

**INTERPRETING THE FRASER INSTITUTE RANKING OF  
SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN BRITISH COLUMBIA: A CRITICAL  
DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF HOW THE MECHANICS OF SYMBOLIC CAPITAL  
MOBILIZATION SHAPES, MANAGES, AND AMPLIFIES VISIBILITY  
ASYMMETRIES BETWEEN SCHOOLS AND SCHOOL SYSTEMS**

by

Michael John Simmonds

M.Ed., Columbia University, 1998

M.A., McGill University, 1991

Diploma in Secondary Science Education, McGill University, 1989

B.P.E., University of New Brunswick, 1985

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

in

The Faculty of Graduate Studies

(Educational Leadership and Policy)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA  
(Vancouver)  
February 2012

© Michael John Simmonds, 2012

## **Abstract**

In the discourse on how to improve British Columbia's secondary schools two prevailing epistemological tensions exist between two competing rationalities: (1) an instrumental rationality that privileges sense-making born out of data-gathering, and (2) a values-rationality that is discernibly more context-dependent. The seeds for public discord are sown when a particular kind of logic for capturing the complexity of any problematic is privileged over a competing (counter) logic attempting to do the same thing. The Fraser Institute proposes to the public a particular vision on how to improve secondary schools by manufacturing annual school report cards that are published in newspapers and online. Proponents of school report cards believe that school improvement is predicated on measurement, competition, market-driven reform initiatives, and choice. They support the strategies and techniques used by the Fraser Institute to demarcate the limits and boundaries of exemplary educational practice. Critics of school report cards object to the way ranking rubrics highlight and amplify differences that exist between schools. They believe that the rankings devised by the Fraser Institute rewards certain kinds of schools while statistically sanctioning others. Drawing principally on published media accounts and the Fraser Institute's own documents this project shows how the Fraser Institute has mounted an effective public critique on the state of public secondary schools. It describes how statistical revisions made to the ranking matrix from 1998-2010 resulted in a marked redistribution of top-ranked schools in British Columbia that privileged certain kinds of private schools over public schools. School rankings designed to locate and fix their respective subjects in this way call on agents to compete for, acquire, and leverage different kinds of symbolic capital on the field of power, which they use to promote their respective political agendas. When the kinds of stories that can be told about schools become narrated through a statistical régime of truth they may negate capital disparities that exist between schools and the population of students they serve. At stake is the emancipatory belief that different kinds of schools operate to serve the diverse educational needs of different kinds of students in different kinds of ways.

## Table of Contents

<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Table of Contents.....</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>List of Tables.....</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>List of Figures.....</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>Acknowledgements .....</b>	<b>viii</b>
 <b>CHAPTER 1: School Rankings Contextualized .....</b>	 <b>1</b>
The Problem and its Significance .....	7
What’s at Stake? .....	11
<i>Problematic</i> .....	13
Polemical Models.....	16
<i>Tout Court—“The Only World”</i> .....	18
Dissertation Roadmap .....	25
 <b>CHAPTER 2: Theoretical Framework .....</b>	 <b>29</b>
Introduction .....	29
Foucault and School Rankings .....	33
<i>The Panopticon</i> .....	39
Systems of Accountability .....	41
<i>Disclosure</i> .....	42
<i>Transparency</i> .....	42
<i>Redress</i> .....	44
Bourdieu and School Rankings.....	45
Limitations of Foucault and Bourdieu in Explaining School Rankings .....	53
An Integrative Approach of Foucault and Bourdieu .....	55
Research Questions .....	61
 <b>CHAPTER 3: Methodology .....</b>	 <b>63</b>
Research Design—Case Study.....	63
<i>Triangulation</i> .....	64
<i>Data Gathering</i> .....	65
Critical Discourse Analysis.....	66
<i>Data Sources Contextualized</i> .....	73
<i>Limitations of Critical Discourse Analysis</i> .....	76

<b>CHAPTER 4: A Changing School Ranking Rubric.....</b>	<b>78</b>
Introduction .....	78
The Epistemology of Seeing.....	80
Iteration #1 (1998-2000): Five Key Performance Indicators .....	84
<i>Descriptive Indicators: Enrolment Data, Trend Indicators, and Parents' Education ....</i>	<i>95</i>
Iteration #2 (2001-2002): Gender Matters.....	100
<i>Descriptive Indicator: Dropout Rate .....</i>	<i>116</i>
Iteration #3 (2003-2006): Refining the Student Cohort .....	118
<i>Descriptive Indicator: Extracurricular Activities.....</i>	<i>124</i>
Iteration #4 (2007): A Revised Graduation Program .....	126
Iteration #5 (2008-2010): Revised University Admission Policy Changes .....	128
Conclusion.....	135
 <b>CHAPTER 5: Discursive Practices and the Mechanics of Capital Mobilization .....</b>	 <b>138</b>
Introduction .....	138
Knowledge Discourses .....	139
Common Sense Discourses .....	152
Expanding the Surveillance Gaze .....	154
<i>Alberta School Rankings .....</i>	<i>154</i>
<i>Elementary School Rankings .....</i>	<i>156</i>
<i>New Brunswick School Rankings.....</i>	<i>160</i>
<i>Aboriginal Report Card.....</i>	<i>161</i>
School Improvement Discourses .....	164
Economic Discourses .....	169
Coded Discourses.....	172
Action Discourses and the Politics of Space .....	173
Local Capital Acquisition .....	181
International Capital Acquisition .....	183
<i>The Beacon Schools Initiative.....</i>	<i>189</i>
Conclusion.....	190
 <b>CHAPTER 6: Manufacturing Dissent .....</b>	 <b>195</b>
Dissertation Synopsis .....	195
A Critical Overview of Major Findings .....	199
<i>Disciplinary Power is Exercised Through Published School Report Cards .....</i>	<i>199</i>
<i>Technologies of Representation Have Surveillance and Visibility at its Core .....</i>	<i>203</i>
<i>Agents Deploy Language in Ways that Mediate and Reposition Relationships of Power .....</i>	<i>207</i>
<i>Capital is Acquired Through Storytelling, Coalition Building, and Policy Borrowing ..</i>	<i>210</i>
Devolution and Choice in England, New Zealand, and the United States .....	216
Reflections on Case Study Research .....	220
Personal Reflections.....	224
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>236</b>

<b>APPENDICES .....</b>	<b>253</b>
Appendix A: Decile Range Table .....	253
Appendix B: Timeline of Fraser Institute publications and changing political landscape in British Columbia (Spring 1998-Summer 2009) .....	254
Appendix C: Percentile rankings for British Columbia schools (Iterations #1 & 2) .....	257
Appendix D: Percentile rankings for British Columbia schools (Iterations #3-5) .....	258
Appendix E: Alphabetized list of school acronyms identified in Appendix F.....	259
Appendix F: Top BC schools ranked by Fraser Institute (1998-2010).....	260
Appendix G: Member schools of ISABC .....	263

## List of Tables

<i>Table 1: Documents used for critical discourse analysis .....</i>	<i>72</i>
<i>Table 2: Changing iterations of the Fraser Institute ranking rubric (1998-2010) .....</i>	<i>81</i>
<i>Table 3: Relative percentage weights of KPIs for iteration #1 .....</i>	<i>85</i>
<i>Table 4: First school ranking table published for YHS (1998) .....</i>	<i>86</i>
<i>Table 5: Second school ranking table published for YHS (1999) .....</i>	<i>100</i>
<i>Table 6: Relative percentage weights of KPIs for iteration #2 .....</i>	<i>102</i>
<i>Table 7: Relative percentage weights of KPIs from iteration #1 to iteration #2 .....</i>	<i>105</i>
<i>Table 8: Percentage distribution of public (PU) and private (PV) schools for iterations #1 and #2 .....</i>	<i>109</i>
<i>Table 9: Schools attaining a score of ten on the Fraser Institute ranking (1998-2010) .....</i>	<i>114</i>
<i>Table 10: Percentage of schools ranked in the top two decile ranges for iterations #2 and #3 .....</i>	<i>122</i>
<i>Table 11: Relative percentage weights of KPIs for iteration #3 .....</i>	<i>124</i>
<i>Table 12: Relative percentage weights of KPIs for iteration #4 .....</i>	<i>127</i>
<i>Table 13: Relative percentage weights of KPIs for iteration #5 .....</i>	<i>131</i>

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Discursive practices (DP) emerge from the conflation of knowledge (K), truth (T), and language (L) .....	56
Figure 2: Discursive practices (DP) are shaped by habitus .....	57
Figure 3: Agents acquire capital (C) on the field of power .....	58
Figure 4: Analyzing the school accountability game through an approach that integrates Foucault and Bourdieu .....	60
Figure 5: Number of 'top' ranked public and private schools for iterations #1 and #2 .....	110
Figure 6: Kitsilano Secondary's overall school ranking for iterations #1 and #2 .....	111
Figure 7: York House School's overall school ranking for iterations #1 and #2 .....	112
Figure 8: Percent annual growth in student enrolment for private schools (1997-2010) .....	175
Figure 9: Percent annual growth in student enrolment for public schools (1997-2010) .....	176

## **Acknowledgements**

I have my good friend and former York House School colleague, Carolyn Levy, to thank for insisting that I apply to the doctoral studies program in the spring of 2004. I didn't know it at the time, but her persistent encouragement resulted in my undertaking—what has turned out to be—one of the most challenging, frustrating, and rewarding experiences of my adult life. I didn't expect the journey would take this long to complete.

Thank you to members of the (2004) EDD Cohort who began this extended journey of scholarship and self-discovery with me. They are: Lyn Daniels, Peter Froese, Bill Koty, Stephen Kozey, Judith McGillivray, Val Peachy, Jeanette Robertson, Trish Rosborough, and Marilynne Waithman. Their collective good-natured and nurturing spirit helped make the first two years of this odyssey fun. Thanks especially to Gwen Dueck and Kathryn MacLeod whose unwavering support and friendship helped me navigate set-backs and disappointments that punctuated my experience as a doctoral student. I'd like to congratulate my colleagues within this group who have completed their work and extend my best wishes for a successful outcome to those of who are still engaged in the adventure.

I would also like to thank my professors for their excellent teaching. They are: Dr. Shauna Butterwick, Dr. David Coulter, Dr. Mary Daniels, Dr. Jo-Anne Dillabough, Dr. Mona Gleason (my pro tem adviser), Dr. Garnet Grosjean, Dr. Dan Pratt, Dr. Tom Sork, and Dr. Daniel Vokey. Without exception every one of them contributed to my completing this project in some way, and they all helped me understand the importance of thinking critically and reflexively throughout the two years that defined the course work part of the program. Thanks especially to Dr. Michelle Stack and Dr. Taylor Webb who, in addition to teaching me policy and accountability courses respectively, also served on my advisory committee. Their focused and critical insights helped me immeasurably to complete this project.

I need to also acknowledge the work of Peter Cowley and Dr. Stephen Easton of the Fraser Institute whose contributions to the discourse surrounding education in 1998



sparked a national debate that continues to this day. Their perspective on what matters in education has made my project possible.

Of course I am grateful for the enduring love, support, and interest my family has consistently demonstrated in my personal and professional lives. They very kindly and skillfully struck an appropriate balance of knowing when to ask about the progress I was making on my “paper”, and when not to. Thank you, Bob, Mary, Paul, Linda, Kelli, Jamie, Tara, Clark, Andrea, and Faye.

My partner, Steve Wilson, has also been extraordinarily supportive and patient throughout this endeavor. Not only has he turned a blind eye to the columns of paper that have engulfed our collective workspace over the years, but he has feigned interest in wanting to learn more about what Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu thought about anything.

Finally, and most importantly, I would like to acknowledge the efforts of my principal advisor, Dr. André Mazawi. Throughout this project André was uncompromisingly discerning, rigorous, and—above all—consistently fair-minded in his appraisal of my work. André challenged me to think, reflect, and write in ways I never imagined possible. At the same time, however, André honoured the direction and course I wanted my project to take. I will always appreciate André’s commitment, exactitude, humour, kindness, patience, compassion, and razor sharp intellect. He is an exceptional person and a master teacher. Thank you for everything!

## CHAPTER 1: School Rankings Contextualized

In the spring of 2006, Peter Cowley—the Director of School Performance Studies at the Fraser Institute—addressed a room full of teachers and administrators at Vancouver’s Arbutus Club. As one of two principal authors of the *‘Report Card on Secondary Schools in British Columbia and the Yukon’*, he described the public’s thirst for holding schools accountable (Cowley & Easton, 2006). Cowley explained the genesis of the controversial Fraser Institute ranking of public and private schools that he coauthored with Dr. Stephen Easton by relating a personal story.

In the mid-90s Mr. Cowley wanted to get information about how students in his daughter’s public high school had performed on standardized provincial examinations. He described how the principal of his daughter’s school refused to share the information, and the frustration he felt as a concerned parent being denied access to it. (The principal explained that school exam results were confidential and not for public consumption.) Cowley talked about how a sympathetic teacher secretly provided him with the information he wanted, and how he felt empowered as a result—Peter could finally make a personal assessment about the overall quality of his daughter’s public high school. He talked about how he was approached by the Fraser Institute to develop a school report card that helped British Columbia parents do precisely what Cowley had difficulty doing for himself—assess the educational experience of students attending British Columbia’s high schools. Peter talked about accepting that challenge and how a concerned parent suddenly had access to the intellectual, financial, and human capital of an advocacy think tank with political clout. He talked about the first *‘Report Card’* being published in *‘The Province’* newspaper in the spring of 1998, and the maelstrom of controversy that accompanied it—everyone, it seemed, had an opinion (Cowley, Easton, & Walker, 1998; Proctor, 1998a, 1998b, 1998c, 1998d, 1998e). He talked about how five “Key Performance Indicators” (hereafter: KPIs) that informed the first published ranking in 1998 had grown to eight in 2006 and why vocal critics of the report should perceive today’s ranking as being a more nuanced, sensitive, and statistically relevant

incarnation. He talked about the '*Garfield Weston Awards for Excellence in Education*' luncheon hosted by the Fraser Institute every spring at which deserving principals were honored for having achieved significantly marked improvements in their school's overall ranking from the previous year, and the pride each of them felt for being recognized in this way.

Peter Cowley talked passionately about education and I was left with the impression that he was committed to improving the educational experience of students in British Columbia. My observation, however, was that in talking about education that evening, Mr. Cowley's position was anchored in a particular kind of instrumental rationality that troubled his critics because it reduced schools to measurable outcomes—exclusively. Critics of the ranking challenged Cowley to consider the obstacles educators faced in meeting the diverse needs of a diverse student population and they objected to the complexity of school systems being reduced to KPIs. Schools were not homogenous places and they reasoned that it made no sense for the Fraser Institute to compare different kinds of schools that served different kinds of students.

Apparently sympathetic to the concerns being expressed by hardworking teachers that evening, Cowley defended the logic of the ranking and explained why it was useful—it helped parents make informed choices about where to send their children to school. He described how each of the KPIs included in the report had been taken from data the Ministry had collected on students and schools and the role teachers played in setting the provincial exams. The evening concluded with Peter challenging his critics assembled in the audience to provide an alternative to the ranking, or to suggest ways that it could be improved. His closing remark, however, made it clear why the ranking would continue to generate controversy, "If people think we have a narrow focus, give us more data."<sup>1</sup> Cowley's comment strikes at the core of the ranking debate because it is predicated on the presumption that school ranking instruments (like the one developed by the Fraser Institute) is key to improving schools. It also invites school ranking critics to engage the Fraser Institute on its own

---

<sup>1</sup> Personal notes made by Michael Simmonds while attending a PDK - UBC Chapter, dinner meeting at the Arbutus Club, Vancouver, April 19, 2006.

epistemological terrain—a terrain defined by standardization, performativity, and the use of measurement.

It occurred to me then that if the voices of British Columbia's students were heard at all, the reactions to Peter's address at the dinner was evidence they were being articulated within a polemical discourse. It seemed that two giant, tectonic plates of truth collided that evening and the controversy surrounding the ranking was the end result. And while Cowley was open to the possibility of expanding the focus of his ranking by including more data, his critics discounted the stories the Fraser Institute told about schools as they were narrated by statistical discourses that did not include a "misery index" (Kozol, 2005, p. 51). They argued the voices of students should be heard outside the boundaries imposed by the Fraser Institute and their position had been well documented in published media accounts printed on the pages of British Columbia's regional and provincial newspapers (Beyer, 2000; Editorial, 1999; Hughes, 2005; Johal, 2001a, 2001b; Knox, 2005; Masleck, 2000; McDonnell, 2005; Proctor, 1998a; Steffenhagen, 2002b, 2003c, 2004a).

