing structure first + quality second	32 = 38.9% 5 = 15.6%
Total choosing quality first + structure second	51 = 61.4% 16 = 31.4%

3. Control Group Data from Ministry of Education

Data Analysis Branch

received March 28/96

Parkland Essay Scores Jan 1991 to June 1995

January 1991 n = 52		
score number		
NR	0	
8	2	
10	2	failures
4 = 7.7%		
12	6	
14	14	
16	13	
18	8	
20	4	
22	3	over 22
3 = 5.8%		
mean 15.42		

January 1992 n= 64		
score number		
NR	0	
8	1	
10	4	failures
5 = 7.8%		
12	14	
14	15	
16	14	
18	8	
20	4	
22	3	over 22
4 = 6.3%		
24	1	
mean 15.06		

June 1991 n= 72		
score number		
NR	0	
8	3	
10	2	failures
5 = 6.9%		
12	5	
14	14	
16	16	
18	21	
20	10	
22	1	over 22
1 = 1.4%		
mean 16.06		

June 1992 n= 73		
score number		
NR	0	
6	1	
10	10	failures
11 = 15.1%		
12	10	
14	17	
16	21	
18	7	
20	4	
22	2	over 22
3 = 4.1%		
24	1	
mean 15.37		

January 1993 n=63		
score number		
NR	0	
2	2	
4	1	
6	2	
8	1	
10	2	failures
8 = 12.7%		
12	8	
14	17	
16	15	
18	10	
20	2	
22	2	over 22
3 = 4.8%		
24	1	
mean 14.44		

January 1994 n=67		
score number		
NR	0	
8	3	
10	3	failures
6 = 9%		
12	9	
14	15	
16	15	
18	10	
20	7	
22	4	over 22
5 = 7.5%		
24	1	
mean 15.58		

June 1993 n=68		
score number		
NR	1	
8	1	
10	7	failures
9 = 13.2%		
12	7	
14	12	
16	20	
18	9	
20	8	
22	3	over 22
3 = 4.4%		
mean 15.49		

June 1994 n=69		
score number		
NR	1	
6	1	
8	1	
10	4	failures
7 = 10.1%		
12	6	
14	10	
16	14	
18	12	
20	9	
22	10	over 22
11 = 15.9%		
24	1	
mean 16.62		

January 1995 n=69		
score number		
NR	0	
4	1	
10	8	failures
9 = 13%		
12	5	
14	12	
16	21	
18	14	
20	5	
22	1	over 22
3 = 4.3%		
24	2	
mean 15.51		

June 1995 n=61		
score number		
NR	0	
8	3	
10	4	failures
7 = 11.5%		
12	8	
14	18	
16	17	
18	7	
20	3	
22	1	over 22
1 = 1.6%		
mean 14.62		

January 1991 to June 1995 totals
N = 658 subjects
failures = 71 = 10.7%
over 22 = 37 = 5.6%
overall mean = 15.37 = 64%

June 1996 data
n = 52
failures = 4 = 7.7%
over 22 = 1 = 1.9%
overall mean = 14.65 = 61%

The significance appears to be that in a year with a lower than average mean achievement and fewer than average numbers achieving in the upper 12%, there was a 3% reduction in the number of failures. Students did not become expert writers, but significant numbers did become competent