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Teachers' Attitudes Toward Government-Mandated Provincial Testing in Manitoba

Government-imposed testing has been introduced in Canada to establish benchmarks, improve accountability, and measure achievement consistently. In this study 133 teachers from urban and rural Manitoba completed surveys (a response rate of 34%) to ascertain their attitudes toward mandated testing. Results indicated that most teachers expressed negativity about exam use, but attitudinal differences were contingent on location and teacher involvement in implementation. Teachers reported using many preparation strategies, but only developing study skills correlated positively with grade 3 exam scores. The findings are discussed in terms of the efficacy of using mandated exams and identifying appropriate preparation strategies.

Les évaluations imposées par le gouvernement ont été implantées au Canada dans le but d'établir des points de repère, d'accroître la responsabilisation et de mesurer la performance de façon constante et uniforme. Pendant ce projet de recherche, 133 enseignants des régions rurales et urbaines du Manitoba, soit 34% des personnes contactées, ont complété des enquêtes qui cherchaient à connaître leurs attitudes face aux évaluations mandatées. Les résultats indiquent que la plupart des enseignants éprouvent des sentiments négatifs face aux évaluations. Toutefois, les attitudes varient selon la région géographique et l'implication de l'enseignant dans la mise en oeuvre des évaluations. Les enseignants ont indiqué qu'ils avaient recours à diverses stratégies pour préparer leurs élèves, mais seul le perfectionnement des techniques d'étude avait un rapport direct avec les résultats des examens de troisième année. La discussion des résultats porte sur l'efficacité des examens mandatés et sur l'identification des stratégies appropriées de préparation.

Policymakers have often imposed testing programs in their jurisdiction to measure student performance in relation to the objectives outlined in the educational curriculum, to establish benchmarks, and to measure achievement expectations consistently and equitably (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 1999; Manitoba Education & Training, 1999; Newfoundland Department of Education, 1997). In addition to the student-focused purposes, policymakers hope the exams serve global and systemic purposes to respond to public concerns for improved standards in education; and to increase accountability to students, parents, and constituents (British Columbia Ministry of Education; Herman, Abedi & Golan, 1994; James & Tanner, 1993; Manitoba Education & Training; Zancanella, 1992). Although the formatting and procedures for administering exams vary, some jurisdictions propose that detailed exam results can be used to evaluate students' strengths and weaknesses, aid in planning instruction, determine remedial and enrichment program planning areas, and help to assess revision of course study and activities (Newfoundland Department of Education).

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The purpose of this article is to examine the current practice by governments to implement standardized testing in classrooms across Canada from the vantage point of Manitoba teachers. Theory on educational accountability is first described to lay the foundation on which government-imposed testing is based. The various kinds of testing programs that have purported to encapsulate student learning are then described, followed by a discussion of the misconceptions that have grown out of these testing approaches. Research on the testing phenomenon in the United States and other nations is discussed, followed by the varying approaches used in Canadian provinces, to obtain a flavor of how these exams have been developed and perceived. Finally, I focus on a specific study that examines the attitudes of teachers in Manitoba schools to determine how this group of stakeholders is coping with a provincial exam mandate.

Testing as a Means of Establishing Accountability

Accountability is a valued concept in education circles today (Reeves, 2002). Everyone from policymaker to curriculum developer, from principal to school clinician, from teacher to school coach is being held responsible for their prescribed role in the development and learning of their students. The priority set by governments, taxpayers, and board members to establish accountability may have developed as a result of trends to identify and measure progress based on educational outcomes and to ensure that benchmarks are consistent for all students in the context of a resource-limited funding model.

One means of establishing accountability in the research literature is through the collection of student data in the form of standardized test scores. The tests purport to address accountability by determining which students have a good understanding of a certain body of knowledge; which schools, teachers, and provinces are performing well in terms of student learning; and whether students have learned other skills such as working with others and critical and creative thinking on a wide variety of tasks (Lingenfelter, 2003). In addition, the trend to have tests sent to an external marking center and/or marked electronically creates the perception of increased objectivity, accuracy, and efficiency (Gallagher, 2003).

However, accountability in education is complicated because no single mechanism or stakeholder group is responsible for the results (Lingenfelter, 2003; Reeves, 2002). For example, student performance can vary as a function of learning styles and strengths or weaknesses; parents can play an important role in the early and ongoing interventions in the education of their children; teachers are responsible for both their content knowledge of a subject area and related pedagogical approaches; and school climate can influence student learning. Accountability is also influenced by the political and cultural backdrop of peer groups, governmental priorities, and other external forces such as the business world (Lingenfelter). Thus test scores may be influenced by a wide and complex range of factors.

Given the popularity of establishing accountability in educational institutions today, many recommendations have been noted for political leaders and administrators to ensure effective accountability. For example, Reeves (2002) suggests that there are four factors associated with planning and establishing a holistic accountability system (which go beyond focusing on test scores):

structure, collaboration, implementation, and communication. Similarly, the Southern Regional Education Board (2000), which represents approximately 16 states in the southern US, recommends that establishing a sound accountability program is dependent on determining appropriate standards; developing tests to assess those standards; and following through with rewards, sanctions, and a good system of reporting. Of equal importance is creating opportunities for professional development and determining target areas for further intervention. Most articles cite the use of a testing program in the grand scheme of establishing accountability (Wikeley, Stoll, & Lodge, 2002), but not without careful consideration of how the program should be developed and articulated (Mayer, 2003).

Finally, it should be noted that some authors have argued against the use of testing programs as a means of establishing accountability. For example, Stiggins (1999) noted that current testing programs heavily intimidate teachers and students, jeopardizing the validity of the test scores and consequently providing an inaccurate account of school effectiveness and success. In addition, Popham (2001) indicated that policymakers confound the causality of high test scores with effective instruction, when in fact the scores may be reflective of a variety of student-specific factors (including socioeconomic status, scholastic aptitude, and school learning). Giroux (2003) indicated that testing and assessment are as much about the distribution of resources as they are about accountability. In fact Giroux claims that the practice of implementing standardized tests disempowers teachers (i.e., because it is external to their locally established curricula and goes beyond their control) and is a fundamental violation of a student's democratic rights.

Testing Misconceptions and Confusions

Despite the trend by governmental jurisdictions to implement testing programs, approaches to testing, including the testing options available, have varied considerably. To complicate matters, testing approaches have been confused in the research literature (Haladyna, 2002), making it difficult for policymakers, educators, and the general public to make informed decisions and opinions about their preferred choice of program. In the most general sense, government-regulated testing programs usually employ a "standardized testing format," meaning generically that the test has been developed, administered, and scored under identical conditions for each student (Haladyna; Popham, 1999). Policy manuals usually clearly document the assessment protocol for administering and scoring the exam.

However, because the standardized testing format became a popular form of assessment with the advent of commercially produced standardized tests in the 1950s (Traxler, 1959), some misperceptions of standardized tests narrowly come to include commercially produced, norm-referenced tests (where student scores are compared with those of others of a similar age or ability) such as the Canadian Test of Basic Skills. Perrone (1991), in an historical review article, noted that these commercially based tests have a negative connotation with educators, as they were used in almost all educational settings in the 1960s and 1970s as an inexpensive means of increasing accountability and that their results had a mystical appeal to the uninformed. But for the most part they did not correspond with material covered in the local curricula. For this reason it

appears that current exam developers have tried to avoid the label of *standardized test* in the marketing of their exam programs to educators and the general public (Cline-Abrahams, 1999; Madak, 1999).

Another form of standardized test that has come to be associated with confusion and controversy in the assessment literature is the minimum-competence or high-stakes test. These tests have been used in some countries such as the United Kingdom, Korea, and Trinidad to streamline students into academic institutions and career paths, and they have recently become popular in the US for establishing accountability in the education system. The intent of these tests is to measure the content, knowledge, and skills of a student and assign a pass/fail designation for each person taking the test (Haladyna, 2002). The tests are then used to make decisions about admission into various programs. For example, failing a high-stakes test in Texas usually means that students must repeat their grade. Misconceptions in definitions between high-stakes tests and other testing approaches may lead the misinformed to confusing the overall intent of a standardized test score and/or result in similar impending stress commonly associated with a pass/fail mentality. Some articles in publicly accessible mainstream magazines have sought to undo these misconceptions in Canada ("Standard Procedure," 2003), but public education of such a widely publicized and contentious issue can be difficult to overcome.