As the evening unfolded I was struck by an interesting paradox that I believed was taking place in the room. It occurred to me that were it not for the publication of the Fraser Institute ranking in a provincial newspaper every spring, the dinner (and the heated conversations that informed the evening) would not be happening in this very public way. If nothing else, Cowley's work sparked a dialogue within the field of education about the purpose and nature of schooling and the filled-to-capacity-room was evidence that it was a conversation worth having. It was within this space that student voices were articulated through a story told by high school rankings. And it was within the same space that student voices were articulated through the stories told by teachers working in low-, medium-, and high-ranked schools. I wondered if these stories were ever told before, and if they were, from whose perspective? Whose voices were included; silenced; marginalized; discounted; hidden; and amplified? I wondered what kinds of stories ranking discourses told about students, teachers, and schools? But mostly, I wondered what (or whose) purpose they served.

When I left the dinner I began to reflect on an important question that framed the conversations about the school accountability movement that emerged at the Arbutus Club dinner—by what techniques are truths about student achievement told in British Columbia and why do prevailing truths seem to be anchored in a particular kind of rationality that Peter Cowley represented that evening? My questions at the time were triggered by my fourteen-year professional practice working at York House School (YHS), an independent k-12 school for all-girls that was founded in 1932 in Shaughnessy—one of Vancouver's wealthiest neighbourhoods. YHS belongs to a number of organizations that includes: the Independent School Association of British Columbia (ISABC); the Federation of Independent Schools (FISA); Canadian Accredited Independent Schools (CAIS); the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS); and the National Coalition of Girls' Schools (NCGS). York House is classified as a Group 2 school in the Independent School Act of British Columbia.

“Group 2 schools receive 35% of their local school district's per student operating grant on a per full-time equivalent (FTE) student basis. They employ BC certified teachers, have educational programs consistent with ministerial orders, provide a program that meets the learning outcomes of the British Columbia curriculum, meet various administrative requirements, maintain adequate educational facilities, and comply with municipal and regional district codes.” (British Columbia Ministry of Education of Independent Schools, 2010).

York House School (YHS) is a college-preparatory, day school that has a selective admissions policy for all prospective students. It has a population of six hundred students and every one of its (approximately fifty-five) graduating students gets accepted to highly competitive, post-secondary institutions throughout the world. On average parents spend about \$14,000 (after tax) dollars on annual tuition and it is not uncommon for students to have spent twelve or thirteen years at the school. YHS employs a team of full-time fundraising development professionals whose sole task is to raise money for the school to assist in meeting (and exceeding) the operating and capital costs of running a mission-driven, independent school. Annual giving campaigns

from parents bring in approximately \$500,000 per year. Its annual budget is approximately 7.5 million dollars. YHS is one of three all-girls', private schools some families living in Vancouver might consider as being a best-fit school for their daughter. There are also a number of other independent, (k-12), co-ed schools in the city from which some families may choose. What is relevant to note at this juncture, however, is that YHS is endowed with high levels of financial, human, social, and cultural capital that—taken together—make it a relatively resource rich school in comparison to most other British Columbian schools. As well it is important to note that YHS is enmeshed within a network of power relations that span provincial, national, and international boundaries. The ISABC, FISA, CAIS, NAIS, and NCGS are different kinds of organizations that have in common the belief that mission-driven independent (and private) schools best serve the diverse educational needs of students.

When the Fraser Institute published its second school ranking in 1999, York House School scored eight-point-six out of a possible ten-point-zero (Cowley, Easton, & Walker, 1999, p. 43). For the past eight years, however, the school has been identified with other independent and private<sup>2</sup> schools in Vancouver as being a 'top'-ranked (ten-out-of-ten) school. By that singular measure, York House lays claim to its status as being one of the "best" schools in British Columbia (Chung, 2006). Students complete all requirements of the Ministry's revised graduation program in Grades 10-12, and may self-select from a number challenging, college-level, Advanced Placement (AP) courses that are offered in science, humanities, languages, English, and the fine arts. The teachers of York House School belong to the British Columbia Government and Service Union (BCGEU) and pay annual union dues. A full-time teaching load in the senior school (Grades 7-12) is six courses and the maximum class size is 20 students. (Some AP classes are taught with as few six students, but whether small classes run at all are left to the discretion of the Head.) An elected Board of Governors works at arm's-length with the

---

<sup>2</sup> The important distinction between a *private* and an *independent* school has to do with governance. An *independent school* is governed by an elected board of trustees and operates outside the boundaries imposed by public school boards. A *private school* can be part of another entity such as a for-profit corporation or a not-for-profit organization such as a church or synagogue. All religious schools are private schools. Most secular schools are independent schools.

Head of School to assist in directing the school's activities. York House is inspected periodically by the Independent School Branch of the Ministry of Education to ensure that it complies with all aspects of the Independent School Act of British Columbia. Collectively these factors created a highly structured web of support for students aspiring to continue their educational pursuits at highly selective post-secondary institutions throughout the world. As importantly, they helped contribute to the school moving up the ranking one-point-four points to achieve a perfect ten-point-zero on the Fraser Institute's school ranking scale of performativity (Cowley & Easton, 2001). In that incremental step York House made an enormous leap by joining the extremely small cluster of 'elite' independent and private schools in Vancouver that had also earned perfect scores. That was twelve-years ago, and with the most recent published ranking of the Fraser Institute report card on secondary schools in May of 2010, only two Vancouver public secondary schools have ever attained a 'perfect' ten-point-zero—Prince of Wales Secondary (Cowley, et al., 1999) and University Hill (Cowley & Easton, 2003). How was this possible? What information about school culture was missing from the Fraser Institute's report card and why is it important to consider in the first place? Are private schools really '*better*' than public schools, and if so why?

That is when I began to seriously consider the possibility that school rankings measured organizational capacity—foremost—and had very little to say about 'school goodness'. I surmised that top-ranked schools like York House had the human, financial, and cultural capital necessary to achieve top-ranked scores in ways that most other public and private schools throughout the province may have lacked. These reflections have led me to explore three aspects of the 'Fraser Institute Report Card on Secondary Schools in British Columbia and the Yukon': (1) how rankings operate discursively to construct the realm of schooling, performance, and accountability; (2) what ideological assumptions underpin the statistical formulae used to construct the rankings in the first place; and (3) why the Fraser Institute has garnered so much traction on the field of education in promoting its school ranking reports. These reflections have informed the

way in which I have come to problematize the school ranking accountability phenomenon within the context of British Columbia in the broadest sense.

### **The Problem and its Significance**

The Fraser Institute is a non-elected, libertarian think tank that promotes an agenda of improving schools through competition, choice, and market forces. Declaring on its website to be “an independent, non-partisan organization” (The Fraser Institute, 2010a). The Fraser Institute is comprised of academics, business executives, and former politicians that espouse and promote right-leaning, conservative political agendas and ideologies. Every spring the Fraser Institute publishes a ranking of public and private schools in *‘The Province’*<sup>3</sup> newspaper based on data it gleams from the Ministry’s website. Entitled *‘Report Card on Secondary Schools in British Columbia and Yukon’*, the rankings represent the collected efforts of statisticians, computer technicians, economists, politicians, and business executives to promote the Institute’s mission “to measure, study, and communicate the impact of competitive markets and government intervention on the welfare of individuals” (The Fraser Institute, 2010a). That a single person represents the report’s findings says something about how political agendas and ideologies from special interest groups can be both promoted and humanized at the same time. This is an important consideration because in assigning scores to schools, the Fraser Institute effectively names-schools by numbering-schools. The public, however, responds best to messages communicated by human beings, and not organizations (and institutes per se). In this way, Peter Cowley has become the spokesperson associated with school-wide accountability issues in British Columbia and elsewhere. This is relevant given Pierre Bourdieu’s assertion that language and power

---

<sup>3</sup> April of 2007 marked the first time since 1998 that the Fraser Institute’s ‘Report Card on Secondary Schools’ was published in the *‘The Vancouver Sun’* and not *‘The Province’* newspaper. *‘The Vancouver Sun’* has a weekly readership of 848,300. *‘The Province’*, by comparison, has a readership of 865,000 (Source: Anne Crassweller, President Newspaper Audience Databank (NAD) Inc., (Personal email correspondence, May 22, 2007).



have profound political implications when an *authorized someone* speaks on behalf of an entire group. At stake is the deployment of power through language.

“The spokesperson, in speaking of a group, on behalf of a group...institutes the group, through the magical operation that is inherent in any act of naming. That is why one must perform a critique of political reason, which is intrinsically inclined to abuses of language that are also abuses of power, if one wants to pose the question with which all sociology ought to begin, that of existence and the mode of existence of collectives” (Bourdieu, 1985, p. 741).

The *existence* and the *mode* of *the existence collective* to be questioned here is the constellation of power forces that underpin and shape the Fraser Institute, and more specifically, its annual ranking of secondary schools.

According to the Fraser Institute’s 2007 *Annual Report* entitled, ‘*Changing the World*’, 87% of its 12.7 million dollar operating budget came from unnamed organizations, corporations, and foundations (The Fraser Institute, 2007). The remaining 13% came from personal donations. While the majority of the Institute’s funding comes from the corporate sector, the 2007 *Annual Report* indicates that the majority of Fraser Institute supporters are individuals, accounting for 85% of its support base. This is an important consideration because it suggests that there exists strong grassroots support for an advocacy think tank whose work is primarily funded by ‘big business’ set on ‘changing the world’ (The Fraser Institute, 2007). The *mode* of the *collective* broadens to include a list of researchers who are currently associated with the Fraser Institute. There are now more than three hundred and fifty researchers in twenty-two countries associated with the Fraser Institute; four of whom have been awarded Nobel Prizes<sup>4</sup> in Economics (The Fraser Institute, 2007). With offices in Vancouver, Calgary, Montreal, and Toronto, “the Fraser Institute has active research ties with *similar* independent organizations in more than 70 countries around the world” (The Fraser Institute, 2007).

---

<sup>4</sup> Freidrich A. von Hayek (1974); Milton Freidman (1976); George J. Stigler (1982); and James M. Buchanan Jr. (1986).

Again, this is an important consideration because it speaks to the epistemic sources of power from which the Fraser Institute gains its legitimacy—a legitimacy it uses to speak with authority on issues such as education, health care, taxation, and immigration within the public domain. The Fraser Institute occupies an important place, therefore, in a broader constellation of power brokers because it is well funded, well connected, and well placed.

Today, the Fraser Institute is associated with: The Hudson Institute, C.D. Howe Institute, Free The World, Atlantic Institute for Market Studies, Montreal Economic Institute, State Policy Network, Institute of Public Affairs (Australia), EKOME<sup>5</sup> (Society for Social and Economic Studies), and Frontier Centre for Public Policy, among others (The Fraser Institute, 2010c). What these institutes from around the world have in common is the development—and promotion—of policy platforms that are closely aligned with the Fraser Institute’s overall mission. Becoming part of a world coalition of advocacy think tanks, therefore, substantially empowers the Fraser Institute because it allows for discourses to be cast, and recast, in ways that can be universally packaged and disseminated. If league tables could be used to improve the educational condition in the United Kingdom, for example, something approximating them—like school rankings—must be able to do the same in British Columbia. What’s essential to understand, however, is the considerable power the Fraser Institute wields in its own right—independent of a worldwide coalition of like-minded think tanks. If numbers tell the whole story, as the Institute’s annual report likes to promote, consider the following statistics that were published at the end of their 2007 Annual Report (The Fraser Institute, 2007).

---

<sup>5</sup> EKOME is headquartered in Greece.

## **Numbers Tell the Whole Story**

214,000,000 combined circulation & listenership of Canadian media coverage  
3,807,728 files, including podcasts & videos, downloaded from all Fraser Institute web sites  
3,000,000 students attend 6,300 schools rated in Fraser Institute School Report Cards  
1,331,549 visits to Fraser Institute web sites  
59,000 copies of monthly magazine Fraser Forum mailed to subscribers  
24,884 inquiries from around the world handled by Fraser Institute staff  
6,243 news stories in print, on line, and broadcast around the world  
4,012 subscribers to Fraser Institute e-mail updates  
3,656 Fraser Institute supporters from 12 countries  
1,058 mentions on external web sites and blogs  
350 authors from 22 countries have contributed to Institute research  
282 commentaries published in newspapers across North America  
225 news releases & media advisories issued  
188 presentations given around the world by Fraser Institute staff  
117 Fraser Forum articles on wide variety of public policy issues  
98 requests from around the world to reprint Fraser Institute material  
24 languages in which Fraser Institute books have been published  
5 Fraser Institute office locations to best influence the North America policy debate  
1 of the most influential think tanks in the world

What is most striking about these statistics is the extent to which the Fraser Institute occupies entirely different fields that reach entirely different populations—physicians respond to its surveys; principals are honored at its award luncheons; Fraser Institute publications are translated into different languages; and offices have been strategically positioned in North America to “best influence the North America policy debate” (The Fraser Institute, 2007, p. 52).

## What's at Stake?

The Fraser Institute's school report card operates within a specific discursive practice that endeavors to hold educational professionals accountable for what goes on within them. In one sense, the invisible work of educational professionals is rendered visible in that parents 'see' a small part of what goes on inside classrooms every time the ranking is published. The assumption is that good teaching occurs in the classrooms of top-ranked schools and that problems exist in the classrooms of low-ranked ones. The ranking, therefore, provides parents with an instrument by which they can choose *good* schools for their children and avoid *bad* ones. In this way, the Fraser Institute's annual report card is perceived by some to serve a public service (Bierman, 2007; Cowley, 2005b, 2007; Editorial, 2001, 2002c, 2003; McMartin, 2010b; Raham, 1999). But in reducing the pedagogical, social, cultural, and economic complexities of public and private secondary schools to KPIs, the Fraser Institute forces a consciousness on the public about what they think matters in schools by effectively promoting a culture of performativity, competition, and consumption. As importantly, the Fraser Institute's message about education is well articulated in media accounts that include print, radio, the internet, and television (Abelson, 2002; The Fraser Institute, 2006, 2007, 2008a, 2009, 2010b). By this measure, the Fraser Institute commands significant attention on the public media stage being cited six times more than its left-leaning policy institute counterpart—the Canadian Center for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) (Abelson, 2002, pp. 98-99). As such it is important to critically examine the assumptions made by the Fraser Institute in publishing its annual school ranking for five principal reasons: (1) the Fraser Institute ranking is fast becoming a national fixture in Canada as it begins to publish school rankings in Alberta, Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, and the Yukon Territory. That the Fraser Institute has established score-board-like-school-rankings in provinces and territories that are culturally, politically, and economically disparate speaks to the inroads it has gained in the minds of Canadians everywhere. This is important because, like published school rankings in other parts of the world, they are used by British Columbians, Albertans, Quebecers, and Maritimers alike to make inferences about

schools that, in turn, have “predictable consequences” on the educational system that may not always be in the best interest of students (West & Pennell, 2000, p. 434); (2) as a non-elected entity the Fraser Institute influences public educational policy and, has as its prevailing goal, the promotion of neoliberal market forces to improve both public and independent/private schools. This speaks to the imposition of a particular ideology that has both political and pedagogical implications that need to be problematized; (3) the data-driven educational reforms supported by the Fraser Institute are steeped in neoconservative standardization movements and accountability systems that are—by their very nature—limiting, reductive, and potentially harmful to schools and students (Rowe, 2000). This belief is reflected by published media accounts that have framed the ranking debate within a polemical discourse that juxtapose two competing core rationalities and will be explored in this project; (4) the Fraser Institute ranking of schools impacts leadership practices within schools. Increasingly school leaders seem to be developing strategies for playing the ranking game that make between-school comparisons highly problematic (Wilson, 2004). This kind of complicit school-accountability game-playing can have deleterious consequences. In their book, *Collateral Damage: How High-Stakes Testing Corrupts America’s Schools*, Nichols and Berliner (2007) explain how ‘Campbell’s Law’ can shape human behavior. When single measures (or indicators) of success and failure in a profession take on too much value, Campbell’s Law asserts that the exaggerated reliance on the measure can create conditions that promote corruption and distortion; and (5) a final reason for critically examining the Fraser Institute report card on secondary schools is that rankings derived from a statistical language privilege a particular kind of instrumental rationality that has profound sociological and pedagogical implications (Apple, 2000; Goldstein & Spiegelhalter, 1996; Norris, 2011; Whitty & Edwards, 1998). The end result may be the division of schools and school districts into ‘winners’ and ‘losers’. This is an important consideration because in ranking schools the Fraser Institute effectively rewards and punishes schools, if rewards and punishments are reflected by choices parents make about where to send their children to school. Winning schools attract the brightest

students. Losing schools take what's left over. This is made possible to the extent the public continues to view the published school ranking as a legitimate authoritative document. This is highly problematic because authoritative documents are constructed to give the impression the author(s) are representing the truth of the matter. "This is achieved through the use of specific syntactical, grammatical...devices which empower the authors and disempower the reader" (Ozga, 2000, p. 19).

"[T]he reader is not just presented with an argument and then asked to make up their mind about its merits and demerits, but is positioned within a discourse—a way of understanding relations within the world—which, if successful, restricts and constrains the reader from understanding the world in any other way. This discourse is characterized as common sense, whereas in fact it is merely one way of viewing the world and is therefore ideological" (Ozga, 2000, p. 19).

### **Problematic**

The emergence of school rankings and their impact on shaping educational discourse spans at least three continents (North America, Europe, and Australia) and has been ongoing for at least three decades (Cowley & Easton, 2006; Dwyer, 2006; Goldstein & Spiegelhalter, 1996; Rowe, 2000; Tight, 2000; West & Pennell, 2000). The United Kingdom's League Tables that summarize the performance of schools and universities have been well established since the mid-1980s (West & Pennell, 2000). League tables in the UK consist of ranking schools "computed from students' average achievement scores (raw and unadjusted) on national curriculum test results at ages 7, 11 and 14 years, together with similar scores for the General Certificate of School Education (16 year-olds) and A-levels (18 year-olds)" (Rowe, 2000, p. 75). In the United States, "detailed public accountability of schools and State education systems on the basis of students' test scores is well established, despite vigorous debate about the consequences of basing performance indicator and accountability arrangements solely on the outcomes of system-wide, standardized testing/assessment programs" (Rowe, 2000, p. 74). Closer to home Canadian colleges and universities have been ranked by *Maclean's* magazine since 1991 with the goal of establishing Canada's 'best' post-

secondary institutions (Fillion, 2006; Hunter, 1999; Kong & Veall, 2005; Stevenson & Kopvillem, 2006). Despite the geographic expanse over which ranking debates occur nationally and internationally, they have at their core the expression of common concerns about the impact school rankings have on teaching and learning on many levels that include: teacher morale, teacher effectiveness, socioeconomic disparity, selective admission procedures, and the erosion of professionalism in an educational system that values standardized testing and market driven reforms (Ball, 1997; Gaskell & Vogel, 2000; Lucey & Reay, 2002; Masleck, 2000; Rist, 2000; Shaker, 2007; Webb, 2005, 2006, 2007).

Although the literature is replete with studies that examine the impact school and university rankings have on the life-world of students, teachers, parents, professors, and administrators the focus of this project is to examine the effect a local ranking has on shaping how the public perceives secondary schools in British Columbia. Since publishing its first secondary school ranking the Fraser Institute continues to present its understanding on the public about what constitutes a quality educational experience for students in British Columbia (Cowley, 2005a; Cowley, Easton, & Walker, 1999; Rocky, 2003; Schmidt, 2005). It does this by first selecting some data that is collected by the Ministry about students and schools, and then interpreting that information in a statistical analysis that measures 'school goodness'. The seeds for public discord are sown when a particular kind of logic for capturing the complexity of any problematic is privileged over a competing (counter) logic attempting to do the same thing. In this debate, some quantitative data counts while all qualitative data does not when the Fraser Institute compiles its published ranking of best-to-worst performing schools. This is extremely problematic on many levels that will be addressed in this project, but some scholars have argued that it may be considered a form of epistemic assault on teachers and schools alike (Apple, 2000; Webb, 2007; Whitty & Power, 2002b).

Despite the data-centric focus on school-wide accountability, the Fraser Institute promotes itself in a way McHoul and Grace (1993) describe as "having adequately captured its 'object' by a series of techniques which 'stitch up' the imperfections in its

representation of other” (McHoul & Grace, 1993, p. 23). I am interested in unstitching the techniques adopted by the Fraser Institute in promoting a particular logic; a logic that follows—what Foucault called—a régime of truth (Foucault, 1977). This logic aims to reduce the socially complex world of schools into an overall mark out of ten, and for the purpose of this study is considered as being a statistical régime of truth. This is especially important given the influence the Fraser Institute has managed to exact on public opinion about school accountability and the school choice movement, not only in British Columbia, but throughout Canada as well. A central argument I will make is the capitalist rhetoric used by the Fraser Institute to promote its free-market agenda for school reform overshadows the constellation of deeper (hidden) forces that operate at the nexus of discourse, representation, and power to effect educational policy-making. Additionally, I am interested in examining how statistical discourses used by the Fraser Institute to construct secondary school rankings have changed over time, and how those changes have reconfigured the school ranking landscape. I am also interested in understanding how information is packaged and disseminated by the Fraser Institute for public consumption that results in school rankings (and the KPIs that comprise them) becoming the accountability litmus test for school goodness in British Columbia. This is an important consideration because secondary schools, and the people working within them, are effectively rewarded and punished in the public’s mind based on a school’s relative position on the ranking: Top-ranked schools are perceived as being better than mid-ranked schools, and mid-ranked schools are perceived as being better than low-ranked schools.

Herein lies my entry point into a research project, that has as its principal focus, a discursive analysis of the Fraser Institute ranking of secondary schools: That a statistical language is used to promote and legitimize how schools have come to be represented in the educational field. I argue this mode of representation is made more palatable to the public because it is presented as being objective, fair-minded, and steeped in a particular kind of instrumental rationality that allows for it to be universally applied to all schools. My study will explore how discourse is contained within language



and how “language...possesses new powers, and powers peculiar to it alone” (Foucault, 2006, p. 53). I am interested in problematizing the legitimacy of school rankings in general by unpacking some of the underlying assumptions the Fraser Institute makes about schools in particular.

The Arbutus Club dinner was evidence the accountability issue was not only controversial but also polarizing. Both sides seemed trapped by their own perspective; unwilling to hear the ‘other’ side’s point of view. Why did there not appear to be a middle ground in the debate? Is it possible to delineate a new discursive terrain that transcends polemical discourse when talking about educational reform in the context of school rankings? Or, as was the case in advancing civil rights in the 1960s, are there some issues for which polemical debate is warranted—indeed necessary? That is, are there some social justice related issues within education for which no middle ground should ever be established, and should the debate on school ranking be considered one of them? These kinds of questions not only inform the school ranking debate but they are—at their core—political in nature.

### **Polemical Models**

Michel Foucault recognized “very schematically...the presence in polemics of three models: the religious model, the judiciary model, and the political model” (Foucault, 1997, p. 112). In religion, polemical debates are dogmatic in nature and deal principally with human moral failing. The judiciary model examines, prosecutes, and sentences the case. But it was the political model that Foucault believed was most powerful because it could establish ‘other’ as enemy.

“Polemics defines alliances, recruits partisans, unites interests or opinions, represents a party; it establishes the other as enemy, an upholder of opposed interests against which one must fight until the moment this enemy is defeated and either surrenders or disappears. Has anyone ever seen a new idea come out of a polemic?” (Foucault, 1997, pp. 112-113).

This was an interesting insight and one I felt had tremendous implication on my work. The more I reflected on the emotional responses expressed by Cowley's critics at the dinner to the position he took as an advocate for educational reform, the more I began to understand the polemical debate was born out of Foucault's political model. And how could it be otherwise? The Fraser Institute is, by definition, a political entity. Born out of the policy institute movement of the mid-1970s and 1980s advocacy think tanks, like the Fraser Institute, marketed their ideas to target audiences. They sought to accomplish specific political agendas and worked hard to see their sociopolitical visions realized above all others.

"Founders of advocacy think tanks understood the importance of immersing themselves in the political arena. Ideas in hand, they began to think strategically about how to most effectively influence policy makers, the public, and the media. It also stressed the importance of marketing its ideas to the media" (Abelson, 2002, p. 31).

It was during this era that the Vancouver-based Fraser Institute was founded to counter the left-leaning politics of then Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau. Increasingly concerned by the federal government's economic policies (and the election of the first NDP government in BC in 1972) Patrick Boyle, a senior industrial executive for MacMillan Bloedel, began considering how best to inform Canadians about the crucial role markets play in economic development (Abelson, 2002). His dream became a reality on October 21, 1974, when the federal government granted the Fraser Institute a charter. Named for the mighty Fraser River, it was deemed politically prudent to give the new institute a geographical, rather than ideological, reference point. And if Boyle and his supporters had any doubt about why the institute needed to be established in the first place, they were assuaged of their uncertainty in December of 1974 when Trudeau told the nation in his annual Christmas message, "the marketplace was not a reliable economic institution and would increasingly have to be replaced by government action in order to sustain the economic well-being of Canadians" (Abelson, 2002, p. 44). The seeds for a new hegemonic alliance were planted and the crop yielded a potent

hybrid of political action that pushed “education and social policy in conservative directions” (Apple, 2004b, p. 174). In this way alliances were formed between right-leaning and seemingly disparate groups united in their goal to shift “the educational debate onto their own terrain—the terrain of traditionalism, standardization, productivity, marketization and industrial needs” (Apple, 1998, p. 5).

### **Tout Court—“The Only World”**

Apple (2004) identifies four distinct groups that have emerged as 21<sup>st</sup> century forces that he feels profoundly shape the educational policy landscape. They are: neoliberals, neoconservatives, authoritarian populists (fundamentalists), and “experts for hire” (Apple, 2004b, p. 176). Each group exerts power on the educational field to varying degrees, but according to Apple (1998), two dominant groups have emerged in this period of modern conservative restoration—neoliberals and neoconservatives. While both groups promote educational reform agendas that are geared at improving the overall educational condition for students in British Columbia they approach the issue from different ideological perspectives.

Neoliberals are characterized as being “economic modernizers who want educational policy to be centered around the economy [and] around performance objectives” (Apple, 2004b, p. 174). Economic modernizers “see schools themselves as in need of being transformed and made more competitive by placing them into marketplaces through voucher plans, tax credits, and other similar marketizing strategies” (Apple, 2004b, p. 175). By comparison, neoconservatives are “deeply committed to establishing tighter mechanisms of control over knowledge...through national or state curricula and national or state-mandated...testing” (Apple, 2004b, p. 175). Both groups promote socially conservative beliefs that “saturate our very consciousness, so that the educational, economic and social world we see and interact with, and the commonsense interpretations we put on it, becomes the tout court, the only world” (Apple, 2004b, p. 4). Herein lies the potential power (and I argue the potential danger) of the new hegemonic alliance. Although neoconservatives and

neoliberals make different assumptions about schools and how best to improve them, they are similar in that both ideologies promote their respective agendas through discursive techniques that intersect at the nexus of educational reform. The economic deregulation agenda of neoliberals like, for example, the Fraser Institute shapes every policy reform initiative proposed by that particular advocacy think tank (not only in education) but in health care, taxation, immigration, and global warming as well.

“Our vision is a free and prosperous world where individuals benefit from greater choice, competitive markets, and personal responsibility. Our mission is to measure, study, and communicate the impact of competitive markets and government interventions on the welfare of individuals” (The Fraser Institute, 2010a).

The social regulation agenda of neoconservatives like, for example, the British Columbia Ministry of Education, shapes educational reform initiatives in a myriad of ways some of which include: prescribing curriculum, setting standardized exams for high school students, and establishing compulsory skills-based assessments for elementary students. In fact the parameters that help the Ministry of Education establish the social regulation agenda for the entire province is entrenched in law. One need only consider the preamble to The School Act. It reads:

“WHEREAS it is the goal of a democratic society to ensure that all its members receive an education that enables them to become literate, personally fulfilled and publicly useful, thereby increasing the strength and contributions to the health and stability of that society; AND WHEREAS the purpose of the British Columbia school system is to enable all learners to become literate, to develop their individual potential and to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to contribute to a healthy, democratic and pluralistic society and a prosperous and sustainable economy; THEREFORE HER MAJESTY, by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly of the Province of British Columbia, enacts as follows...[insert The (Revised) School Act]” (The Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, 1996).

There clearly exists an ideological tension embedded within the School Act itself about “educational goals and their ordering” (Godwin & Kermerer, 2002, p. 65). On the one hand schools *enable* students to become engaged members of a democratic and pluralistic society, while on the other hand schools help students acquire the *skills and attitudes* they need to contribute to *a prosperous and sustainable economy*. This ideological tension exists regardless of what political party holds office—Liberals, Conservatives, NDP, or the Green Party—because the tension resides in the inter-textuality between The School Act and the political agendas set by power wielding brokers whose interests are affected by the legislation. And while an uncontested outcome of education is that students become literate in ways that enable them to actively participate in a democracy, what is highly contestable is how this outcome is best achieved.

In their book, School Choice Tradeoffs: Liberty, Equity, and Diversity, Godwin and Kermerer (2002) describe five approaches to the state’s role in education. At one end of the political spectrum is classical liberalism—an approach that limits the role of government to protecting life, liberty, and property. Classical liberalism places a “heavy burden on the state to justify its intervention in the private sphere” (Godwin & Kermerer, 2002, p. 67). In this paradigm the state funds education, but it does not provide it. Classical liberals view the state as something to fear and forbid the state to “control the socialization of children” (Godwin & Kermerer, 2002, p. 72). At the other end of the political spectrum is communitarianism—an approach that advocates for the state’s monopoly on education. Communitarianism “places a greater emphasis on public rather than private goals” (Godwin & Kermerer, 2002, p. 85). Here the goal of education is to develop participatory citizens who share common values. Communitarianists do not support private schools in any form.

Positioned between the poles of the political spectrum are political liberalism, comprehensive liberalism, and progressive liberalism. At their core these approaches are differentiated by the degree to which parental and state rights drive educational outcomes. Political liberals—like, for example, the Fraser Institute—expect the state to

protect constitutional and charter rights that promote pluralism and autonomy. When that state's expectations of human behaviour conflict with religious rights entrenched in the law, political liberals would advocate for the rights of the individual to supersede the rights of the state. As such, political liberals expect the state to fund and regulate schools, but not as a monopoly. Political liberals support the role that private schools can play in educating students and advocate for minimal state regulation of them. Comprehensive liberalism is an approach to education that supports highly state-regulated private schools to co-exist with their public school counterparts. Comprehensive liberals expect the state to protect constitutional and charter rights that promote autonomy and develop participatory citizens. "They would like the state to...eliminate discrimination and to guarantee that parental prejudices do not go unchallenged" (Godwin & Kermerer, 2002, p. 90). This approach elevates reason over faith and perceives the role of publically funded schools to socialize students to that idea. Progressive liberalism "demands shared values, a common culture, and the elimination of all illiberal aspects of communities and subcultures" (Godwin & Kermerer, 2002, p. 93). Progressive liberals "give the state the broadest educational goals, and they give it almost total control over schooling" (Godwin & Kermerer, 2002, p. 92). This approach to education is aimed at creating a deliberative and egalitarian democracy with multiple shared values. The state's role is to not only to fund education, but also to provide experiences for students in ways that promote emancipatory outcomes. These approaches to education (political liberalism, comprehensive liberalism, and progressive liberalism) are different because they balance the rights of the individual and the rights of the state in different ways, but they are similar inasmuch as they challenge society to ask of itself "what kind of education develops the best human beings?" (Godwin & Kermerer, 2002, p. 65). This is an important consideration and one that lies at the heart of the Fraser Institute school ranking debate because the Fraser Institute's political agenda is concomitantly aligned, and at odds, with the School Act. It aligns with the parts of the legislation that promote free-market approaches to building a prosperous and sustainable economy through, for example, consumerism, competition, and choice.

But it resists those parts of the School Act that make room for plurality, diversity, and egalitarianism when students are required by law to attend local public schools situated within designated catchment areas until the School Act itself was amended in 2003. With the amendment came the possibility that—for the first time in British Columbia—students could apply for admission to public schools beyond the limits imposed by state-designated catchment areas called school districts. When this occurred the contours of the educational landscape shifted away from a terrain defined by the politic of comprehensive liberalism towards a terrain defined by the politic of political liberalism—a politic more in keeping with the mission-driven agenda of the Fraser Institute itself. The effect of the amendment amplified the relevance of school rankings for some parents as much as it renewed criticism of the Fraser Institute’s school report card. I will show how voices expressing dissent about school rankings (and the choice-based-reforms that underpin them) promote counter agendas that are anchored in social justice issues and the emancipatory hope the educational encounter can provide. Such position taking is not new. Nor is it born out of the school accountability and choice movements—exclusively.

To describe the Fraser Institute’s effect on the educational field through discourses that have accountability as its most dominant discursive feature, therefore, is to discount the influence of overlapping social justice discourses that are positioned in relation to critical theory and political action.

“Questions of justice and education have [always] been a part of educational thinking as long as there has been a formal schooling system. The introduction of mass schooling itself arose in the broader context of a struggle for social improvement and transformation, to provide opportunities for the ‘poorer classes’” (Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard, & Henry, 1997, p. 126).

Education brings with it potential opportunities that can lead to an overall improved quality of life in the struggle for upward social mobility. But opening doors of opportunity for students comes at a substantial cost. Education is an expensive

undertaking. In 2007 the Ministry of Education spent \$5.07 billion on the (k-12) educational system alone (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2010).