Finally, some school districts and governmental jurisdictions have chosen to adopt a relatively new testing format in the assessment literature entitled "standards tests" (Haladyna, 2002). These tests adopt a criterion-referenced format (which means that student performance is assessed relative to a set of predefined criteria). However, the criteria in a standards format are specific in terms of content, knowledge, and skills assessed, and the criteria are made available to teachers (usually in the form of a curriculum). Once a standards test is administered, scores are divided into categories relating to various proficiency levels (e.g., above expectations, meeting expectations, below expectations). These tests have become increasingly popular for school divisions and governmental jurisdictions that wish to track student progress at the individual, school or regional level (Haladyna, 2002). Thus they can satisfy definitions of both norm- and criterion-referencing. Conyers, Andrews, and Marzano (2001) have studied and report the success of one such criterion-referenced test, the Academic Learning Process Assessment System, used in schools in Denver, Colorado. The standards tests have become the most common form of assessment used in today's government-imposed Canadian testing programs.

Summary of the Research on Government Imposed Testing Programs

With the current emphasis by governments to implement mandatory testing programs, particularly in the US, the subject of testing and the effects of the testing regime have been heavily debated among parents, school personnel, government officials, and researchers (Dwyer & Snider, 1997; Moore, 1994; Murphy, 1997; Rotberg, 1996; Smith, 1991). In most cases attitudes among stakeholders regarding the use of standardized exams have been vehemently negative (Herman et al., 1994; Moore; Smith). Researchers have shown that the mandated tests create anxiety in students (Haladyna, Haas, & Allison, 1998; James & Tanner, 1993; Paris, Lawton, Turner, & Roth, 1991); they increase

test-driven instruction (James & Tanner; Popham, 2001); and they sometimes lead to unscrupulous testing practices among both students and teachers (Moore; Paris et al.; Popham). Testing practices have been found to influence teaching practices in terms of “narrowing the curriculum” (Brown, 1992; Wright, 2002), encouraging more traditional as opposed to innovative teaching techniques (Brown), and increasing the tendency for teachers to use a one-size-fits-all teaching approach (Moon, Brighton, & Callahan, 2003). Moon et al. further suggest that the above-mentioned teaching practices are not aligned with the best teaching practices recommended by the National Research Council (1999), as they may turn “certain groups of students off from learning” (p. 49). In addition, Haney and Madaus (1986) indicate that if important decisions are made as a function of test scores, teachers will simply work toward increasing test scores using methods that may be considered counterproductive and educationally detrimental.

Teachers are among the collective of stakeholder groups who generally oppose government-imposed testing (Basturk, 2002; Lam & Bordignon, 2001; Moore, 1994). In one study teachers felt that they did not need the results of the testing to measure concepts taught in class, and they were suspicious about the intended purposes of the testing (Basturk). Teachers have also been reported to oppose mandated standardized tests as the tests seem to lead to the elimination of relevant classroom activities in favor of drill-and-practice approaches and the practice of unfair and unscrupulous testing practices (Moore).

In the backdrop of a generally negative attitude toward testing and research articles that predominantly question the use of government-imposed testing programs, there are arguably some benefits. For example, Shepard and Dougherty (1991) found that testing programs have increased the emphasis placed in classrooms on the teaching of basic skills in line with curriculum requirements to improve test scores. Testing programs have also encouraged teachers to adjust their teaching to the content and objectives of the exam (Herman & Golan, 1993), which presumably is in line with the content and objectives of the local curriculum. Thus with the implementation of government imposed exams, teachers may be compelled to teach closely to the goals of the locally established curriculum, ensuring a fair and equitable education for all students. Basturk (2002) found that teachers who knew more about the purposes of standardized tests and had more professional experience with testing were generally less opposed to the use of a state-wide testing program than those with less knowledge and experience.

Standardized Testing in Canada

Following trends in the US and in other parts of the world, government-imposed testing programs are currently in vogue in Canada (Froese-Germain, 2001; Lam & Bordignon, 2001). At the time of writing this article, most provinces and territories were implementing a testing program in core subject areas in at least some grades and often at evenly spaced grade intervals. But because provincial examination mandates are highly visible to the public and are consequently subject to scrutiny in the public eye, they are in a continual state of influx and change.

Historically, Alberta, Quebec, and to some extent British Columbia have been reported to have the most rigorous and sustainable testing programs in

Canada compared with other provinces (Mayer, 2003). Students in Alberta (and the Northwest Territories, who follow the Alberta curriculum) write provincial examinations in grades 3, 6, and 9 in core subject areas; and their grade 12 students have been writing diploma examinations in a broad range of courses since 1984 (Government of Alberta, n.d.). Similarly, students from British Columbia (and the Yukon Territory, where students follow the BC curriculum) write provincial examinations worth 40% of their final mark in core subject areas in grade 12 to establish minimum competence requirements (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 1999; Government of Yukon, n.d.). Students from Quebec write examinations in the educational equivalents of grades 6, 9, 11, and 12 (Quebec Education, n.d.) in French (i.e., their primary language of instruction) and in mathematics.

Other provinces such as Saskatchewan and the Atlantic provinces implemented testing programs later (Mayer, 2003), and some of these provinces do not mandate exams each year. For example, students from Newfoundland have written the Canadian Test of Basic Skills as a measure of achievement in past years (Newfoundland Department of Education, 1997), but there is currently no mention of a testing program this year on their provincial education Web site. Similarly, Saskatchewan has recently assessed student progress at various grades (e.g., grades 5, 8, and 11) and subject areas (critical and creative thinking in 2002; mathematics in 2001; language arts in 1998, 1996, and 1994, Saskatchewan Department of Education, n.d.). Evidently these programs appear to assess student progress at varying grades for the purpose of measuring the educational standards of their province.

In most other provinces achievement testing is completed minimally in mathematics and in the primary language of instruction at several grade levels (e.g., grades 3, 6, 9, and 10 in Ontario, Ontario Ministry of Education, n.d.a, n.d.b); grades 9 and 12 in Nova Scotia (Nova Scotia Education and Culture, 1996); and grades 4, 8, 11, and 12 in New Brunswick (New Brunswick Ministry of Education, 2000). Depending on the province, grade level, and subject area tested, the provincial tests can be used to account for up to 60% (i.e., in grade 12) of a student's final course mark.

The cultural backdrop of the Canadian testing programs appears to be more relaxed and more focused on assessing curricular goals than the high-stakes formats that have been described in other nations (e.g., the US and the UK). With the exception of Newfoundland, provinces have adopted a locally based, criterion-referenced testing format, and emphasis is placed on assessing student progress in relation to the local curriculum. The Canadian approach is reflected in the philosophy statements of the provincial examination policy manuals. For example, the Saskatchewan government has implemented sporadic assessments in core subject areas over the past 10 years to "provoke debate and inform decision-making in order to improve student learning" (Saskatchewan Department of Education, n.d.). The Ontario Ministry of Education (n.d.a) policy manuals state,

Assessment is a natural and necessary part of learning. Students, teachers and parents need feedback on how well students are doing ... Province-wide assessments are based directly on the provincial curriculum. As a result, they

reinforce and extend the knowledge and skills students have been working with all year.

Finally, in British Columbia (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 1999), the exams are implemented

To ensure that grade 12 students meet consistent provincial standards of achievement in academic subjects; to ensure that graduating students from all schools of the province are treated equitably when applying for admission to universities and other post-secondary institutions; and to respond to strong public desire for improved standards of education.