Given the great expenditure of public funds on one of “the best educational systems in the world” (Bond, 2007)<sup>6</sup> it is not surprising that some stakeholders endeavor to hold schools accountable in ways that can be objectively measured. So when Ministry documents declare the government’s mandate is to “make British Columbia the best-educated, most literate jurisdiction on the continent” (Bond, 2007), questions about performance outcomes and student achievement are concomitantly raised. Questions like: How does a government measure grade-specific educational success? What standards should be used to measure student (and teacher) performance? What cost effective initiatives can be implemented in schools without compromising educational quality? What does it mean to be an educated person living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Should all schools look and feel the same? For many, these questions are best answered when decisions about spending are informed by quantitative assessments about the educational system. It is no longer sufficient to say that literacy rates have significantly improved in Grade 4 students, for example. A discerning tax-paying electorate, and the politicians beholden to voters everywhere, want to know by how much literacy rates have improved, and at what cost? These questions beg data-driven responses through which entire régimes of truth are manufactured about the educational system. For how else can Shirley Bond make the following *‘indisputable’* claim in her web-published educational report?

“One important and indisputable factor contributing to the fact that B.C. students rank among the best in the world is the dedication of B.C.’s many skilled teachers” (Bond, October 10, 2007).

In ranking students, therefore, against an international standard the Ministry of Education implements a discursive practice that is not unlike the one adopted by the

---

<sup>6</sup> Shirley Bond was British Columbia’s Minister of Education from June 2005 to June 2009.



Fraser Institute. They are similar because they are both anchored in measurement and performativity.

Notwithstanding the increasing hold the Ministry of Education and the Fraser Institute rankings have managed to exact on the public's consciousness about the school accountability movement, a study that challenges prevailing statistical régimes of truth-telling contributes to the accountability dialogue by providing alternative rationalities by which schools are measured and compared. Herein lies the emancipatory potential of my study: Not only do I problematize the Fraser Institute's articulation of school ranking discourses in ways that account for the statistical and contextual assumptions it makes about secondary schools in British Columbia, but I will also illustrate how debates and controversies over accountability and policy making are not confined to the formal seat of power; as power is defined in a legislative (democratic) sense. More specifically, I will show how discursive practices are used to demarcate the limits and boundaries of exemplary educational practice in a way which "presupposes a play of prescriptions that govern exclusion and selections" (Foucault, 1997, p. 11). When a particular kind of school is consistently held up by the Fraser Institute as being an exemplar for all schools to emulate a new "policy technology" has been deployed that is considered by Ball (2003) as being integral to the new mode of state regulation.

"In various guises the key elements of the education reform 'package'—and it is applied with equal vigor to schools, colleges, and universities—are embedded on three interrelated policy technologies; the market, managerialism and performativity" (Ball, 2003, p. 215).

It is interesting (and I believe relevant) in a study that has as its principal focus the critical examination of school rankings to consider performativity in the way Ball suggests—as a kind of "technology; a culture and mode of regulation that employs judgments, comparisons and displays as means of incentive, control, attrition and change—based on rewards and sanctions" (Ball, 2003, p. 216). When institutional performances begin to serve as measures of productivity, output, and/or displays of quality they do so within a field of judgment. "The issue of who controls the field of

judgment is crucial” (Ball, 2003, p. 216). Part of my project explores how different agents with different visions for school reform compete for capital to dominate the *field of judgment*. When schools become complicit in their own subjugation because they subscribe to policy technologies that promote régimes of performativity it leaves open the possibility that individuals and organizations fabricate the educational experience for students in ways that align with the metrics of accountability (Ball, 2003; Webb, 2006). This dynamic creates tremendous institutional tension; a tension that manifests in media accounts between competing agents.

### **Dissertation Roadmap**

The Fraser Institute ranking of schools is regarded by some to be an objective measure of the overall quality of high schools in British Columbia (Editorial, 2003; Foot & Benzie, 2001; Raham, 1999). It has sparked tremendous public controversy since it was first published in *The Province* newspaper in the spring of 1998 (Bierman, 2007; Cowley & Easton, 2000; Cowley, et al., 1999; Derworiz, 2002; Fine, 2001; Foot & Benzie, 2001; Johal, 2001a; McMartin, 2010a; O'Connell, 2002; Proctor, 1998a; Royce, 2010; Sokoloff, 2005; Steffenhagen, 2000, 2002b, 2008). This study questions, problematizes, and unpacks many of the assumptions made by the Fraser Institute about secondary schools and what it takes to improve them.

Chapter 1 has contextualized for the reader the impact the Fraser Institute ranking of secondary schools had on my professional practice working in one of Vancouver’s ‘best’ schools. It established the rationale underpinning the polemical debate that emerged in British Columbia as a result of the Fraser Institute publishing its annual secondary school ranking. At issue is the collision of two competing epistemic approaches about how best to determine an overall ‘good’ school—one anchored in a particular kind of instrumental rationality, whereby schools (and the students attending them) are reduced to a set of measurable KPIs; the other anchored in a belief that schools are complex organizations that provide opportunities that serve the diverse educational needs of all students—an understanding that transcends measurement on

KPIs. What's at stake is the erosion of school cultures that value and serve different kinds of students in different kinds of ways.

Chapter 2 establishes the theoretical grounding for my project. My intent is to show how modern disciplinary power operates on the fields of accountability and judgment through the Fraser Institute's school-ranking rubric. A principal argument I make is anchored in Foucault's (1977) understanding of how power is operationalized in prisons—that statistical rankings cast their omnipresent gaze on secondary schools from published tables in the same way prison guards cast their omnipresent gaze on incarcerated prisoners from Panoptic prison towers. I draw on Bourdieu's work to show how capital imbalances between agents playing the school accountability game result in power imbalances between agents on—what Brighenti (2007) calls—*the field of visibility*. Here I am interested in exploring the possibility that political formations compete across fields in ways that seek to force a particular vision on schools. Five research questions are posed at the end of Chapter 2 as they relate to discourse, political praxis, capital acquisition, and governmentality.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodological approach that I bring to bear on this project. Specifically, I will be analyzing the Fraser Institute ranking of secondary schools—the case under investigation—through a critical discourse analysis (CDA). CDA focuses on the role of discursive activity in constituting and sustaining unequal power relations (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). It “examines how language constructs phenomena” (Phillips & Hardy, 2002, p. 6). CDA also focuses on how particular kinds of discourse privilege some agents at the expense of others. More specifically, CDA examines how “discourse structures determine specific mental processes, or facilitate the formation of specific social representations” (van Dijk, 1993, p. 259). Yin's work on how to conduct case study research when investigating a “contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context” (Yin, 2003, p. 13) is something I draw on to help frame my study.

Chapter 4 unpacks and problematizes the development and use of the Fraser Institute ranking rubric with a particular emphasis placed on demonstrating how semiotic ranking discourses have shifted and mutated from 1998-2010. My interest and

focus here is not in critiquing the myriad of complex statistical equations the Fraser Institute has developed to measure the overall quality of secondary schools in British Columbia as a mathematician, statistician, or actuary might, but rather to explore how the language of statistical rankings have been used by the Fraser Institute as a discursive strategy to tell particular kinds of stories about schools. Here I argue that embedded in the polemical debate around school rankings is what Foucault calls the “principle of rarefaction” (Foucault, 1984, p. 116). The principle of rarefaction describes the relationship between epistemologies and discursive practices whereby one position supplants another. I am interested in analyzing how a particular—impenetrable—statistical gaze has been manufactured by the Fraser Institute to highlight and amplify the differences between schools with the goal of promoting its privatization agenda through choice and market-based reform initiatives in this province and elsewhere. As importantly, I will be arguing how the principle of rarefaction operates within school ranking discourses to supplant counter discourses made by teachers and the political organizations to which they belong. Here I will demonstrate how the market, managerialism, and performativity—what Ball (2003) calls interrelated policy technologies—are strategically deployed by the Fraser Institute on the field of visibility to shape how the public perceives (and judges) schools and school systems.

Chapter 5 explores the polemical nature of the school ranking debate. Specifically the chapter focuses on how particular régimes of truth are manufactured by political agents about secondary schools and how they are presented in the media to construct a reality effect in the public’s mind about the state of secondary school education in British Columbia. Here I will be analyzing the mechanics underpinning the discursive strategies deployed by agents invested in the school ranking debate. I argue that discourse is a form of symbolic capital that is used in strategic ways by the Fraser Institute to manufacture public support for an educational reform movement that is principally rooted in privatization and choice. I also focus on how different political agents that include (but are not limited to) the Fraser Institute acquire and the BCTF, consolidate, and leverage symbolic capital on the field of power to promote divergent

visions about the role school rankings should play in holding teachers accountable for their work. Finally, I describe how the Fraser Institute expands its presence on the educational field by devising school-ranking rubrics for elementary schools and Aboriginal students both within, and outside of, British Columbia.

Chapter 6 begins with a synopsis of the study. It has been written with the goal of repositioning the reader within the confines defined by the original problematic. This is followed by a description of the major findings that emerged in response to the research questions posed. Very generally these findings—which are presented as empirical assertions—relate to: (1) how disciplinary power is exercised through published school report cards; (2) how technologies of representation inform, shape, and manage the field of visibility through surveillance; (3) how competing agents use language to mediate relationships of power; and (4) how symbolic capital is acquired, mobilized, and leveraged through storytelling, coalition building, and policy borrowing. My goal here is to review how each finding resonates with the literature on discourse, surveillance, accountability, the acquisition of symbolic capital, and policy theory. These points are contextualized—not only in relation to British Columbia—but in relation to England, New Zealand, and the United States. This is relevant because those countries have also emphasized the benefits gained when market-based reform initiatives are paired with standardization movements that promote the development (and publication) of school ranking tables. The chapter continues with a critical analysis of the single case study approach that was used to conduct this investigation. Here a focus is placed on the extent to which this particular methodological approach could be deemed successful in this case. The chapter concludes with my personal reflections on how the Fraser Institute ranking of schools has shaped my thinking about teaching, leadership, and accountability.

## CHAPTER 2: Theoretical Framework

### Introduction

Chapter 2 establishes the theoretical framework for my project. It focuses on how asymmetries of power are established and promoted by examining the relationship between knowledge, discourse, and truth as that relationship is informed by a particular kind of representation—the statistical ranking of schools. A central argument I make is that in using statistical rubrics to describe the experiences of students in secondary schools, the Fraser Institute employs a particular kind of logic that not only limits the kinds of stories that can be told about schools, but as importantly shapes how they are ‘seen’ by the public. This is especially relevant because the Fraser Institute has become a significant force in determining how educational issues are discussed in the public realm since their school rankings were first published in 1998. A study that questions how language is used by one group to describe the experiences of another must also have as its focus questions that relate to agency. This is an important consideration because language, knowledge, and truth are enmeshed in discourse, power, and agency. Where there is knowledge there is language. Where there is language there is discourse. Where there is discourse there are truth claims. Where there are truth claims there is difference. Where there is difference there is power. And where there is power there is the potential for agency that can take the form of a political struggle.

Without exception political struggles are situated within a socio-political context and to some the Fraser Institute acts as a proxy for conflict within the British Columbian context because its mission-driven agenda to “measure, study, and communicate the impact of competitive markets and government interventions on the welfare of individuals” is steeped in the controversial educational reform of privatization (The Fraser Institute, 2010a). I argue this reform initiative is communicated to the public through a ranking discourse that highlights visibility asymmetries between schools and school systems. How different schools are represented on the report card, therefore, is at the core of the Fraser Institute ranking because published accounts of ‘school

*goodness*’ reflect discursive practices that are both familiar and strategic. Report cards are familiar because teachers, and schools, have traditionally communicated student achievement through reporting documents that cast student performance against a backdrop of achievement possibility.<sup>7</sup> Report cards take on a strategic role because they are tied to the Fraser Institute’s choice agenda when they are published as rankings in newspapers and online. In sorting schools according to how well students perform on compulsory standardized provincial examinations the Fraser Institute has devised an accounting tool that has an “extraordinary impact on the life world of educators [by] establishing what is normal and what is not [and] what is necessary and what is peripheral” in the operation of schools (Pignatelli, 2002, p. 172). In this regard I agree that the Fraser Institute’s published school rankings reconfigure what, Andrea Brighenti, calls “the epistemology of seeing” (Brighenti, 2007, p. 323). According to Brighenti (2007) the epistemology of seeing defines fields of visibility on which human activity is perceived and judged—contextually. For many people it is through school rankings that we come to know, evaluate, and recognize what ‘good’ schools are according to a particular epistemology of seeing—an epistemology presented by the Fraser Institute through its school ranking discourse. By implication the rankings also highlight ‘bad’ schools while, at the same time, renders invisible alternative ways that schools can be presented in the public realm. A central focus of my study will investigate and clarify how this representation takes place in the public domain through published school report cards.

In understanding how the field of visibility is constructed, Ball (2003), focuses on how technologies of governance can identify certain performances as being exemplar thereby instituting a “new mode of state regulation which makes it possible to govern in an ‘advanced liberal way’” (Ball, 2003, p. 215). By this logic, the ranking of school

---

<sup>7</sup> In British Columbia students receive letter grades and/or percentages in compulsory and elective subjects that comprise the Ministry of Education’s Graduation Program. Additionally, compulsory Foundation Skill Assessment (FSA) results for students in grades 4 and 7 are reported to parents in three categories—numeracy, reading comprehension, and writing—as: not yet meeting (NWM), meeting (M), or exceeding (E) expectations. In many respects student report cards are perceived by the general public as being the traditional and normative way for educators to document student progress at every grade.

performance is associated with a culture that defines relative quality, net worth, and the value of individuals and organizations. When viewed in this context, rankings can be thought of as a governing technology through which schools can be regulated (Ball, 2003; Rowe, 2000; West & Pennell, 2000). Governing technologies (like school rankings) exercise disciplinary power when they are introduced across the social space and insert themselves into an ever-changing web of power relations under the guise of accountability régimes.

I argue that within the British Columbian context the school report card serves as a kind of governing technology that is used by the Fraser Institute, the Ministry of Education, political organizations that represent teachers, and other professional and parental groups to play the '*school accountability game*' on the field of visibility. The debates about the local report card are reflected in the discursive practices through which each agent (or player) constructs their respective vision of schools. Here it would be important to understand how each contestant's strategy in playing the accountability game unfolds relative to other agents playing the same game and, moreover, in the broader debates and controversies that stem from the Fraser Institute publishing its annual school report card. Clarifying this problematic would help explain why the discourse that surrounds the Fraser Institute ranking of schools is polemical in nature. This is why I believe there is something essential at stake that underpins the ranking phenomenon and that warrants further investigation: To be successful in the school ranking game—and to be a successful school by making a positive difference in the diverse lives of students—is not the same thing because, generally speaking, "educators do not see students as objects, but as a potentiality that triggers the oppressed, silenced, and marginalized to come forth and be emancipated".<sup>8</sup>

Herein lies my point of entry into an analysis of the Fraser Institute ranking of secondary schools as a case study. So far the polemical debate has focused on the impact school rankings have on teacher and student morale ("BCTF responds," 2006; McDonnell, 2005; O'Connell, 2002; Proctor, 1998a). However, very little scholarship has

---

<sup>8</sup> Dr. André Mazawi. Personal notes made during Dr. Mazawi's EDST 565 lecture, UBC, August 4, 2005.



been devoted toward understanding how rankings operate discursively to create self-disciplining dynamics that co-opt professionals working within schools into playing by rules imposed by the Fraser Institute. This shortcoming reflects a major gap in the literature and brings to light an important element that is not discussed in the public realm—the relationship between power and discourse in the production of knowledge and truth claims about schools and school systems.

I also argue that ranking discourses promote the Fraser Institute's agenda that market forces will lead to an overall improvement in the educational experience of students when two criteria are met: (1) when an interested public perceives the ranking instrument to be a legitimate way to measure the overall quality of schools, *and* (2) when the public perceives top-ranked private schools as being model schools to be emulated by their public school counterparts. By this logic, the Fraser Institute becomes influential in driving an educational reform initiative that is principally anchored in visibility, school performativity, market forces, and school choice. This is relevant because it implies that private organizations—like the Fraser Institute—acquire and mobilize symbolic capital in ways that can influence public educational policy within the broader field of political power. It also implies that the Fraser Institute promotes its privatization agenda by using discursive practices in strategic ways to shape and manage the public field of visibility and—by extension—the public field of judgment.

Michel Foucault (1926-1984) and Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) have written extensively about how the state, individuals, and groups procure and leverage different forms of capital that I believe are relevant to the school-ranking phenomenon. I draw on their work to support my argument that different agents use different strategies on the field of power to shape and manage how the general public perceives secondary schools. I use some of Foucault's theoretical testimony to understand how instruments of disciplinary power operate within a ranking discourse to produce '*winning*' and '*loosing*' schools. I argue that discourse can be thought of as a form of capital that is used by the Fraser Institute to promote its political agenda. I draw on Bourdieu's understanding of how class-based struggles are steeped in the acquisition and

mobilization of different kinds of capital by competing agents playing the ‘*accountability game*’ on the field of education. Class-based distinctions, therefore, are at the heart of Bourdieu’s work and it is the division of schools by the Fraser Institute into high, mid, and low-ranked institutions in a journalistic mediated space that is of principal interest to me. What follows is a description of how I apply some of their work to my analysis of the school ranking phenomenon.

### **Foucault and School Rankings**

Foucault’s preoccupation was to deconstruct premeditated claims to régimes of truth. He believed that truth was born out of “multiple forms of constraint” (Foucault, 1980, p. 131). He also believed that each society had its general politics of truth. Foucault understood that politics made possible,

“the types of discourse [society] accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances that enable one to distinguish true and false statements; the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true” (Foucault, 1994, p. 131).

Foucault understood that the deployment of discourse was an area where truth is manifested, expressed, sanctioned, and seized. As such, it becomes important to problematize the epistemic and semiotic foundations of the statistical language operating in school ranking discourses through which the ‘*truth*’ is told about schools. Like any ‘foreign’ language, statistical discourses need first to be translated if the stories told about schools are to be critically interpreted. Part of my study will focus on this enterprise.

Like Foucault, I am also interested in problematizing truth-claims made about a matter—in this instance the ones made by the Fraser Institute about schools. And like Foucault, I am less interested in understanding what power is *per se*, as I am in explaining how power operates within a published ranking system that identifies the

‘best’ and ‘worst’ performing schools in British Columbia. Principally, I argue that school rankings function as a particular kind of knowledge discourse that exercises disciplinary power on the public field of accountability. Foucault’s thinking about discourse is relevant in this regard because he concerned himself with the relationship between speech, language, and text—core aspects of the rankings’ representation—in the production of régimes of truth. He was instrumental in awakening scholars to the limitations imposed by discourse analyses relating to the structural, linguistic, and hermeneutical dimensions associated with language (Foucault, 2006). Before Foucault intellectuals thought about taxonomic discourses that named, classified, and organized knowledge in “the theory of representation” (Foucault, 2006, p. xxv). By drawing on Foucault’s work I intend to problematize how the Fraser Institute uses school rankings to name, classify, and organize schools in the *practice of representation* to legitimize its position that report cards, tables, and numbers speak for themselves—categorically. Foucault’s work is relevant in this regard because he deconstructed claims to truth embedded in the production of knowledge, language, and discourse. He understood, “that we should not speak of the author but more definitively of the author function” (Rabinow, 1984, p. 113) in constructing an instrument like, for example, the Fraser Institute school ranking. Furthermore, Foucault believed that when authors write, “much of what they say is a product, not of their distinctive insight or ability, but the result of the language they are employing” (Gutting, 2005, p. 13). By this logic, power is operationalized through discourse as opposed to the kind of sovereign power that a single group or institute wields over another.

In his essay, *The Order of Discourse*, Foucault (1984) argued that “in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality” (Foucault, 1984, p. 109). In many respects Foucault is describing the mechanics underpinning polemical debates because he recognizes that opposing sides develop discursive strategies to gain mastery on the field of power. In the same essay Foucault

describes the principal of rarefaction whereby, “none shall enter the order of discourse if he does not satisfy certain requirements or if he is not, from the outset, qualified to do so” (Foucault, 1984, p. 120). This underscores the epistemic and ontological divide between the Fraser Institute’s approach and teachers that so far has characterized the school ranking debate because both sides feel uniquely qualified to speak from positions of authority about what goes on within secondary schools.

I argue that the polemical debate that plays itself out in the media over the Fraser Institute’s ranking of schools results from the same guiding question posed by Foucault in his preface to the English edition of *The Order of Things*: “What is the ground on which we are able to establish the validity of [considered] classifications with complete certainty?” (Foucault, 2006, p. xxi). This is an important consideration and it underscores why I am drawn to Foucault as one of two principal theoretical anchors for this project: He exposed the historical specificity of discourse by suggesting that discourses always functioned in relation to power relations; that power was everywhere; and that power was inextricably connected to truth-telling.<sup>9</sup> Herein lies Foucault’s intellectual contribution. He challenged scholars to problematize the political and social conditions necessary for the production of truth claims and related that production to knowledge itself (Foucault, 1980). In this way Foucault argued that power and knowledge directly implied one another and—that unlike universal laws of gravitation—there were no absolute truths in the social domain. This is an important insight, and one that is especially relevant in a study that problematizes school rankings devised by non-government organizations—like the Fraser Institute—because it underscores the ambiguity associated with the construction of knowledge in the

---

<sup>9</sup> Foucault recognized that truth, power, and knowledge were related and—that in the absence of absolute truth—knowledge and power colluded to promote prevailing truth claims that he termed *régimes*. Absolute truth transcended the influence of religion and politics when absolute truth was expressed through the physical sciences because truth had a predictive element. Humans could predict, for example, the rise and fall of tides; the time of the next solar eclipse, etc. These absolute and irrefutable truths that were steeped in rational epistemologies allowed, for example, Galileo to challenge the church. Consequently, predictive epistemologies became privileged epistemologies because they were premised on irrefutable truths that were steeped in the collection and interpretation of data. The data spoke for itself and, in Galileo’s case; the data enabled him to question the infallibility of a 17th century pope. Foucault, on the other hand, concerned himself with the social world and perceived this other world as being distinct from the physical world and the universal laws that governed it.

production of truth. It also points to how socially constructed régimes of truth gain their legitimacy when they take the form of privileged epistemologies; ones that are steeped in data-centric notions of reality like, for example, school rankings. To focus on the ranking from Foucault's perspective, therefore, is to focus on how non-government organizations construct régimes of truth about what schools should, and should not, be. In part this project will focus on this insight and question the relations embedded within networks of power relations that are established by the Fraser Institute to promote school rankings in British Columbia and elsewhere.

Foucault's understanding that régimes of truth were manufactured in the social realm to promote political agendas—and that not every citizen was equally served in the process—is an insight that still resonates today. He believed the key to political agency was in problematizing the relationship between knowledge, power, and discourse (Foucault, 1994, 1997, 2006; Rabinow & Rose, 2003). Foucault located power at the extremities—the place where official discourses over-asserted their authority. Furthermore, Foucault understood that power extended well beyond state imposed limits when he said, “for all [its] omnipotence [the state's] apparatuses is far from being able to occupy the whole field of actual power relations...because the state can only operate on the basis of other, already-existing power relations” (Foucault, 1994, p. 77). Foucault is saying here that non-state agents can—and do—operate within the broader field of power to exert influence. He is saying that “[t]he exercise of power is not simply a relationship between “partners,” individual or collective; it is a way in which some act on others” (Rabinow & Rose, 2003, p. 137). This implies that power is not a matter of consent, and that power is exercised in relation to existing power dynamics and enmeshed networks of connectivity between multiple agents. Herein lies a principal interest I have in studying how a non-state agent (like the Fraser Institute) positions itself in relation to already-existing, state-sanctioned, power relations between the Ministry of Education, schools, teachers, and unions.

I am especially interested in exploring Foucault's understanding of disciplinary power (power that disciplines) and its relationship to knowledge and discourse because

I think it operates throughout emerging power relationships that have developed since the Fraser Institute's first published its secondary school report card to punish entire populations of schools. As importantly, Foucault's conceptualization of disciplinary power and its relationship to surveillance theory is something I believe warrants further consideration in thinking about schools, in general, and published school rankings, in particular. This is especially true given how the Fraser Institute uses standardized examination results to compile its annual ranking. To that end, I intend to draw on Foucault's (1977) seminal work, Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, to show how ranking discourses reward and punish different kinds of schools. A principal argument I will make is that school rankings operationalize disciplinary power through similar techniques Foucault described were at play in relation to surveillance in prisons. While schools and prisons are designed with decidedly different purposes in mind I will show how school rankings can elicit institutional compliance in the same way panoptic prisons were designed to elicit prisoner compliance.

At this point it is worth noting that for disciplinary power to operate within any human field techniques for observing subjects within the field have to be established and ritualized by an authority figure. Foucault (1977) identified three distinctively modern techniques for observing subjects within a field: (1) hierarchical observations, (2) normalizing judgment, and (3) the examination. The art of discipline presupposes the exercise of discipline and Foucault was clear on the means in which he felt disciplinary power operated.

"The exercise of discipline presupposes a mechanism that coerces by means of observation; an apparatus in which the techniques that make it possible to see induce effects of power and in which, conversely, the means of coercion make those on whom they are applied clearly visible" (Foucault, 1977, pp. 170-171).

This is an important point that Foucault raises which I draw on to argue that, in British Columbia, the Fraser Institute's school ranking represents a modern technique for observing subjects because it incorporates hierarchical observations that are made

about student performance. As such, it becomes possible for the Fraser Institute to manage how the public ‘sees’ schools because the Fraser Institute manages how student achievement data is made visible to the general public.

A second feature of modern disciplinary power is concerned with normalizing judgment. Foucault described five ways in which the “normalization process operated within the régime of disciplinary power: (1) it referred individual actions to a whole that is at once a field of comparison, (2) it differentiated individuals in terms of following an optimum toward which one must move, (3) it was measured in quantitative terms, (4) it introduced the constraint of a conformity that must be achieved, and (5) it traced the limit that would define difference in relation to all other differences” (Foucault, 1977, pp. 182-183). I argue that this normalization process is at play every time the Fraser Institute publishes its annual school ranking because school improvement is always measured in relation to an arbitrarily defined optimum score of ten—a normalizing judgment rendered by a non-elected institute that exercises disciplinary power.

As for the examination, it combines hierarchical observations with normative judgment. If the examination is to work as a technique of disciplinary power, there has to be associated with it an artifact of the exam process; a document; a paper; a product that is held up for scrutiny by someone in a position to judge based on some criteria. The exam, therefore, not only situates students in relation to a Ministry prescribed curriculum but it situates students in relation to other students and agents in the broader field of power. Foucault made specific claims about the examination and its mediation to knowledge and power. In Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison he argued that examinations: “transform the economy of visibility into the exercise of power; introduce individuality into the field of documentation”; and finally, that “examinations (surrounded by all its documentary techniques) reduce an individual to a case” (Foucault, 1977, pp. 187-191).

If disciplinary power has a functional dimension, Foucault recognized that it also has a structural one. In writing about the Panopticon, Foucault had this to say about the effect of disciplinary power: “Inspection functions ceaselessly. The gaze is everywhere”

(Foucault, 1977, p. 195). I believe this conceptualization of power is especially relevant to a study that has as its focus the institutional practice of school rankings because the effect of school surveillance is made permanent by students writing compulsory, Ministry-set, standardized exams, the results of which, are published in newspapers and online. “The art of punishing, then, must rest on a whole technology of representation” (Foucault, 1977, p. 104). The technology associated with exam setting and exam marking, therefore, transforms the *theory of representation* into the *practice of representation*—a concern that stands at the centre of my project.

### **The Panopticon**

It is a bleak comparison, but a principal argument I make in my analysis of the Fraser Institute’s school ranking is that it functions very much like Jeremy Bentham’s 17<sup>th</sup> century proposal for a model prison. The all-seeing Panopticon was designed to surveil inmates 24-hours a day in a cost-efficient way. An essential architectural function of Bentham’s prison was that a few “overseers” could effectively monitor and scrutinize the behaviour of prisoners (Foucault, 1980, p. 155). This omnipresent functionality was achieved through structural means because an *all-seeing* tower was positioned in the central courtyard of the Panoptic prison. Consequently, inmates would never know when guards stationed within the tower were observing them. This speaks to the powerful relationship between structure and agency because, as Foucault noted in Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, “visibility is a trap that assumes the automatic functioning of power” (Foucault, 1995, p. 200). Foucault described the effect panoptic architecture had on human behaviour.

“Hence the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. That this architectural apparatus should be a machine for creating and sustaining a power relation independent of the person who exercises it; in short, that the inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers” (Foucault, 1977, p. 201).



In its 21<sup>st</sup> century extension of the Panoptic prison Thomas Mathiesen (2006) writes about the need for *panoptic* surveillance mechanisms to be augmented by the recognition of *synoptic* surveillance mechanisms. “Synopticism involves the ability of a large group of people to scrutinize the actions of a few individuals” (Haggerty & Ericson, 2006, p. 28). It is the opposite of panopticism whereby a few prison guards scrutinize the actions of many prisoners. Synopticism, therefore, is a function of contemporary mass media because the detailed actions of groups are made public through newspapers, television, and Internet accounts in the new politic of visibility. Foucault’s central argument that panopticism was an essential component of disciplinary power because it contributed significantly to its production as a mechanism (or instrument) of power, is something that I feel may be operating within published school rankings—synoptically.

Earl (1999) describes the economic relationship between test-taking, surveillance, and scarce resources.

“External tests and examinations have always existed in schools, with a clear and singular purpose: making decisions about the educational status of individual students. They have been seen as a fair way to identify the best candidates for scarce resources, and they have been the vehicle for directing students into various programs or into the world of work” (Earl, 1999, p. 4).

I maintain that compulsory provincial exams and school ranking systems that are advocated by neoconservatives as being essential ways to improve schools serve the same principal function as prison towers because both instruments operate as cost-effective technologies of governance of *scarce resources* that make possible the surveillance of prisoners and teachers alike. In the same way, therefore, the state is able to reduce the operating costs associated with prison reform by employing a few guards to view many inmates, so too does the ranking of schools have the potential to reduce the costs of, and resistance to, educational reform by employing technologies of

governance that “narrowly calculate and assess student learning, teacher work, [and] school effectiveness” (Pignatelli, 2002, p. 157).

### **Systems of Accountability**

Pignatelli (2002) suggests that educators are increasingly subject to educational reform initiatives that are “marked by evermore centrally designed and monitored systems of accountability” (Pignatelli, 2002, p. 157). And just as the Panopticon created a power relation between the ‘object’ and the ‘subject’ in ways that rendered the ‘subject’ in a permanent state of visibility so too can published school rankings create an analogous power relationship—a relationship in which the subjects become complicit in their own subjugation. For example, Webb (2006) identified how teachers can “generate performances of their work in order to satisfy accountability demands” which he termed “choreographed performances” (Webb, 2006, pp. 201-202). I argue that it is not just educators that are targeted by *accountability systems*, but other agents that also participate in the educational project—students, parents, school trustees, politicians, and political organizations like, for example, the British Columbia College of Teachers (BCTF)—that are also targeted in ways that underscore and highlight a network of power relationships I am interested in problematizing.

In an unpublished doctoral study, Kuchapski (2001) identifies three key principles that accountability systems seem to have in common: (1) disclosure, (2) transparency, and (3) redress (Kuchapski, 2001). My intent is to link these accountability markers with Foucault’s description of how disciplinary power operates through distinctly modern techniques to “monitor and scrutinize individuals at every location in the social hierarchy in the new politic of surveillance and govern-mentality” (Haggerty & Ericson, 2006, p. 6). In large measure this politic is made possible because of the ubiquitous presence of the media that has the capacity, not only to shape public opinion, but as importantly to create a reality effect in the public’s mind.

## **Disclosure**

Although fundamental to the idea of accountability, disclosure is a problematic concept because it must be balanced with a respect for an individual's right to privacy (Kuchapski, 2001). For the purposes of this analysis disclosure pertains to the sharing of information about student achievement by the Ministry of Education. The Ministry uses two large-scale assessments to gather information about student achievement at five different grades: (1) Foundation Skill Assessments (FSAs) in Grades 4 and 7, and (2) Standardized Provincial Exams in Grades 10, 11, and 12.<sup>10</sup> The collection and analysis of information about people in this way in order to govern their activities is fundamental to the new politic of visibility. Consider what Haggerty and Ericson (2006) have to say about data-gathering as an important dimension of surveillance technology.

“Surveillance technologies...operate through processes of disassembling and reassembling. People are broken down into a series of discrete informational flows, which are stabilized and captured according to a pre-established classification criteria. They are then transported to centralized locations to be reassembled and combined in ways that serve institutional agendas” (Haggerty & Ericson, 2006, p. 4).

I argue that this understanding of surveillance theory is fundamentally no different from how data is gathered about students in British Columbia. The Ministry discloses individual student results to parents and school administrators with one hand (disassembling data) while it reassembles (repackages) the collective experience of entire groups of students for publication in provincial newspapers and online, within the broader field of power.