These statements reinforce the point that provincial governments may be trying to focus on a standards approach in an attempt to minimize the high-stakes perception of these tests, and also to be distinguished from the standardized testing movement, which has received critical reviews in the education literature.

Although generally less research has been conducted on the topic of government-imposed standardized testing in Canada, the topic appears to be controversial, as evidenced by coverage in a recent issue of a parenting magazine ("Standard Procedure," 2003), as a keynote debate at an international conference in Winnipeg (*Through the Eyes of a Learner International Conference*, 2003), and as topics in local newspapers and newsletters (Job, 2003). Because the cost of implementing a province-wide testing program has been estimated at 14 to 15 million dollars annually as reported by the Manitoba Teachers' Society ("Did you know," 1999), the attention this topic is receiving in the public eye is causing some taxpayers to question the efficacy of testing and public spending priorities.

A handful of research projects and theoretical papers recently published in a special issue of *Interchange* raise concerns about testing in Canada that are consistent with other above-mentioned studies that do not have a Canadian focus. Lam and Bordignon (2001), for example, surveyed Ontario English teachers on the use of a grade 9 exam to assess reading and writing. They found that the teachers were negative about the use of the exams, especially in terms of their effect on curriculum, teaching, and learning. Similarly, Froese-Germain (2001) commented that although the format of the testing programs may appear to be more relaxed than in other countries and jurisdictions, the exams have still come to be perceived as having a high-stakes mentality. Finally, Casas and Meaghan (2001) present evidence that, contrary to the explicit purposes cited in most exam administration manuals, the exam platform is used to rank students, which negatively affects low-income and minority students. These studies and theoretical reports collectively question the use of standardized testing programs in Canada.

Only one study conducted by the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (2000) could arguably be cited as indirectly supporting teachers' adjustment and acceptance of the testing movement. In this study, teachers were asked to complete a survey to ascertain their concerns related to a number of educational issues. Although the teachers surveyed expressed negativity toward the exam mandate, their concerns were less pronounced when compared with other contentious political changes in Ontario (i.e., funding criteria,

reduction of hours for educational support staff, professional development). This study may provide some evidence that teachers in at least some geographic regions are beginning to cope with a provincial exam mandate.

The Manitoba Context

Consistent with the trend in many other states and provinces in North America, provincial exams have been piloted and administered in Manitoba, Canada since 1996 (Manitoba Education and Training, 1999), and they have been referred to as Provincial Standards Tests. Other forms of government-imposed testing existed previously in Manitoba, but the tests were administered sporadically to individual children or to classrooms from varying grades. According to Manitoba Education and Youth (2003),

The standards tests connect curriculum, learning, teaching, and assessment and the test results help improve classroom instruction, student learning and school effectiveness. Results from standards test are prepared and distributed by the department in various types of reports to division/district offices and schools.

Although they were not intended to be a focus in this study, it is worth noting that some schools in Manitoba also participate in national and international testing programs such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA, Human Resources Development Canada, 2001) and the Youth In Transition Survey (YITS, Government of Canada, n.d.).

The Assessment and Evaluation Branch of the Department of Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth is responsible for the development, implementation, scoring, and reporting of the tests. According to former director of the Assessment and Evaluation branch Norman Mayer (2003), a small working group representing various stakeholder groups met with the Manitoba Minister of Education in 1994 to develop a process for the standard assessment of student achievement across the province. The delegation reviewed the programs of other forerunning provincial testing programs (especially the testing program in Alberta) before developing the made-in-Manitoba measure. Although it might have been cheaper to use an off-the-shelf, commercially based standardized test than a locally developed measure, Mayer reported that the team felt that the instruments should be developed to reflect the content and scope of the Manitoba curriculum. But given limited time and resources, government officials argued for a simple testing solution. Mayer felt that the pivotal event in swaying the Manitoba government toward the use of locally based curricular assessments occurred when US presidential advisor Robert Randolph spoke about the "Goals for 2000" platform in Manitoba. In this address, he advocated for well-developed, well-researched testing programs that require a commitment of time and money. Mayer speculated that Randolph's position as an advisor to the US president on educational reform was influential in swaying Manitoba governmental officials toward preferring the more expensive, curricular-based approach.

In 1999 the Provincial Standards Tests were completed by children in grades 3, 6, 9, and 12 (i.e., students aged 8, 11, 14, and 17 respectively) in mathematics and/or language arts or their French equivalents (Manitoba Education and Training, 1999). These test scores were both norm- and criterion-ref-

erenced, and they were used in the final evaluation of students, accounting for 20%, 25%, and 30% of a student's final grade in a course in grades 6, 9, and 12 respectively. In grade 3 the test scores were used for information purposes only and did not formally constitute part of students' final marks. According to Mayer (2003), the test program delegation wished to measure achievement in children as young as possible, include a reasonable spacing between each grade tested, and assess students at the endpoint of their public school tenure. Although he felt that they could have just as easily started testing in grade 4, the grade 3 level was chosen as it would allow four equal intervals of testing up to the grade 12 level. The tests were marketed to be administered at various stages in children's educational development and to measure the changes in educational knowledge over a period of years. However, the tests have often been perceived to assess the learning accomplishments and teaching of materials for the particular grade to which the exam is included as an endpoint. Using titles such as Mathematics 40S (i.e., grade 12) Provincial Examination contributes to the misconception that these tests evaluate knowledge learned in a particular grade.

Concerns over the purposes of the tests, the stress experienced by the education system, and issues pertaining to fairness raised by the public resulted in the exams being included as an election platform in the 1999 provincial election; and a change in government gave the grade 3 assessment a more authentic flavor based on critical competences in literacy and numeracy. The Manitoba government is studying the issue. For both the 2001-2002 and the 2002-2003 school years, provincially developed exams were available for use by schools for some core subject areas in grades 6 and 9, and the exams could be used in an assessment of a student for up to 20% or 25% of the student's final mark respectively. The grade 3 assessments of critical competences in literacy and numeracy have continued to be implemented with minor modifications. Finally, all grade 12 students in Manitoba complete competence-based exams worth 30% of their final mark in mathematics and language arts. But the topic of standardized testing in Manitoba continues to be politically contentious, as evidenced by the attendance and subsequent discussion at a recent debate on the pros and cons of testing at a conference sponsored by the Manitoba Teachers' Society (Job, 2003).

Consistent with the practices in other regions, the exams in Manitoba are prepared by a team of provincial specialists and educators who meet centrally in Winnipeg to develop the measures. Test items are piloted on earlier developed examination measures, and they are marked by a trained group of educators (Manitoba Education and Training, 1999). Students' individual scores are compared with their class mean and with the provincial mean for their grade, making them norm-referenced. Under some definitions, the 1999 tests can be considered standardized (Cangelosi, 2000; Popham, 1999). But others have (incorrectly, I believe) advocated that they are not standardized because they are criterion-referenced in relation to local curricular objectives (Cline-Abrahams, 1999; Madak, 1999).

Purpose of Current Study, Research Questions, and Hypotheses

The purpose of the current study was to examine teachers' attitudes toward the use of mandated government exams in Manitoba classrooms. The project was

undertaken by a university professor and three graduate students enrolled in a quantitative research methodology class. Because the graduate students were working as teachers in the education field, they contributed their first-hand knowledge and experience of the issues they perceived as important into a survey instrument. Given the heightened awareness of the Manitoba provincial standards tests in the public forum, a survey instrument was designed to describe and to understand the testing situation in Manitoba from the teachers' perspective. Teachers from three school divisions in Manitoba employed in diverse teaching environments were invited to complete a seven-page questionnaire. Some of the questions on the instrument targeted teachers who were involved in teaching courses with an exam as an endpoint. In the study four questions were addressed:

- What is the general attitude of teachers in regard to the use of the Provincial Standards Tests in Manitoba schools?
- Do teacher attitudes vary as a function of being directly exposed to and involved with the exams as an endpoint in the courses they teach?
- Are attitudinal differences dependent on the teaching experiences in rural versus urban environments?
- What strategies do teachers use to prepare their students for the mandated exams? Are certain strategies associated with better exam performance than others?