## **Transparency**

If corruption is symbolized by darkness and secrecy, transparency serves as its polar opposite accountability marker. Visibility seems to be synonymous with transparency as evidenced by multiple dictionary definitions that reference light, clarity,

---

<sup>10</sup> The compulsory standardized provincial exams that all British Columbian students write since 2005 are: English 10, Math 10, Science 10, humanities 11, and English 12.

and openness in defining the term. When school rankings are made transparent to the public agents understand how information is used by the Fraser Institute to compile its annual report card. Transparency limits the possibility that people, organizations, and corporations can misrepresent their respective positions on the field of power. Enron is an example of what can go wrong when corporate accounting practices are non-transparent. Enron collapsed because its senior accounting team consistently overstated revenues and underreported liabilities in a cloak of secrecy. Transparent due process reduces the possibility that these kinds of willful misdeeds occur within organizations.

It is important that I contextualize transparency within a business discourse because it speaks to a particular accounting phenomenon called the audit that I believe has become entrenched within school culture. Auditing is made possible to the extent complex human behaviour within organizations is reduced to objective measures that, in turn, become entries on a spreadsheet. Auditing, therefore, may be thought of as a particular kind of surveillance tool (technology) that promotes a particular régime of truth. In the realm of business, spreadsheets can be thought of as a kind of numerical text that, like any hermeneutic, is subject to interpretation. As importantly, however, the audit as a surveillance tool has found a home in schools.

“Originally focused on financial criteria, auditing now encompasses various efforts to render institutions more transparent and more accountable. This quest for visibility through surveillance has come at a cost. Auditing disproportionately values criteria that are amenable to being audited, often to the detriment of other outcomes that are less easy to measure. For example, standardized test scores in education are prominent auditing criteria that are only loosely connected to the diverse goals and accomplishments of schools” (Haggerty & Ericson, 2006, p. 7).

In this context, transparency can be considered a powerful condensation symbol within educational policy because it serves an anti-corruptive (or counter-corruptive) function in the public’s mind. Furthermore, the very real limitations embedded within auditing as a surveillance tool are effectively diminished because auditing criteria may serve to “distort organizational mandates, as the phenomena being measured is maximized at

the expense of other ends” (Haggerty & Ericson, 2006, p. 7). It is precisely for this reason that critics object to school ranking instruments that negate, devalue, and/or ignore important aspects of school culture that matter in the lives of students, teachers, and parents—things like: how approachable do students find their teachers?; to what extent are parents engaged in their respective school communities?; and what kinds of curricular and extra-curricular opportunities do students have at their schools, which help connect students to each other and their teachers beyond the classroom. These aspects of school life are most commonly ‘felt’ by members of any school’s community but they are equally important because they contribute to the overall ethos of any ‘good’ school.

### **Redress**

Redress operates where disclosure and transparency intersect. It represents that accountability marker that functions to remedy, or set right, an undesirable or unfair situation. Redress may be thought of within the greater context of emancipatory discourses that percolate within the public space. Redress begs the question: What should we do and how should we do it? In determining what is “good” redress underscores a fundamental belief that underpins critical social theory at its core—not only that society *can* be engineered and arranged—but that society should be engineered and rearranged. But engineered and arranged for whom, and with what purpose in mind?

The civil rights movement of the 1960s, in which the United States Supreme Court ruled that it was unconstitutional for public schools to provide separate but equal educational opportunities for black students, speaks to the power of redress in reengineering an aspect of American society. The Supreme Court’s decision was made possible, in part, because the educational experience of black students was demonstrated to be significantly compromised compared to their white peers. In disclosing the inequities of a two-tiered public educational system made transparent in a court of law, redress was made possible—at least in principle. Herein lies the potential

‘good’ that can result from surveillance theory in the new politic of visibility. In making visible the diminished educational opportunities that black students experienced systemically decades ago, the political climate and will of a nation was altered in a way that opened doors of opportunity for students of colour where they might otherwise remain closed. In this example disclosure, transparency, and redress changed the way black students came to think about themselves. It also changed the way white students came to think about black students. This warrants serious consideration in the context of school rankings because, I argue, there exists within them an opportunity for different kinds of stories to be told about different kinds of schools.

While Foucault’s focus helps explain how discourses shape and define social relations, it is important to note that he is concerned much less with the material, non-material, and symbolic distribution of capital that make playing the accountability and ranking game easier for some schools than others (Bourdieu, 1985; Callewaert, 2006; Foucault, 1977). Herein lies the limitation of applying Foucault’s approach—exclusively—to an analysis of the Fraser Institute ranking of schools: The social field of schooling is not just defined by discourse but also to the material and symbolic aspects of politics. Moreover, discourse does not cause or explain human agency in isolation from the material context of political action. Discourse holds meaning in relation to the cultural and social fields that discourse encounters. So while Foucault’s principal interest was in understanding the relationship of individuals to society as forms of discourse, Bourdieu’s focus was in understanding this relationship in terms of a social practice.

### **Bourdieu and School Rankings**

Bourdieu was also interested in deconstructing social realities but he approached the problematic differently. He believed that the nexus of power resided not so much in discursive practices per se, but in the amount of social, political, cultural, and symbolic capital that agents had either inherited, accumulated, and/or mobilized in playing a game on the field of power (Bourdieu, 1985). I am drawing on Bourdieu’s work because he brings to bear on this project an epistemological bridge between discourse and

power; structure and agency; in proposing the concepts of *habitus* and field. This is an essential theoretical component to my study because I argue that *habitus* gets expressed through discursive practices that are employed by the various agents active in the field of power. I also argue that the Fraser Institute ranking reflects class-based distinctions between schools that have always existed. Classes, understood from the objectivist point, are categories of people who occupy similar positions within a field because they are similar to each other: “The closer the positions are, the more likely is the participation of their occupants in a shared *habitus*, the possibility of their constitution as a social group through political struggle, and their collective recognition of their identity as distinct from other groups or classes” (Jenkins, 2002, p. 88).

*Habitus* is the product of individual and collective history; a history steeped in traditions and internalized social conditioning. “When *habitus* encounters a social world of which it is the product, it finds itself ‘as a fish in water’; it does not feel the weight of the water and takes the world around itself for granted” (Brown & Szeman, 2000, p. 14). *Habitus* “characterizes the reoccurring patterns of class outlook—the beliefs, values, conduct, speech, dress, and manners—which are inculcated by everyday experiences within the family, the peer group and the school. Implying habit, or unthinking-ness in actions, the *habitus* operates below the level of calculation and consciousness, underlying and conditioning and orienting practices by providing individuals with a sense of how to act and respond in the course of their daily lives” (Mills & Gale, 2007, p. 436). *Habitus* brings into focus the subjective dimension of Bourdieu’s social theory because it transcends “determinism and freedom, conditioning and creativity, consciousness and unconscious, or the individual and society” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 54). *Habitus* shapes understandings, behaviour, and outlooks but it does not define them. *Habitus* becomes active in relation to fields because “it provides the connection between agents and practices” (Rawolle & Lingard, 2008, p. 731).

Fields are socially constructed areas defined by human activity. They are a configuration of [objective] relations that include political organizations, public schools, private schools, boarding schools, day schools, single sex schools, provincial statutes,

and think tanks—to name a few. Bourdieu theorized that different fields had their own structures, interests, and preferences in which the ‘rules of the game’ were played. In this way, fields can be thought of as a kind of social arena within which struggles take place between agents steeped in different *habitus*. And just as there are winners and losers on the soccer field, so too are there winners and losers in the ranking field of school-wide accountability.

In many respects fields are defined by what’s at stake within the field. For example, in the field of education, Bourdieu would say that intellectual distinction, economic prosperity, self-esteem, and the emancipatory potential for redress are at stake. In the field of politics, power is at stake; in the acting (theatre) field it might be fame, and so on. Social spaces consist of a number of overlapping, autonomous, and interconnected fields that operate interdependently but with their own logic of practice. Bourdieu recognized that relational power between agents competing for limited resources on various fields resulted in strategies being adopted by the agents themselves. These strategies help tip the balance of power in ways that promote the interests of some agents while simultaneously disadvantage the interest of others. Bourdieu’s description of relational power playing itself out in the field of journalism is especially relevant in a study about school rankings that are published in provincial newspapers.

“Constant, permanent relationships of inequality operate inside this [journalistic] space, which at the same time becomes a space in which the various actors struggle for the transformation and preservation of the field. All the individuals in the universe bring to the competition all the (relative) power at their disposal. It is this power that defines their position in the field and, as a result, their strategies” (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 40).

This is an important point for my study because in emphasizing the relationship between power and power-operationalized, Bourdieu clarifies how agents adopt strategies to win the game being played on any given field. Bourdieu realized what was at stake in the struggle of the disempowered when the media was involved in telling



their stories. In writing specifically about televised imagery, Bourdieu stated: “At stake today in local as well as global political struggles is the capacity to impose a way of seeing the world, of making people wear “glasses” that force them to see the world divided up in certain ways” (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 22). This is an important consideration and one that I intend to explore in depth throughout my analysis of school rankings in British Columbia. A central argument I make is that by imposing *its* way of seeing schools through the media the Fraser Institute effectively makes class-based distinctions between schools that are disconnected from what really goes on inside them and that primarily reflect the ways symbolic capital is unequally distributed throughout the educational system. Class-based distinctions, therefore, are at the heart of Bourdieu’s work and it is the division of schools by the Fraser Institute into high, mid, and low-ranked institutions in a journalistic mediatised space that is of principal interest to me. I argue that media (principally newspapers) play an important role in this regard because they shape, not only how we understand-self in relation to the plurality of other, but how we experience-self in relation to the plurality of other. I refract these theoretical insights through Bourdieu’s lens to examine how different agents like, for example the Fraser Institute, the BCTF, the Ministry of Education, teachers, parents, and journalists—mobilize various resources to advance their relative positions over the field of education within the context of an ever-changing field of power. The strategic positioning and repositioning of agents in this way shapes how school communities are viewed because the struggle takes place—in part—as a public spectacle in the media.

Bourdieu (1998) also talked about the relationship between journalism and the capacity it has to create a reality effect in the representation of the ‘Other’. He writes: “the simple report, the very fact of reporting, of putting on record as a reporter, always implies a social construction of reality that can mobilize (or demobilize) individuals and groups” (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 22). I argue that different groups compete for different media representations that promote different reality effects. In my analysis of the school-ranking rubric I explore how different agents engage the media about its characterization of schools in the *practice of representation*. While divisions make

possible the mobilization of groups that, “can exert pressure to obtain privileges, and so forth” (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 22), divisions also make possible the imposition of socially constructed dominant views by one power-wielding group over another like, for example, the Fraser Institute imposing its view on how secondary schools should be ‘seen’. By this logic the media’s reality effect becomes a form of capital that agents engaged in the school accountability debate mobilize to promote their political agendas. How groups mobilize the media to leverage reality effects on the field of judgment become an important determinant in their location on the field of power.

Another way to think about fields is as a social space that is comprised of multi-faceted, inter-dependent, context-dependent fields of human activity in which political struggles play themselves out between teams. For Bourdieu, it is necessary to understand the relationship of the field in question to the field of power because it spoke to the issue of legitimizing the game being played and the efforts exerted to that end. Furthermore, Bourdieu argued that it was not only essential to analyze the field-play of various teams involved in the game itself, but as importantly his methodological approach made possible the analysis of how team strategies affected the game’s outcome. In other words, Bourdieu was interested not only in who played the game, but also how they played it: Was every team equally adept at playing?; Did everybody understand the rules?; Were all teams equally prepared to play?; Who was benched for the duration of the game and why?; And were the officials refereeing unbiased in calling the game? Team players could be considered ‘agents’ who collectively implement game-specific strategies concerned with preserving (or improving) their relative positions within the field of power according to logics of practice. For Bourdieu there were two principal logics under which agents negotiated fields and engaged in practice. Bourdieu termed these logics ‘practical’ and ‘reflexive’ (Schirato & Webb, 2002). Practical logic refers to a *feel* for how the game is played. Agents engaged on the field must know how the game is played “with respect to the various discourses, genres, capital, written and unwritten rules, values and imperatives that inform and determine agents’ practices” (Schirato & Webb, 2002, p. 256). By comparison reflexive knowledge “is an extension

and development of this practical sense away from habituated practice to a more aware and evaluative relation to one's self and one's context" (Schirato & Webb, 2002, p. 255). Embedded within reflexive knowledge is the concept of strategy; that agents can learn from the game in ways that allow for them to develop and implement new strategies that affect the outcome of the game. Simply put, agents play the game to the extent they understand and abide by the rules of the game (practical logic of practice) *and* to the extent they can change the rules by which the game itself is played in the deployment of strategy (reflexive logic of practice).

As importantly, however, Bourdieu was interested in knowing what makes the game go on, and why players take the game so seriously. When agents come to "accept the game of the field on its own terms unquestioningly" simply because they are caught up in, and by, the game itself then agents are enmeshed in a condition he called '*illusio*'—a term that describes a tacit acceptance by agents on the field that "playing is worth the effort" (Schirato & Webb, 2002, p. 256). '*Illusio*' is like an ontological spell that is cast on agents engaged in *any* game on *any* field. '*Illusio*' gives agents the motivation to play the game and '*illusio*' drives their actions. Consider what Bourdieu said about how competing agents acquire social, cultural, and political power when cast under the spell of '*illusio*':

"It becomes clear why one of the elementary forms of political power...consisted in the quasi-magical power to name and to make-exist by virtue of naming. The capacity to make entities exist in the explicit state, to publish, make public (i.e., render objectified, visible, and even official) what had not previously attained objective and collective existence and had therefore remained in the state of individual or serial existence...represents a formidable social power, the power to make groups by making the common sense, the explicit consensus, of the whole group. In fact, this categorization, i.e., of making-explicit and of classification, is performed incessantly, at every moment of ordinary existence, in the struggles in which agents clash over the meaning of the social world and their position within it, the meaning of their social identity, through all the forms of benediction or malediction, eulogy, praise, congratulations, compliments, or insults, reproaches, criticisms, accusations, slanders, etc. It is no accident that the verb *kategoresthai*,

which gives us our "categories" and "categorèmes", means to accuse publicly" (Bourdieu, 1985, p. 729).

What is at stake in the struggle for competing agents, therefore, is to establish a prevailing logic of practice through which the school accountability game is played. I argue that the Fraser Institute accumulates capital in the field of power because it has changed the rules of the accountability game by importing and consolidating its own reflexive logic of practice. To change the rules of the game, therefore, agents accumulate, mobilize, and leverage capital in ways that promote their respective (reflexive) logic of practice, which—in the *habitus* of the Fraser Institute—is anchored in the discourse bounded by school rankings, privatization, and market-driven reform initiatives. Understanding Bourdieu's theoretical approach to the reproduction of schools by showing how both social and political forces get imported into the educational system is an important aspect of my project. Additionally, I show how the Fraser Institute engages in building networks and coalitions over the field of power by aligning itself with other institutions that share the Fraser Institute's base *habitus*. In this regard I am interested in unpacking the strategies different agents use on the field of power to build networks of influence with the goal of mobilizing capital and shaping the educational field.

Bourdieu recognized that capital imbalances between groups resulted in power imbalances between groups. He felt that, "differences in scholastic outcomes could be explained by understanding differences in social provenance—especially when the culture of pupils and their backgrounds meshed or clashed with the dominant culture of educational institutions" (Grenfell, 2004, p. 58). It is therefore, important that Bourdieu's approach to power be brought to bear on this project because it strikes a balance between an analysis that focuses on discourses—exclusively—and an analysis that focuses on resources—exclusively; as those forces play themselves out over the larger field of power. Simply put, an analysis that problematizes the Fraser Institute's ranking solely from a discursive perspective sees schools (and the communities that inhabit them as social institutions) as text and language. Bourdieu's approach

contributes to my analysis by focusing on the contextual dynamics relating to capital imbalances that clearly exist between individual students and ordered groups of schools as they move over the field of power politics.

Bourdieu's project attempts to articulate a methodological approach that is able to capture the ability of agents to mobilize diverse forms of capital to further their position on the field of power. In the case under consideration I draw on Bourdieu's work to understand how school rankings operate within the wider realm of power and the dynamics associated with the mobilization of capital among contending groups. I am interested in exploring the possibility that political formations—like advocacy think tanks, research centres, professional organizations, etc.—compete across the field of power in ways that seek to force a particular vision on schools. Their vision is imposed on the public by mobilizing various forms of cultural, symbolic, and political capital, which are leveraged to either promote and legitimize or discount and undermine the introduction (and continuance) of school rankings into the educational system.