It would be beneficial to assess the attitudes of Canadian teachers working in a range of educational settings to determine the extent of their negativity toward the exams given the seemingly relatively relaxed cultural undertones associated with exam usage in Canada. It would also be useful to assess teachers' perceptions of the intended purpose of the exams, to determine how knowledge is being disseminated "through the pipe" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999) into classrooms and beyond. Understanding teachers' attitudes toward policy can determine how programs are administered in classrooms and marketed to the public. Teachers' attitudes have typically been found to influence the delivery and effectiveness of programs, including affecting the expectations for students (Alexander & Strain, 1978). Furthermore, with the inside advantage of working in a school environment, and teachers' direct, first-hand experience implementing educational policy (Lipsky, 1980, cited in Hess, Maranto, & Milliman, 2000), their attitudes toward an education-related issue are usually respected in the public eye. Teachers' attitudes can affect public perceptions of exam usage, either through influencing membership opinions in provincial and national unions or lobbyist groups (Hess et al., 2000), or through discussions with the voting public. Educational policy with disapproval from teachers has seldom produced improvements in schools (Elmore, Peterson, & McCarthy, 1996; Mirel, 1994; Pauly, 1991). Consequently, it seems to be difficult to propose and impose change in classrooms without the support of the classroom teacher. Given ongoing provincial reviews of current assessment practice in schools, this study may provide some timely information.

Consistent with earlier work (Herman et al., 1994), it is hypothesized that all teachers, regardless of their involvement with the exams, will be negative toward the use of the provincial tests in schools. Teachers may feel restricted by

the exams in that the exams limit teaching freedom, they place undue stress on stakeholders, and given a resource limited system, monies could be more efficiently spent elsewhere. Consistent with Basturk's (2002) survey of teachers from Ohio, teachers may feel that the tests do not provide any information that will be of use in their classrooms.

Furthermore, it is expected that those teachers involved in courses mandating an exam as an endpoint will be more negative compared with those who teach courses without an exam. These teachers may not be aware that the exams are designed to measure progress for a cluster of grades to establish competence. Thus they may feel additional pressure to conform to the curriculum using traditional approaches, teach for the test, and feel more personally involved when a child or classroom does not achieve high performance on an assessment.

Given the unique characteristics associated with working in a rural environment (e.g., organizational overload, limited infrastructure and professional resources, involvement expectations, limited academic programming, Hughes & Fagan, 1985; Renihan & Renihan, 1991), teachers employed in these schools may feel that the exams do not capture the essence of learning and instruction in a rural setting. Consequently, consistent with the research of one earlier study (Basturk, 2002), it is hypothesized that rurally employed teachers will be more opposed to the use of the mandated exams, as they will feel disadvantaged given the nature of their school setting compared with their urban counterparts.

Finally, it is hypothesized that teachers who are involved in courses with an exam as an endpoint will be proactive in terms of preparing their students in the best way possible. Consequently, when asked about exam preparation, this group of teachers will report using a wide variety of strategies to help their students score highly on the test. The measures may include teaching approaches consistent with the purposes of the mandated tests such as covering a wide range of the curriculum in depth, but they may also include other questionable approaches such as teaching to the test. Because the exams purport to be criterion-referenced according to the Manitoba provincial curricula, it is hypothesized that the teachers who report in-depth coverage of the curriculum in their courses will on average, by their own self-report, obtain satisfyingly high classroom provincial exam results.

Method

Participants

Teaching staff (i.e., classroom teachers, resource teachers, guidance counselors, and teaching principals) from three school divisions in the south central and southwestern geographical area of Manitoba were asked to complete a mail-back questionnaire. Two of the school divisions were considered to serve rural populations with students living in hamlets, villages, small towns, Hutterite colonies, and farms. The third school division served a small urban center of approximately 50,000 people, but its catchment area also included three small neighboring communities. In the two small rural school divisions, all teachers were invited to participate. In the urban school division, 10 (out of 23) schools were randomly selected. The results of this random drawing included two high schools, one middle school, one elementary school with a French immersion

education stream, and six schools with elementary and middle school programming. All teachers from these randomly selected schools were invited to participate. All schools participating from the large urban school division were located in the urban center.

The study included 133 teachers (38 men, 76 women, and 19 participants who did not identify their sex), with slightly fewer than half (i.e., $n=56$) of those teachers working in an urban setting. Furthermore, 57 teachers (i.e., 43%) reported that they would be teaching a course with an exam as an endpoint this year. The 133 teachers represented a response rate of 34%. This percentage is generally consistent with the response rates of teachers reported in other published work (Hess et al., 2000; Moore, 1994). Consistent with the demographic characteristics of teachers in Manitoba, the average age range of the participants was from 40 to 49 years, and most of the participants had completed a four-year Bachelor of Education as their highest level of schooling. The teachers were employed in diverse teaching environments (i.e., urban core and suburban areas, small rural towns and villages, and Hutterite colonies). The sample of teachers was collectively involved in instructing all subject areas in the early years (kindergarten to grade 3), middle years (grades 4-8), and/or senior years (grades 9-12) in either English, second-language immersion, French, or English second-language programs. Specifically, the sample included 34 (25.8%) early years teachers, 21 (15.9%) middle years teachers, 36 (27.3%) senior years teachers, nine teachers (6.8%) who reported teaching at all grade levels (e.g., in subject areas such as music, computers, physical education, or resource), 18 teachers (13.6%) who taught at combined early-middle or middle-senior levels, and 15 teachers (10.6%) who did not identify the grade levels they taught. Data from one completed survey was not included in the data analysis as the participant did not give written consent.

Materials

Depending on their experience and involvement with the provincial exams, teachers were asked to complete up to seven pages of questions on the survey instrument. A copy of the questionnaire is included in the Appendix. The questionnaire was divided into four sections, and teachers completed the parts of the survey that were relevant to their teaching experience. Section 1 was completed by all teachers and was used to obtain demographic information on the sample. Section 2 included both open-ended and selected response items to determine the experiences of teachers who had already taught a course with an exam as an endpoint. In section 3 teachers who were currently teaching a course where there would be a provincial exam were asked to comment on the strategies they were using to prepare their students for the exam. They also completed five-point Likert-scale items that were used to assess any concerns they had about the exams. For example, they rated the extent to which they strongly agreed, agreed, were neutral, disagreed, or strongly disagreed that "the testing evaluates my teaching ability." In the final section, all teachers were asked to complete some open-ended questions assessing the purposes of the testing, their opinions on the usefulness of the assessment measure, exemptions practices, and strategies they would use if involved in a course with a provincial exam as an endpoint. All teachers also used the same five-point Likert scale to assess their attitudes toward specific issues heightened during

the implementation of the exams (assessment of teaching ability, waste of government spending, promoting differentiated instruction). There was also a place for teachers to include additional comments at the end of each section.

The survey questions were developed by students as part of the requirements of a graduate research methods course. They were piloted by a small group of practicing teachers. Most questions on the survey were adopted from earlier research by taking similarly worded questions from other studies (e.g., Herman et al., 1994) aimed to assess teachers' knowledge of the purposes for the testing (e.g., Why do you think that provincial tests are used in Manitoba?) the effects of the testing on the classroom environment (e.g., To what extent does provincial testing promote differentiated instruction?); and the usefulness of the testing in providing feedback to stakeholders (e.g., Are provincial exams a good measure of student ability?).

Because the questionnaire identified various groups of teachers (i.e., those directly involved in courses with provincial exams, those who had already experienced teaching a course with an exam as an endpoint, etc.), subsequent analyses could focus on comparing attitudes across teachers with these differential experiences.

Procedure

The study was nonpartisan (i.e., completed by a university professor and graduate students enrolled in a graduate-level educational research methods class). The study was completed during a three-month period in the winter to coincide with the university course. Principals of participating schools were contacted by phone and informed of the goals of the study. Pending their support, discussions focused on the preferred way to distribute the questionnaires in their school. In all cases the principal mentioned the study at a staff meeting, and questionnaires were distributed to teachers (either at a staff meeting or via the teachers' mailboxes). Teachers were asked to complete a 20-minute survey assessing their attitudes toward the provincial testing in Manitoba. Teachers were instructed to read the questions carefully and to provide written responses on the survey sheet. Approximately 10% of teachers returned the questionnaires directly by mail in a preaddressed stamped envelope to the researcher, but most preferred to return their questionnaires in supplied sealed envelopes to a drop-off box in their school. When the survey response rate was low in a particular school, principals were contacted and asked to solicit volunteers again. A reminder letter and additional survey forms with preaddressed stamped envelopes were supplied to principals. A researcher also attended a regional principals' meeting in one of the school divisions to encourage participation. However, no direct contact was made with the teachers themselves. These attempts to improve the participant response rate were marginally successful and resulted in only a handful of additional surveys being returned. Because timelines were approaching the spring break period, where teachers probably had other commitments (e.g., report cards, end of term wrap-up), no other methods of recruitment were employed.

Where necessary, data from the surveys were coded and subjected to statistical analyses using a statistical software package (i.e., Statistical Package for the Social Sciences or SPSS). Coding was conducted on questions to quantify

respondents' educational background, current teaching assignment, and their perceptions on the purpose of the testing. To ensure coding was conducted reliably, ratings from three raters who coded 25% of the transcripts were compared. Percentage agreement among the three raters ranged from 82% to 98%. Disagreements were resolved through discussion. Following the coding, scores on each of the Likert-scale questions were tallied, aggregated, and reported in terms of percentage: *strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree*.

Four sets of analyses were conducted to answer the four research questions proposed in the Introduction. Specifically, descriptive statistics were used to report teachers' general attitudes regarding the provincial testing. One-way Analyses of Variance (ANOVAs) were then used to make group comparisons between (a) attitudes of teachers who taught courses with exams as an endpoint to their grade level with those who did not instruct a course with an exam as an endpoint; and (b) teachers working in a rural versus those employed in urban settings. Finally, Pearson product-moment correlational analyses were used to examine the relationship between the strategies used by teachers to prepare their students for the exams, and their self-reported classroom average final exam results. Responses from the open-ended sections of the survey were used to expand on and to support information obtained during the quantitative questions. A thematic analysis was used to identify patterns across participants' responses.

Results

The results section is divided into four parts to provide information on the four research questions: (a) general attitudes of teachers regarding provincial testing, (b) comparisons between those teachers involved in courses with mandated exams versus those teaching courses unassociated with a final exam, (c) attitudinal differences between teachers working in rural versus urban settings, and (d) the relationship between exam results and strategies reportedly used to prepare students. Because preliminary analyses revealed no gender differences or attitudinal differences across the two rural school divisions, the gender data and data from the two rural school divisions were collapsed in all subsequent analyses.

General Attitudes of All Teachers

Table 1 contains the frequency of teachers' responses to general questions on the use of standards testing in the province. Survey results indicated that 66.2% of all teachers disagreed to some extent (i.e., either strongly disagreed or disagreed) that the exams should be used in their current form as a means of assessing student achievement. Qualitative responses clarified some of the concerns felt by teachers. One grade 1-2 teacher stated, "if it is our belief that learning is developmental, then administering one test to everybody discriminates against learning styles and readiness of students for those tasks." Furthermore, one senior years high school teacher noted, "the stress put on the teachers and the students is tremendous. Other circumstances like the lack of time, curriculum changes, etc. added to the stress factor make it an unreliable test." One grade 3 teacher commented on unscrupulous testing practices: "I have heard rumors of some teachers prompting students during tests, review-

Table 1
 Summary of Teacher Ratings ($N=133$) to Questionnaire Items (in %) Indicating Their Opinions on the Use of Provincial Exams in Schools

	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>No Data</i>
Use in current form	25.6	40.6	12.0	17.3	0.8	3.8
Use at every grade	53.4	30.8	4.5	6.8	1.5	3.0
Use in senior years only	16.5	33.8	19.5	21.8	2.3	6.0
Waste of spending	0.0	15.8	15.0	30.1	33.8	5.3
Identifies have/have not schools	3.8	15.0	25.6	35.3	15.8	4.5
Assesses student ability	27.1	39.1	14.3	15.8	0.0	3.8
Assesses teacher ability	45.1	34.6	8.3	9.0	0.0	3.0
Discriminates ethnic minorities	0.8	9.8	32.3	33.1	18.8	5.3
Inhibits "learning for learning's sake"	1.5	12.8	12.8	49.6	19.5	3.8
Promotes differentiated instruction	31.6	34.6	21.8	6.8	1.5	3.8
Discriminates poor homes	1.5	15.0	29.3	36.8	12.8	4.5

ing in the middle of the two-day testing period, and not abiding by rules to take down displays that kids can use during the test. These all will affect the validity of scores." Some teachers also addressed the reliability of the test. For example, one respondent noted that there were "too many variables that cannot be controlled to make the test truly a valuable indicator of a student's, teacher's, or school's level of achievement."

Teachers were especially opposed to the use of the examinations in the primary grades (i.e., kindergarten to grade 4, $M=1.69$ out of 5), but more respondents tended to agree that the exams could be used to assess performance in subject areas taught in secondary years ($M=2.58$). Again qualitative responses provided further clarification and detail on these questions. One early years teacher indicated that the tests "have no place in early years where children's progress is better marked on a continuum." Another respondent noted that the tests should not be used in the early years because the "testing situation for young students is so opposite to the environment that they're used to, the results are not valid."

Of all the teachers surveyed, 63.9% felt that the exams were a waste of government spending, 51.1% agreed that the exams identified have and have-not schools, and 51.9% indicated that the testing discriminates against ethnic minorities.

One early years teacher indicated that "not all children enter school with the same academic background. Some not having attended nursery school, having not the enrichment of being read to (would be adversely affected on the test)." A senior high teacher commented, "they have spent 9 million dollars at the Assessment Branch this year alone. What a colossal waste of resources." Finally, one grade 8 teacher stated that the process of writing exams "is a tremendous waste of educational resources. Teachers' assessments can give you better information for far less money."

Although they represent the minority view, it is important to note that some teachers were in favor of the standardized testing. In line with this view, many of these teachers commented on the need both for increasing standards and for improving uniformity in teaching practices across the province. In their qualitative responses, testing proponents advocated, "we need a system of determining whether curriculum delivery is effective" and "there is some value in using a standardized curriculum and standardized testing is probably a necessary measure in doing that." Furthermore, some respondents suggested benefits for students: "it's good for students to have a way of comparing themselves to their peers throughout the province," and testing is helpful "to provide a level playing field for entrance into university or colleges." Finally, one respondent indicated that the provincial testing "improves the quality (of courses)—standards have to be met."

Attitudes of Teachers with an Exam as an Endpoint to their Grade Compared With All Other Teachers

Table 2 illustrates the mean responses and standard deviations of teachers to general questions on the provincial testing program as a function of their involvement with courses containing a final exam. ANOVA results revealed significant attitudinal differences between teachers who instructed courses with endpoint examinations (i.e., math and language arts teachers in grades 3, 6, 9, and 12) versus those who did not have courses with exams (i.e., all other teachers in the sample). Contrary to earlier research and hypotheses, teachers who taught students in grades with exams as an immediate endpoint reported fewer negative concerns ($M=2.53$ out of 5) than their less directly affected colleagues [$M = 2.10$, $F(1, 126)=4.76$, $p<.031$]. Furthermore, teachers who did not instruct courses with exams as an immediate endpoint were more likely to agree that the exams were a poor assessment of student ability ($M=2.07$ out of 5) and that they inhibited "learning for learning's sake" ($M=3.87$ out of 5) compared with their colleagues involved in courses with mandated exams as an endpoint [M 's = 2.46 and 3.51, respectively; $F_{\text{student ability}}(1, 126)= 4.21$, $p<.042$ and $F_{\text{learning}}(1, 126) = 3.89$, $p<.05$]. Qualitative comments from teachers involved in a grade and subject with an assigned exam were cautiously optimistic: "the students worked to the best of their ability" and "I will try to cover the curriculum and give them [the students] a sense of what to expect. I don't think there's much more I can do." However, teachers involved in the implementation of the exams commented on the stress they felt: "I would like to change grades! ... [there is] extreme pressure to teach, assess and prepare students for these tests." Furthermore, one grade 3 teacher noted that she would like to change her "attitude [from] feeling overwhelmed to feeling more comfortable with my teaching and knowing that standardized testing is now a part of my teaching job."