In sum, the ongoing and successful reproduction of relationships of domination and subjugation lies at the heart of Bourdieu's social theory. These relationships are informed by how the '*accountability game*' in British Columbia is played out between competing agents involved in political struggles over the institution of schooling. I argue that the debates over the Fraser Institute's ranking are part of a larger struggle over the role and function of schools, in particular, and rankings in general. In that sense, how different social and political groups in British Columbia (and beyond) coalesce in the current struggle over education and schooling is conceived as part of the broader reconfiguration of the field of politics currently taking place in British Columbia and other jurisdictions. An examination of the school ranking phenomenon through Foucault and Bourdieu makes possible, not only an analysis of power that focuses on the intersection of shifting discourses within a shifting accountability field, but also the unpacking of strategies through which various actors/agents mobilize different forms of capital on the field of education to enhance their respective positions.

## Limitations of Foucault and Bourdieu in Explaining School Rankings

While Foucault investigated the discursive techniques through which power operates to name, blame, and shame 'Other', Bourdieu's focus was in describing the sociocultural mechanisms by which power produces (and reproduces) class-based struggles. Clearly both scholars have something relevant to contribute in problematizing prevailing truth claims that surround the secondary school ranking debate, however, their respective epistemological approaches also invite critique. Many scholars have taken issue with Bourdieu's theory. On the one hand Bourdieu is saying there exists a possibility for agents to acquire new skills and apply different (winning) strategies that could result in different (emancipatory) outcomes. On the other hand, he is saying that, "*habitus* excludes ideas like 'self', 'choice', and action' by virtue of its emphasis on practices arising from the group's relation to the collective and to its own repeating history" (Brown & Szeman, 2000, p. 20). Jenkins (2002) is especially critical. He characterizes Bourdieu's *élan vital* as persistently producing "deterministic models of social process" (Jenkins, 2002, p. 175).

I argue that there exists within Bourdieu's "conceptual triad [of] practice, *habitus*, and field" the emancipatory possibility of redress (Rawolle & Lingard, 2008, p. 3). I believe that Bourdieu's approach leaves open the door to human agency because he understood that it made no sense to speak of a highly structured, deterministic, social space in absolute and definitive terms. His theoretical accountings factor prominently in understanding how individuals play the sociopolitical game of anything and Bourdieu did not accept that social practice could be understood solely in terms of individual decision-making. He also didn't believe that group life could be understood as being the aggregate of individual behaviour. For Bourdieu, marginalized agents could enhance their position when they acquired enough capital to implement winning strategies on political fields. My intent is to show how competing agents involved in the school wide accountability struggle, debate, accumulate and leverage capital over the course of time. By analyzing these strategies my aim is to show that story-telling and coalition building through capital mobilization stand at the core of the school ranking debate,

thus helping me bring together the works of both Foucault and Bourdieu to bear on framing this study. What is different between agents is how they mobilize different forms of capital across the field of power in ways that leverage their respective discursive practices to promote their respective agendas.

Finally, it is not surprising that published rankings that cast schools as 'best' and 'worst' according to an imposed *reflexive logic of practice* invites agents involved in the ranking game to respond critically. The epistemology of seeing schools through a statistical lens that is manufactured in this way engages agents on the broader field of power because they are made visible. Here then is opportunity for voices of marginalized students to be heard in relation to discursive practice. Embedded, therefore, within Bourdieu's sociological theory is what Mills and Gale (2007) describe as the "revolutionary potential of agents" (Mills & Gale, 2007, p. 437). The revolutionary potential of agents is made possible in the new politic of visibility because it highlights the uneven playing field, on which different kinds of schools compete for, and leverage, capital. This is something I feel warrants serious consideration because an uneven playing field defines what strategies agents employ on the field of power to promote their respective agendas.

Foucault's epistemic grounding that discourse and power are enmeshed fails to recognize that discursive practices become active in relation to multi-layered, complex, intersecting social fields. Callewaert (2006) described the essential difference between Foucault (the philosopher) and Bourdieu (the sociologist) when he noted:

"Although [Foucault] wrote thousands of very innovative pages on power, he never wrote about power as a social activity in action. He wrote only very marginally about forms of exercise of power, or about power as an aspect of discourse" (Callewaert, 2006, pp. 90-91).

Callewaert's position was well reflected in the way Bourdieu himself critiqued Foucault.

"[Foucault] explicitly refuses to search outside the 'field of discourse' for the principle, which would elucidate discourses within it. He rejects...the

endeavour to find in the ‘field of polemics’ or in the ‘divergences of interests or mental habits of individuals’...the explanatory principle of what happens in the ‘field of strategic possibilities’ (Bourdieu, 1992, pp. 195-206).

I argue that an analytical approach that weaves together Bourdieu and Foucault would salvage some of the limitations expressed above. The approach explains how shifting discourses may be leveraged as forms of capital mobilization on a shifting field of power that promotes political agendas through context-specific action strategies. The next section outlines the guiding principles of an integrative approach that I have proposed, which builds on the theoretical insights provided by Foucault and Bourdieu. I use this approach to explain how the Fraser Institute has effectively managed to promote its school ranking agenda, not only within British Columbia, but throughout Canada as well.

### **An Integrative Approach of Foucault and Bourdieu**

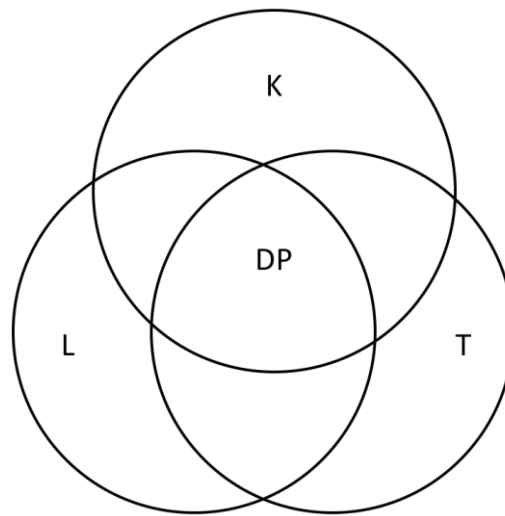
To illustrate the shifting configurations of complex alliances, political forces, and strategies that are at play between the Fraser Institute and other competing agents in the broader field of power I propose an approach that links Foucault’s theoretical testimony that régimes of truth are manufactured to promote political agendas through discursive practices *with* Bourdieu’s conceptualization of *habitus*, field, and capital. In the approach, different agents compete for (and/or inherit) cultural, social, symbolic, and political capital that is used to promote different agendas. This integrative approach is depicted in Figure 4 as schematic, but it has been conceived in three interdependent parts.

Figure 1 illustrates how Foucault thinks about knowledge, language, truth, and discourse. In this representation three overlapping circles (knowledge, language, and truth) intersect at the nexus of discursive practice—the place “where truth is both manifested and expressed” (Foucault, 2006, p. 41). The Fraser Institute uses the semiotic *language* of statistical rubrics, for example, to promote a particular régime of



truth—a régime that is principally anchored in standardization, measurement, and performativity. So when Peter Cowley says, “If people think we have a narrow focus, give us more data”<sup>11</sup>, he is really emphasizing the value the Fraser Institute places on how the ‘objective’ *language* of data can be used to *know* something in particular about schools. Embedded in Cowley’s comment is an epistemic positioning *by* the Fraser Institute—for the Fraser Institute—which, in turn, informs its discursive practice. The discursive practices used by competing agents opposed to this kind of stance like (for example) the BCTF are anchored in different *truth* claims because that *truth* is born out of a different experience—an experience that is discernibly more contextual by comparison. What the BCTF ‘*knows*’ about schools is different from what the Fraser Institute ‘*knows*’ about schools because teachers operate from different epistemic and ontological vantage points.

**Figure 1: Discursive practices (DP) emerge from the conflation of knowledge (K), truth (T), and language (L)**



---

<sup>11</sup> Personal notes made by Michael Simmonds while attending a PDK – UBC Chapter, dinner meeting at the Arbutus Club, Vancouver, April 19, 2006.

Figure 2 represents how knowledge (K), language (L), truth (T), and discursive practices (DP) are shaped by *habitus*, which is represented in this approach as a box containing three overlapping circles. *Habitus* explains why different agents experience the same accountability game in different ways. The Fraser Institute perceives school rankings as a way to promote educational reform initiatives that are principally rooted in privatization and choice (Cowley, 2003b, 2005b). The BCTF perceives school rankings as undermining the work of teachers (Clarke, 2004; Kuehn, 2002). These disparate perspectives are shaped by disparate *habitus*.

**Figure 2: Discursive practices (DP) are shaped by *habitus***

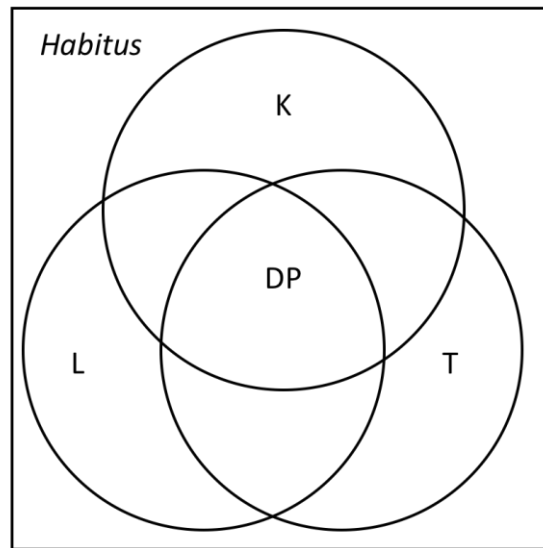


Figure 3 depicts the net-capital acquisition of different kinds of symbolic capital by agents. Capital acquisition takes place in strategic ways over time. The acquisition and mobilization of capital by competing agents on the field of power is essential to winning the school wide accountability game. The discursive practices used by agents on the field of judgment can be seen as a form of capital that is leveraged by competing sides to win the school accountability game. At stake is the public's perception of secondary schools in British Columbia. The more net-capital that is acquired by agents is reflected in this figure by an increase in the height and base of the triangle.

**Figure 3: Agents acquire capital (C) on the field of power**

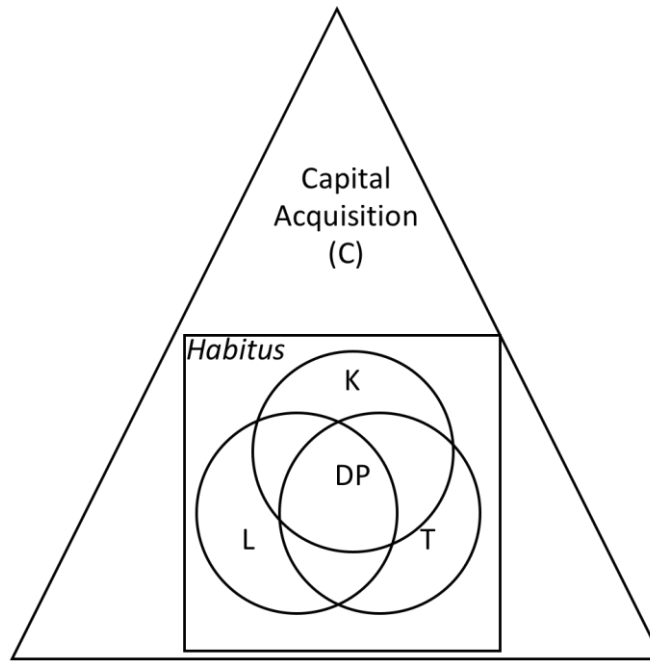
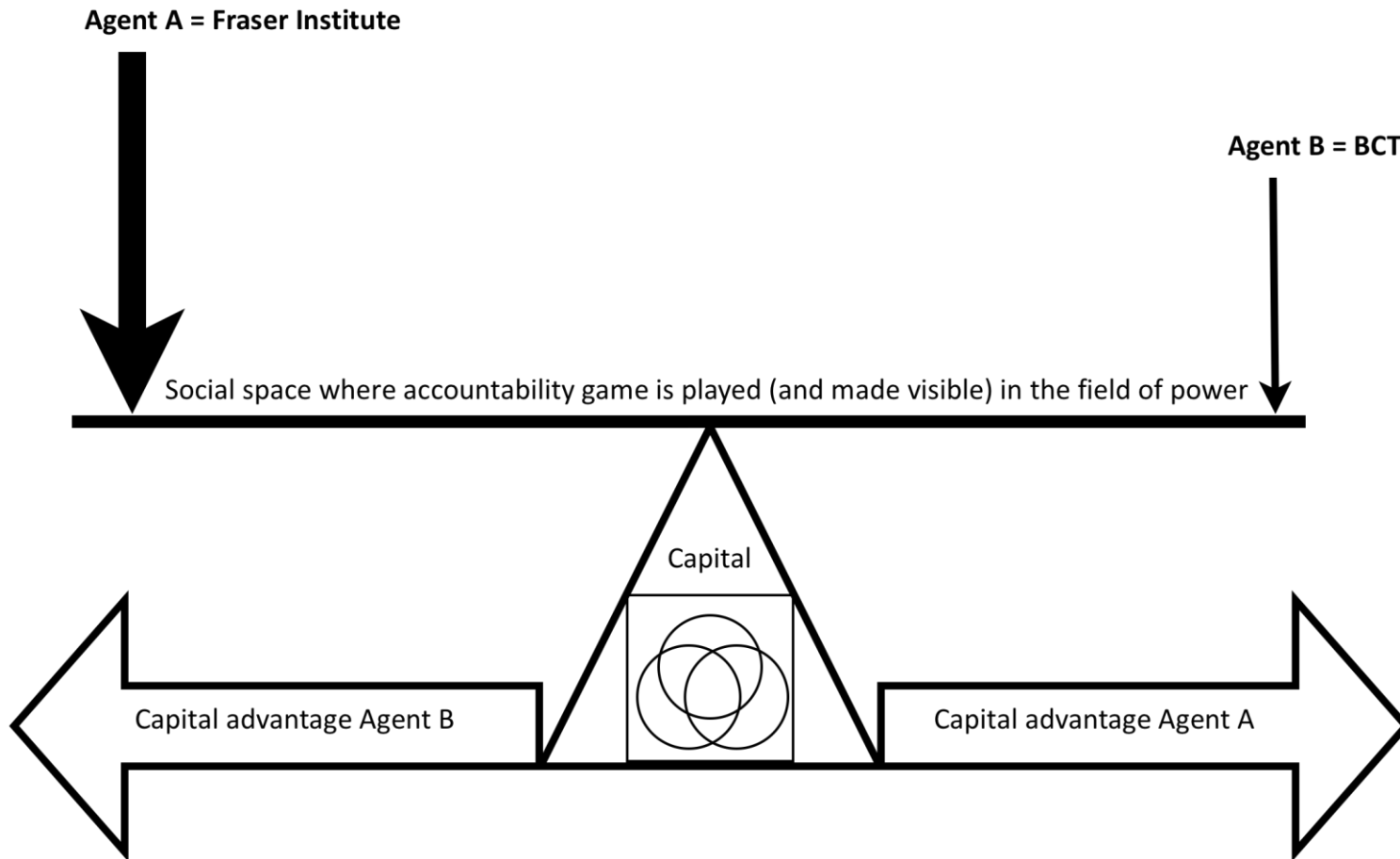


Figure 4 illustrates how the school accountability game is played. Competing agents develop strategies they believe will result in the acquisition and mobilization of capital. In the figure the Fraser Institute is represented as 'Agent A', and the competing agent—the BCTF—is represented as Agent B. The sizes of the arrows pointing towards the lever are intended to reflect the relative effectiveness of the agents in developing game-winning strategies. What is key to understanding this integrative approach is that the acquisition and mobilization of symbolic capital is a complex, on-going exercise that occurs over time. Here, capital reflects *all* the political, symbolic, social, and cultural capital that agents acquire (and mobilize) while playing the accountability game. I argue that discourse can be thought of as a form of capital that is leveraged by competing agents to sway public opinion about the value of school rankings. When the discursive practices used by the Fraser Institute (Agent A) prevail in promoting their agenda the capital fulcrum shifts to the right. When the BCTF and the constellation of other like-minded political forces (Agent B) prevail in promoting their competing agenda the capital fulcrum shifts to the left. The net effect of a shifting fulcrum (which represents the mobilization of capital in this approach) is that one agent gains ground on the field of power at the expense of the competing agent. This tips the balance of power.

Figure 4: Analyzing the school accountability game through an approach that integrates Foucault and Bourdieu



## Research Questions

It is possible to formulate the following research questions in relation to the theoretical testimony presented throughout this chapter. These questions emerge as well from the debates, struggles, and controversies underpinning the introduction and use of the Fraser Institute's secondary school report card in British Columbia and will be addressed in Chapters 4 and 5 respectively.

### Chapter 4

1. How have the statistical components of the Fraser Institute's secondary school ranking in British Columbia changed over time in terms of their modes of statistical representation?
2. What implications do these statistical changes have for the way secondary schools come to be known by the public, and how do they shape the field of visibility through which secondary schools are viewed?