Urban Versus Rural Comparisons

Table 3 contains teachers' mean responses and corresponding standard deviations to the questions on provincial testing as a function of working in an urban versus a rural school division. Significant differences were noted between urban and rural teaching populations. Although all responses were generally negative, rural teachers were more likely to report that the provincial test

Table 2
Comparing the Opinions of Teachers Involved in Courses with Provincial Exams With Those of Other Teachers on the Use of Provincial Exams in Schools

Question Asked	Teachers Involved in Courses with Exams			Other Teachers		
	<i>n</i>	Mean	SD	<i>n</i>	Mean	SD
Use in current form*	41	2.53	1.09	87	2.10	1.02
Use at every grade	41	1.63	.96	88	1.70	.96
Use in senior years only	40	2.63	1.07	85	2.54	1.12
Waste of spending	40	3.73	1.11	86	3.93	1.07
Identifies have/have not schools	40	3.50	1.18	87	3.45	1.02
Assesses student ability*	41	2.46	1.14	87	2.07	.95
Assesses teacher ability	41	1.83	.97	88	1.80	.94
Discriminates ethnic minorities	40	3.78	.95	86	3.56	.94
Inhibit "learning for learning's sake"*	41	3.51	1.19	87	3.87	.85
Promotes differentiated instruction	41	2.22	1.01	87	2.02	.98
Discriminates poor homes	40	3.53	.97	87	3.44	.96

*Denotes significant group differences in opinion at the .05 alpha level.

results were a poor measure of teacher ability ($M= 1.96$) and that the testing inhibits differential instruction procedures ($M= 2.30$) than urban teachers [$M_s = 1.63$ and 1.77 respectively; $F_{\text{teacher ability}}(1, 126)= 4.01, p<.047$ and $F_{\text{instruction}}(1, 125) = 10.22, p<.002$]. However, urban teachers were more likely to agree that the testing discriminates against ethnic minorities ($M=3.85$) than their rural colleagues [$M=3.46, F(1, 123) = 5.63, p<.019$]. Some teachers specifically commented on their concerns over regional disparities in the qualitative questions. For example, one respondent noted, "there are too many variables and regional differences to make standardized tests fair." In addition, one French immersion early years teacher suggested that "different circumstances require different assessment measures (e.g., special needs, ESL, Hutterite colonies)." A middle years math teacher suggested that "our school is too small, the mixed classes affect results, and local administration and [the] province use results to compare schools."

Exam Preparation Strategies

Teachers who were involved in a course with a mandated exam were asked to select (from a range of choices) the strategies that they used to prepare their students. Most selected a number of strategies from the list, including: covering a wide variety of course topics in the curriculum, covering certain curricula materials in depth, reviewing old exam questions, and developing practice tests that were similar to the testing format. In addition, some teachers reported holding information sessions for parents, discussing various test-taking strategies and studying techniques with their students. One respondent commented that he conducted "evening tutorials for two weeks prior [to the exam, and that many co-workers offered] sympathy for having to go through the wringer and be identified."

Table 3
Comparing the Opinions of Teachers Employed in Rural versus Urban Settings on the Use of Provincial Exams in Schools

Question Asked	Rural Teachers			Urban Teachers		
	<i>n</i>	Mean	SD	<i>n</i>	Mean	SD
Use in current form	71	2.38	1.06	56	2.09	1.05
Use at every grade	72	1.75	.99	56	1.61	.93
Use in senior years only	70	2.63	1.08	54	2.52	1.13
Waste of spending	69	3.72	1.10	56	4.02	1.05
Identifies have/have not schools	70	3.34	1.14	56	3.61	.97
Assesses student ability	71	2.25	1.04	56	2.14	1.02
Assesses teacher ability*	72	1.96	.98	56	1.63	.86
Discriminates ethnic minorities*	70	3.46	.99	55	3.85	.85
Inhibits "learning for learning's sake"	72	3.62	.98	55	3.91	.95
Promotes differentiated instruction*	71	2.30	.95	56	1.77	.89
Discriminates poor homes	71	3.41	.95	55	3.53	1.00

*Denotes significant rural/urban difference in opinion at the .05 alpha level.

Table 4 contains the frequency of strategies reportedly used by grade 3 teachers (in percentages) to prepare their students for the provincial exams, and the correlation of those strategies with exam performance. (Only grade 3 data were analyzed here due to low sample sizes at other grades). Analyses correlating strategy use with teacher-reported exam results at the grade 3 level revealed that many of strategies teachers used to prepare students were positively related to exam results. However, only one strategy met statistical significance. Specifically, the discussion of studying techniques was positively correlated with teacher-reported exam results at the grade 3 level ($r=.5948$, $p<.001$).

Discussion

This study examined teachers' attitudes on the implementation of government-mandated exams in Manitoba. The study sought to determine the perceptions of a diverse Canadian teaching population (i.e., those employed in urban and rural settings, representing all grades, subjects, and most of the programs taught in the Manitoba school system; and those who are directly involved in a course with a mandated exam compared with those who are not) on what seems to be a politically controversial issue across the country. In addition, given concerns over educational accountability, teachers were surveyed on the strategies they were using to prepare their students in order to achieve high exam scores. This article offers a unique Manitoba perspective on the topic of government-mandated standardized tests.

The findings are generally consistent with earlier research on other global testing trends, revealing that teachers' attitudes toward mandated-government testing in Manitoba are very negative (Basturk, 2002; Herman et al., 1994; Lam & Bordignon, 2001; Moore, 1994; Smith, 1991). These Canadian teachers viewed the mandated government testing as a waste of money, and they felt it was a poor assessment of student ability. Furthermore, many teachers wrote addi-

Table 4
 Frequency of Preparation Strategies Reported by Grade 3 Teachers and
 Resulting Correlations between Exam Preparation Strategies
 and Exam Results

<i>Exam Preparation Strategy</i>	<i>Frequency (%)</i>	<i>Exam Result Correlation</i>
Deep curriculum coverage	100	-.0524
Time management	92.3	.0535
Wide range of topics	84.6	-.2304
Practice tests	84.6	-.0765
Reviewed old exams	76.9	.3425
Test Anxiety	61.5	.1652
Multiple-choice strategies	46.2	.1752
Parent information sessions	46.2	.1974
Taught to the exam	46.2	-.0801
Studying techniques	38.5	.5948*
Study groups	30.8	.0969
Other	15.4	-.1257
Extra help after school	7.7	.2065

*Denotes significance at the .05 alpha level.

tional comments addressing the undue stress placed on students and teachers and the concern that they felt pressure to teach to the test. They were also concerned that the assessment and evaluation of the school system should not be completed at the expense of the students. These concerns raised by the teachers increase the likelihood that there is some pollution associated with the test scores, thereby questioning the validity of the examination process. Thus consistent with the findings from other research (Froese-Germain, 2001; Lam & Bordignon, 2001; Lingenfelter, 2003), the current findings undermine political attempts as stated by Manitoba's Department of Education (i.e., Manitoba Education and Training, 1999) to use the exams for purposes of establishing educational accountability.

Although efforts have been made by the provincial government to link the standardized assessment of student performance to all grades up to and including the grade where an exam falls (Cline-Abrahams, 1999), Manitoba teachers clearly perceive the exams to be assessing performance at the specific grade (i.e., grades 3, 6, 9, and 12) and subject tested (i.e., language arts and mathematics). This attitude has created a sense of sympathy for those teachers involved in courses with exams. It also builds on a false sense of an us-versus-them mentality among teachers in schools who either feel connected to a grade with an exam as an endpoint, and thus responsible for exam preparation, or not. This mentality goes against current trends to develop a sense of community in schools (Epstein, 1995). It also poses problems in using the exams to establish educational accountability, because only the teachers who have the exam as an endpoint to their grade are perceived to be responsible for the results of the testing, instead of all teachers. Finally, if teachers perceive this discrepancy between tested and non-tested grade levels, and they have been

cited as a source of information for the public, students and parents may have the same segmented viewpoint about exam administration (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999).

Surprisingly, the negative viewpoint regarding the use of standardized testing in schools was most prevalent in teachers who had little to no direct experience with the mandated exams. Consistent with one study (Basturk, 2002), teachers who have taught courses with endpoint province-wide exams may have been exposed to more training sessions and inservicing to learn the purpose and procedures of the exams than those less directly affected. Furthermore, their direct experience in teaching courses with exams may have allowed the teachers with mandated exams in their courses to become accepting and tolerant of the exams and develop strategies to cope with the exam reality. Teachers with mandated exams in their courses may also have learned that the exams do not seriously affect the structure and content of their classrooms.

Alternatively, considering the theory of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957), teachers instructing courses with mandated exams may have changed their attitudes and perceptions to maintain consistency between their thoughts and actions. Their thoughts are still negative, but they have shifted toward being more tolerant and accepting of the exams than their less-involved colleagues. Thus coping with the seemingly unchangeable reality of having exams as endpoints to their courses, these teachers may have adjusted their thoughts, consciously or not, to feel less negative about them.

Nonetheless, this contradictory finding that teachers more involved with the exams were less negative than their colleagues is indicative that more research is needed to understand the complicated process involved in terms of introducing an exam mandate and influencing teacher perceptions. In-depth studies, perhaps using an interview format, with teachers who are involved (and less involved) with the exam mandate across diverse teaching environments may provide further information on the experience of teaching in settings with mandatory exam requirements.

Consistent with some earlier work (Basturk, 2002), attitudinal differences also occurred between urban and rural teachers, and these groups of teachers seemed to be concerned with circumstances akin to their teaching environments. On average both groups of teachers found the testing regime to be unfair, but for different reasons. Urban teachers were more concerned than their rural counterparts about testing ethnic-minority students due to the high population of these in their classes.

Conversely, rural teachers usually involved in small communities with multigraded classrooms were concerned about their teaching reputations in the community and their ability to deliver courses effectively using differentiated instruction techniques. Many teachers commented on how the exams were being used formally and informally to assess their teaching ability and the relative performance of each school in the province and/or school division. These findings suggest that the government should be sensitive to the cultural and regional disparities that exist in the province in terms of establishing accountability through mandated testing programs. Teachers' reports of their classroom experience in this study substantiate the concerns raised by academics concerned with accountability (Popham, 2001) that there may be

ethical issues associated with the administration of one test to a diverse population.

Consistent with earlier work, teachers use a wide variety of strategies suggested in the testing literature (Herman & Golan, 1993; Hoyos, 1996) to cope with the exam mandate. These findings may suggest that teachers are responding to the government's attempt to establish accountability by preparing students in the best known way. When asked to identify the strategies used to prepare students, most teachers chose all or most of the strategies listed on the questionnaire and even added some of their own. The fact that all teachers are using a wide range of strategies may account for the general lack of findings that certain preparation strategies are more important than others for ensuring good exam performance. However, one strategy to develop good studying technique was found to be correlated significantly with self-reported positive exam results at the grade 3 level. Consequently, in addition to the myriad strategies teachers reported using to help students prepare for the test, instruction on metacognitive skills and studying techniques may have positive benefits as early as the primary grades.

It should be noted that this research was conducted at a specific time when provincial testing was considered an important issue in classrooms and staff-rooms in schools across Manitoba. The relationships among the variables studied in this research may vary with the local situation in schools or with changes in the provincial political climate. Nonetheless, the fact that many teachers have continued to voice strong concerns about changes in educational policy such as the implementation of government-imposed exams suggests that more research is needed to determine the efficacy of these government-mandated decisions.

This study has implications for improving the implementation of standardized assessment techniques such as provincial tests in Canadian classrooms. First, it is important to ensure that teachers are properly trained in areas of assessment and evaluation to ensure that their opinions about assessment practices are current and informed. For example, clarifying differences in the definition and categories of a standardized test would be beneficial. Furthermore, establishing methods to foster teamwork among colleagues (such as eliminating a specific grade level from the title of the exams) could alleviate concerns that testing focuses on a particular grade or teacher in a school. Although some of this information could be provided in professional development sessions, mandatory course work at the university level for pre-service teachers seems important in enhancing general understanding. Some work has shown that teachers by their own report feel limited in their assessment background (Impara, Plake, & Fager, 1998). Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth has provided some training on the provincial exam mandate, and an assessment team was formed at one point to develop a handbook on current assessment practices. But more research is needed to understand the process of disseminating provincial policy knowledge to stakeholders accurately.

Second, educational stakeholders need to consider the effect of the exams in a specific environment. For example, given some of the teachers' concerns about regional disparities, it may not be appropriate to be using the same standardized testing format to assess student achievement in all geographic

areas. In support of this view, Worthen and Leopold (1992) have urged policymakers to consider more authentic assessments instead of standardized tests. Further research is needed to determine the effect of government-mandated testing in nontraditionally tested areas such as rural communities or classes involving large ethnic minority populations, especially when the exams constitute a proportion of the student's final grade. At a minimum, some pooling of strategies used and information and resources required (e.g., marking criteria) to optimize a student's exam result are needed.

Finally, if the exams continue to be included as an assessment device for students, it is important that policymakers continue to educate stakeholders on the meaning of the tests. For teachers, inservices are important to continue to provide guidance on the purposes of these exams and to educate them on effective methods for improving student performance. These inservices should be conducted for the teaching population at large, and not just those who are perceived to be directly affected by the exam mandate. For parents and the general public, it is important to clarify the goals of the testing and the meaning of a test score. Finally, for students, it would be helpful to provide province-wide guidelines for studying and test-taking (such as the list of relevant vocabulary words and the writing samples provided to students from the Government of Alberta (n.d.)), to maximize their potential of achieving a positive exam experience.

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Appendix
Opinions on Provincial Testing Questionnaire

Instructions: Answer the following questions. If you require additional space to respond, use the back of each page. If there are questions you find objectionable, place an "x" on the question number and leave the question out. Thanks for your cooperation!

Once you have completed the questionnaire, return it to the envelope, along with the signed consent form, and

- 1) Mail it to the address on the brown envelope -OR-
- 2) Return it to the office in your school, to be picked up by research personnel

Demographic Information

Sex: (please circle one) M F

Age Range: (please select one box)

Under 30 years	30-39 years	40-49 years	50-59 years	60 yrs and over
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Education: (please circle all that apply)

B.A.	B.Ed.	B.Sc.	M.A.	M.Ed.	M.Sc.	MaSc.	Ph.D.	Ed.D.	Other
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Years of **full time** teaching experience:

0-1 years	2-5 years	6-10 years	11-19 years	20 + years
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Your current level of satisfaction with your current employment situation:

<i>Very Satisfied</i>	<i>Satisfied</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Unsatisfied</i>	<i>Very Unsatisfied</i>
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Location of Current School:

Urban area (e.g., Brandon)	Urban suburb (e.g., Brandon)	<i>Town</i> (e.g., Souris)	<i>First Nations</i> School	Hutterite Colony
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Size of current school:

<200 total students	201-499 students	500-1000 students	> 1000 students
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Size of **largest class** taught this term:

1- 10 students	10-20 students	20-30 students	31 or more students
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Size of class you teach **most frequently** this term:

1- 10 students	10-20 students	20-30 students	31 or more students
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Instructional Program taught in the majority of your classes:

<i>English</i>	<i>Francais</i>	<i>French Immersion</i>	<i>ESL</i>	<i>Other</i>
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Current grade(s) and subjects taught this term (e.g., grade 4 French): _____

Grades(s) and subjects taught in previous years: _____

Provincial Testing Questions

Section A: To be completed by teachers who have already taught courses with a mandated provincial exam in Manitoba

1. Have you taught any classes that have been required to write a provincial exam in your subject area in previous years? **Yes** **No** (circle one)

If you answered **No** to this question, please go on to answer the questions in Section B.

2. Which courses and grade level(s) completed the exam? _____

3. In what program were the course(s) requiring the exam offered (e.g., English, Francais, French Immersion)? _____
4. How did you prepare students to write the exam? (Circle all that apply).
 - a) Covered certain curricula materials in depth
 - b) Covered a wide range of course topics in the curriculum
 - c) Discussed studying techniques
 - d) Discussed test taking strategies for answering multiple choice questions
 - e) Discussed test taking strategies for time management
 - f) Discussed strategies for coping with test anxiety
 - g) Developed practice tests that were similar to the testing format
 - h) Held information sessions for parents
 - i) Held study group sessions
 - j) Provided extra help after school
 - k) "Taught for the exam"
 - l) Reviewed old exam questions
 - m) Other strategies used: _____
5. Choose the five strategies you feel are **most important** in ensuring success on a provincial exam. Place a number from 1 to 5 indicating the order of importance (1= very important to 5 = somewhat important). Choose only **5** strategies!
 - a) Covered certain curricula materials in depth
 - b) Covered a wide range of course topics in the curriculum
 - c) Discussed studying techniques
 - d) Discussed test taking strategies for answering multiple choice questions
 - e) Discussed test taking strategies for time management
 - f) Discussed strategies for coping with test anxiety
 - g) Developed practice tests that were similar to the testing format
 - h) Held information sessions for parents
 - i) Held study group sessions
 - j) Provided extra help after school
 - k) "Taught for the exam"
 - l) Reviewed old exam questions
 - m) Other: _____

6. Did you give students the opportunity to earn extra marks in other portions of the course, in the event they scored poorly on the provincial exam? **Yes No** (please circle one) Why or why not? _____

7. What were your classroom provincial testing results? _____

8. Were you pleased with the results? Why or why not? _____

9. Did you receive feedback from the school administration (e.g., school trustee, superintendent, principal) regarding the test scores of your class? **Yes No**. (please circle one). Please comment on the positive or negative nature of the comment: _____

10. Did you receive feedback from parents regarding the test scores of your class? **Yes No**. (please circle one). Please comment on the positive or negative nature of the comment: _____

11. Did you receive feedback from fellow teachers and staff regarding the test scores of your class? **Yes No**. (please circle one). Please comment on the positive or negative nature of the comment: _____

12. What will you change if you are required to teach another course where there is a provincial exam? _____

Additional comments: _____

Section B: To be completed by all teachers who are currently teaching a course scheduled to write a mandated provincial exam. Please answer these questions with respect to the design of that class.

1. Will your class be required to complete a provincial exam for a course you are teaching this year? **Yes No** (please circle one).

If you answered **No** to the above question, please go on to the questions in Section C.

2. Which courses and grade level(s) will be required to complete the exam? _____

3. How are you preparing your students to write the exam? (Circle all that apply).

- a) Covering certain curricula materials in depth
- b) Covering a wide range of course topics in the curriculum
- c) Discussing studying techniques
- d) Discussing test taking strategies for answering multiple choice questions
- e) Discussing test taking strategies for time management
- f) Discussing strategies for coping with test anxiety
- g) Developing practice tests that were similar to the testing format
- h) Holding study group sessions
- i) Providing extra help after school
- j) "Teaching for the exam"
- k) Reviewing old exam questions
- l) Other strategies used: _____

4. Do you feel your students will be well-prepared for the exam? **Yes No** (please circle one). Please explain: _____

5. What concerns do you have for your students as they prepare to write the provincial exam? (circle all that apply)

- a) Weak basic skills in the subject domain
- b) Slow to acquire new knowledge
- c) Poor study habits
- d) Very anxious about writing the exam
- e) Poor test taking abilities
- f) Difficulty following instructions
- g) Difficulty generalizing knowledge
- h) Classroom management concerns
- i) Significant learning problems may interfere with exam
- j) Significant emotional and behavioral problems may interfere with exam
- k) May fail course
- l) Does not assess students' true knowledge of subject domain

Other concerns for students: _____

6. What concerns do you have as a teacher given that your class is required to complete the provincial exam? Please shade in the box that most accurately describes how you feel about the following sentences. You may add additional comments at the end of the page.

a) I do not have enough time to teach the curriculum thoroughly.

<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>
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b) I have limited resources.

<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>
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c) I am spending a lot of time preparing for this course because of the provincial exam.

<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>
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d) The provincial exam evaluates my teaching ability.

<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>
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e) The testing evaluates the abilities of my students.

<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>
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f) I think my class will do well on the exam.

<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>
--------------------------	-----------------	----------------	--------------	-----------------------

g) I will lose my job if students perform poorly on the exam.

<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>
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h) Fellow teachers will razz me if my students perform poorly on the exam.

<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>
--------------------------	-----------------	----------------	--------------	-----------------------

i) I want to help students prepare for the exam, but I don't know how.

<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>
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j) Parents will blame me if students perform poorly.

<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>
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k) The school administration will blame me if students perform poorly.

<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>
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l) The testing evaluates my teaching ability.

<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>
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Additional comments: _____

Section C: To be completed by all teachers.

1. Which one of the following do you think is the best way of judging the academic progress of students in elementary school? (Please circle one letter)
 - a) The individual teacher should have sole responsibility for making assessments
 - b) Assessments should be based on tests set jointly by teachers in the school
 - c) Provincial tests should be used to supplement teacher-made tests
 - d) Provincial tests should be most important
 - e) Don't know

2. Which one of the following do you think is the best way of judging the academic progress of students in high school? (Please circle one letter)
 - a) The individual teacher should have sole responsibility for making assessments
 - b) Assessments should be based on tests set jointly by teachers in the school
 - c) Provincial tests should be used to supplement teacher-made tests
 - d) Provincial tests should be most important
 - e) Don't know

3. Why do you think provincial tests are used in Manitoba? _____

4. Do you think they should be used as an assessment measure? Yes or No (please circle one) Why or why not? _____

5. How do you think provincial testing affects the quality of courses offered? _____

6. How would you change your teaching if you taught a course with a mandated provincial exam? _____

7. In what circumstances should a student be exempt from writing the provincial exam? _____

8. Please shade in the box that describes how you feel about the following sentences.

a) Provincial testing should be used in its current form as a means of assessing student performance.

<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>
--------------------------	-----------------	----------------	--------------	-----------------------

b) Provincial testing should be used at every grade to assess student performance.

<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>
--------------------------	-----------------	----------------	--------------	-----------------------

c) Provincial testing should be used only in the senior years to assess student performance.

<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>
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d) Provincial testing is a waste of government spending.

<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>
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e) Provincial testing identifies the “have” and “have not” schools.

<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>
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f) Provincial test results are a good assessment of student ability.

<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>
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g) Provincial test results are a good measure of teacher ability.

<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>
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h) Provincial testing discriminates against ethnic minority students.

<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>
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i) Provincial testing inhibits “learning for learning’s sake.”

<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>
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j) Provincial testing promotes differentiated instruction.

<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>
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k) Provincial testing discriminates against children from poor homes.

<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Strongly Agree</i>
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Additional comments: _____

Thank you for taking the time to complete our survey!
 Once you have completed the survey, please place it in the supplied envelope, along with the signed consent form. You can return the form to the office at your school, or mail it to the address on the envelope.