### Chapter 5

1. How can agents use language to mediate relationships of power and privilege in social interactions, institutions, and bodies of knowledge? How does the naturalization of ideologies come about?
2. What particular régimes of truth are manufactured by the media about secondary schools to construct a reality effect in the public's mind about the state of secondary school education in British Columbia?
3. How do different agents involved in the ranking debate mobilize different forms of capital on the field of power to promote their respective agendas with respect to schools?

These questions will be examined through a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of the Fraser Institute. CDA "should deal primarily with the discourse dimensions of power abuse in ways which make manifest the injustice and inequality that result from it" (van Dijk, 1993, p. 252). CDA "tries to explore how socially produced ideas and objects that populate the world were created in the first place and how they are maintained and

held in place over time” (Phillips & Hardy, 2002, p. 6). It describes and explains how power abuse is enacted, reproduced or legitimized by the talk of the dominant groups and institutions (van Dijk, 1993).

Critical theory “is characterized by...a pronounced interest in critically disputing actual social realities. Its guiding principle is an emancipatory interest in knowledge” (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2003, p. 110). A critical theory approach to the Fraser Institute ranking of secondary schools “presupposes the idea that societal conditions are historically created and heavily influenced by the asymmetries of power and special interests, and that they can be made the subject of radical change” (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2003, p. 110).

I use CDA and critical theory as the epistemological lenses through which to view the Fraser Institute’s ranking of secondary schools for three principal reasons: (1) it makes possible the unpacking of discursive practices and technologies of governance that underpin the ranking phenomenon within, and beyond, British Columbia’s borders; (2) it brings to light the politics of power associated with agents promoting different visions for secondary schooling within the fields of visibility, judgment, and power; and (3) it provides an epistemic framework on which to build an integrative theoretical approach that explains how shifting discourses can be used as instruments of disciplinary power to acquire and mobilize capital within a shifting accountability field of judgment to create a reality effect that private and independent school system is ‘better’ than the public school system.

## CHAPTER 3: Methodology

### Research Design—Case Study

In the broadest sense, a central question that underpins the methodological approach used in this study is: *What is the school ranking phenomenon a case of?* Given the thirteen-year monopoly the Fraser Institute has on ranking schools in British Columbia a more nuanced and relevant central question becomes: *What is the Fraser Institute ranking of schools phenomenon a case of?* This is an important distinction that I believe warrants consideration because it shifts the focus of my research away from a study about the Fraser Institute per se—an institutional case study—towards an investigation that has as its focus the case of school rankings as they are conceived, published, and promoted by the Fraser Institute. In essence, the case study at issue here *is* secondary school rankings (the phenomenon under investigation) and *not* the Fraser Institute—an advocacy think tank. This important distinction has clear methodological implications because it requires that I problematize the school ranking issue through a case study approach that accounts for the *discursive, contextual, and statistical* elements that frame the ranking phenomenon being studied. It also informs the kinds of research questions that will establish the methodological trajectory of this study.

Yin (2003) suggests that ‘*how*’ and ‘*why*’ questions are most appropriate for case study research when they are “being asked about a contemporary series of events, over which the investigator has little or no control” (Yin, 2003, p. 9). This kind of investigation demands that multiple sources of data be used because the phenomenon under investigation is highly contextual.

“Case study research is particularly appropriate for situations in which the examination and understanding of context is important. Multiple sources of evidence are used and the data collections techniques include document and text analysis” (Darke & Shanks, 2002, p. 113).

Like other research strategies the case study is a way of investigating an empirical



topic that not only relies on multiple sources of evidence (see Table 1), but also “investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context” (Yin, 2003, p. 13). The phenomenon of interest in this case study is secondary school rankings—the *primary unit of analysis*. Yin (2003) indicates that four tests are commonly used to establish the overall quality of any empirical social research design. A good case study is strong in construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability. These quality control research markers will be demonstrated in this investigation through—what Yin (2003) describes as being—a *Type 1, single-case, holistic case study design*. This particular design matrix is appropriate when a single case represents the critical case in testing a well-formulated theory *and* when the single-case is studied at two or more different points in time (Yin, 2003, pp. 39-42). Given this study’s principal focus of analyzing the Fraser Institute’s published school ranking over the past thirteen years it is clear that a ‘critical case’ is also a longitudinal case because it is considered at two or more different points in time.

### **Triangulation**

Yin (2003) describes the important need for case study researchers to use different sources of information as a way to ensure the investigation is valid. He metaphorically calls this ‘*listening*’, but Yin clearly establishes the rationale for using multiple sources of evidence in conducting robust case studies. Multiple sources of evidence develop “*converging lines of inquiry*, a process of triangulation” (Yin, 2003, p. 98). Triangulation is usually defined as using two or more methodologies to look at the same broad research topic (Olsen, 2002). It is generally regarded as a methodological approach that strengthens the validity of the findings obtained through a single qualitative method. “When you have really triangulated the data, the events or facts of the case study have been supported by more than a single source of evidence” (Yin, 2003, p. 99). Using both qualitative and quantitative evidence helps establish the validity of claims made in response to the research questions posed. This kind of convergence is called *data triangulation*. *Theoretical triangulation* combines two or more different theoretical

perspectives to examine the same phenomenon. They converge in this study through my use of Foucault and Bourdieu's respective theoretical testimonies in the ways I described earlier.

### **Data Gathering**

Yin (2003) indicates that evidence for case studies may come—indeed it *must* come—from a variety of sources if the investigation is to satisfy the validity and reliability tests described earlier. *Documents* are relevant to every case study topic and include: memoranda and communiqués, written reports, and newspaper clippings and other articles appearing in the mass media (including the internet). These kinds of documents are important to collect because they help establish “explicit links between the questions asked, the data collected, and the conclusions drawn” (Yin, 2003, p. 83). Documents are stable, unobtrusive, exact, and broadly elucidate the questions under investigation. Their weakness lies in an obvious reporting bias that is author-specific.

The documents used in this study come from three principal sources: the Fraser Institute, the Ministry of Education, and published print and online media reports, articles, and accounts. These documents may be considered—what Smith (2001)—calls “organizing texts” (Smith, 2001, p. 174). In her paper, *‘Texts and the Ontology of Organizations and Institutions’*, Smith (2001) described how *organizing texts* mediated people's daily lives and activities within organizations. Moreover, she described the conditions necessary for *‘texts in action’* to “co-ordinate multiple sites of people's everyday activities” when she noted “organizing texts must be readable as the same even though they are taken up and interpreted differently in the different settings in which it is read to the organizing system of texts that co-ordinates multiple sites of such reading and writing” (Smith, 2001, p. 174). I will be drawing on Fraser Institute produced school reports that describe in detail how successive ranking iterations are manufactured. This is important because the rationale is given for why some key performance indicators (KPIs) are included in the ranking rubric while others are neutralized and/or excluded. If the Fraser Institute's (school reports) *‘coordinate*

*multiple sites of people's everyday activities'* as Smith (2001) suggests, then it must be possible to demonstrate why, when, and how people's activity is coordinated by a school ranking instrument that exerts some degree of control.

*Direct observation* can run the gambit from casual to formal data collection and include observations made at meetings and other public gatherings. They are useful because they cover events in real time and are highly contextual, however issues of selectivity (what is remembered) and reflexivity (how the event proceeds because it is being observed) both factor into the data collection process. The direct observations that I have conducted are defined by the twenty-one years of professional experience that characterize my time as an educator.

Yin (2003) describes artifacts as being a "technological device, a tool or instrument, a work of art, or some other physical evidence" (Yin, 2003, p. 96). Artifacts are relevant in case study research when they assume an important component in the overall case. In this study the artifact is the essential component of the case because the physical evidence of school rankings is the Fraser Institute's report card and associated online reports. I am arguing here that the Fraser Institute uses particular discursive strategies to promote its privatization agenda by publishing a *ranking artifact* called a '*school report card*' with which readers engage.

Having established the rationale for adopting a case study approach to investigating the Fraser Institute ranking of secondary schools in British Columbia, it is important to elucidate in more specific terms how the case under investigation will be analyzed. At its core this project brings together critical social theory and critical discourse analysis to "describe, interpret, and explain the ways in which discourse constructs, becomes constructed by, represents, and becomes represented by the social world" (Rogers, Malancharuvil-Berkes, Mosley, Hui, & O'Garro Joseph, 2005, p. 366).

### **Critical Discourse Analysis**

I need to say at the outset that I am not approaching the statistical dimension of the Fraser Institute ranking of schools as a statistician might—focused in the critique of

the kinds of multivariate regression formulae used by the Fraser Institute in the construction of its school ranking rubric. But I am saying that statistical rankings constitute a particular kind of discourse that is grounded in a sociopolitical context. A critical discourse analysis (CDA) of the Fraser Institute's report card on secondary schools, therefore, not only examines "the nature of social power and dominance" (van Dijk, 1993, p. 254), but it also "focuses on how language as a cultural tool mediates relationships of power and privilege in social interactions, institutions, and bodies of knowledge" (Rogers, et al., 2005). Social power is based on privileged access to socially valued resources like income, position, status, group membership, education, and/or knowledge. van Dijk (1993) notes that modern power "is mostly cognitive, and enacted by persuasion, dissimulation or manipulation, among other strategic ways to change the mind of others in one's own interests" (van Dijk, 1993, p. 254).

CDA is specifically interested in the deployment of power in discourse, which van Dijk (1993) calls dominance. Dominance is seldom total, and as van Dijk (1993) points out in his paper, *'Principles of Critical Discourse Analysis'*, dominance may be restricted to specific domains. He very clearly establishes when dominance crosses into the domain of hegemony when he says,

"if the minds of the dominated can be influenced in such a way that they accept dominance, and act in the interest of the powerful out of their own free will, we use the term hegemony. One major function of dominant discourse is precisely to manufacture such consensus, acceptance and legitimacy of dominance" (van Dijk, 1993, p. 255).

van Dijk (1993) argues that power and dominance can be institutionalized to enhance their effectiveness and can be sustained and reproduced by the media. This is an important insight because it highlights a principal argument that I intend to make through a CDA of the Fraser Institute's published ranking of secondary schools—that dominant discourses shape public opinion and "facilitate the formation of social representations" (van Dijk, 1993, p. 259). In other words a CDA reveals how agents "enact, or otherwise 'exhibit' their power in discourse" (van Dijk, 1993, p. 259).

Moreover the actions of a “powerful group may limit the freedom and actions of others, but also influence their minds” (van Dijk, 1993, p. 254).

In his paper, *Critical and Descriptive Goals in Discourse Analysis*, Fairclough (1985) suggested that “there is a one-to-one relationship between ideological formations and discursive formations” (Fairclough, 1985, p. 751). He referred to institutions as a “speech community” (Fairclough, 1985). Speech communities determine “*what can and should be said*” (Fairclough, 1985, p. 751). He characterized the inseparability of ‘*ways of talking*’ and ‘*ways of seeing*’ as “ideological discursive formations (IDFs)” and indicated that IDFs were “ordered in dominance” (Fairclough, 1985, p. 751). A feature of a “dominant IDF is the capacity to ‘naturalize’ ideologies by winning acceptance for them as non-ideological ‘common sense’” (Fairclough, 1985, p. 752).

“To ‘denaturalize’ them is the objective of a discourse analysis which adopts ‘critical’ goals. I suggest that denaturalization involves showing how social structures determine properties of discourse, and how discourse in turn determines social structures” (Fairclough, 1985, p. 739).

I am interested in denaturalizing how language is used to construct meaning within a field of judgment that has as its central feature the culture of performativity. As such, my focus is on disrupting and destabilizing the epistemic and statistical assumptions that underpin the Fraser Institute’s ranking of secondary schools and which construct a one-size-fits-all-school-ranking-rubric. It is essential that a CDA of the statistical aspect of the Fraser Institute ranking be carried out in this way because the Fraser Institute report card is compiled entirely from quantitative data provided by different ministerial branches of provincial government. A CDA not only ‘involves examining the production, consumption, and reproduction of the texts [but] the analysis of sociocultural practice [as well], which includes an exploration of what is happening in a particular sociocultural framework’ (Rogers, et al., 2005, p. 371). The interdependency of CDA and critical social theory is not difficult to appreciate given,

“[t]he word “discourse’ comes from the Latin *discurses*, which means, “to

run to and fro.” That is, discourse moves back and forth between reflecting and constructing the social world. Seen in this way, language can not be considered neutral because it is caught up in political, social, economic, religious, and cultural formations” (Rogers, et al., 2005, p. 369).

By definition a CDA of school rankings also focuses on sociopolitical dimensions at play when a de facto policy document is produced by an advocacy think tank with clout. It will be important, therefore, to analyze policy documents that are published by the Fraser Institute with the goal of establishing prevailing ideological stances this particular advocacy think tank promotes. This is an important consideration because in promoting school rankings the Fraser Institute also promotes its ideological position about how best to improve schools. In exploring how rankings have changed and evolved over time a CDA makes possible an examination of how published school rankings have overexerted their authority on the accountability field by promoting neo-liberal ideologies that privilege certain kinds of schools.

Bourdieu’s central theme in his analysis of education was that the “system consecrates privilege by ignoring it, by treating everybody as if they were equal when, in fact, the competitors all begin with different handicaps based on cultural endowment” (Jenkins, 2002, p. 113). School rankings, therefore, may be thought of as being schemes of construction that—by their very nature—include and exclude certain kinds of schools that serve certain kinds of students. For if Bourdieu’s assertion that social groups occupy similar positions within a field because they share a common *habitus* is operational within a school ranking discourse, then an analysis of statistical data should reveal contextual similarities and differences between schools that obtain similar overall scores. By this logic it is entirely possible that a particular kind of independent school is more likely to achieve the highest possible ranking.

I am also interested—not only analyzing how the ranking rubric has shifted and mutated over time—but in looking at how the general public engaged with published school reports through published media accounts from 1998-2010. Smith (2001) describes “text-reader conversations in which, unlike real life conversations, one side of

the conversation is fixed and unresponsive to the other's response" (Smith, 2001, p. 175).

"In face-to-face conversations among people, the utterance-response sequence is one in which each next utterance is modified as a response to the utterance that preceded it. In text-reader conversations, one side is obstinately unmovable. However, the reader takes it up, the text remains as a constant point of reference against which any particular interpretation can be checked" (Smith, 2001, p. 175).

I will be using CDA to show that people make sense of school rankings from (private) text-reader conversations that people engage in when reading published annual rankings, and in (public) face-to-face conversations that take place in the media and online. Furthermore, rankings could not be created without the help of technological devices (like computers) and the *technologies of governance* that make possible the data from which school rankings are derived in the first place. By this logic, published school rankings become physical artifacts and serve as a primary source of data for this project. School ranking tables/documents are relevant here because they exemplify what Smith (2001) calls "the textual mediation of people's activities through standardized genres" (Smith, 2001, p. 173). *Textual mediation*, therefore, creates artifacts that stem from "the coordinating machinery of organization and institution" (Smith, 2001, p. 174). For the purpose of this investigation *textual mediation* principally takes the form of school reports cards that place an emphasis on key performance indicators (KPIs) and their relationship to the phenomenon of school performativity. In large measure the Fraser Institute compiles its annual secondary school report card from average exam results that students achieve on standardized (compulsory) Ministry examinations. These subject examinations are based on a Ministry prescribed curriculum and are carried out within schools across the province. Foucault believed that "the age of the "examining" school marked the beginnings of a pedagogy that function[ed] as a science" (Rabinow, 1984, p. 198). He "sought to understand the history and evolution of constructs that were considered natural...and how such constructs are

a product of power/knowledge relationships” (Rogers, et al., 2005, p. 370). It is essential, therefore, that a CDA of school rankings be made with the goal of problematizing the statistical techniques used by the Fraser Institute to manipulate the climate of public opinion because they are perceived by many to be ‘*normal*’ constructs that operate within the domain of school peformativity. Table 1 lists the documents that will be analyzed in this study. Each document may be considered a discursive event that has three dimensions: (1) it is a spoken or written text; (2) it is an instance of *discourse practice* involving the production and interpretation of texts; and (3) it is a part of a broader sociopolitical context (Rogers, et al., 2005).



**Table 1: Documents used for critical discourse analysis**

Sources of Data — Collecting the Evidence
<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Primary Sources</u></b></p> <p><b><u>Fraser Institute Produced Documents</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fraser Institute Report Cards on British Columbia’s Secondary Schools (1998-2010)</li> <li>• Fraser Institute Annual Reports (1998-2010)</li> <li>• Fraser Forum Magazine Articles</li> <li>• Information published on the Fraser Institute’s website</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Newspaper &amp; Magazine Articles, Editorials, &amp; Letters to the Editor</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As published in <i>The Province</i>, <i>The Vancouver Sun</i>, <i>Globe &amp; Mail</i>, <i>The National Post</i>, &amp; other regional newspapers (1998-2010)</li> <li>• BCTF Newsletters, <i>Maclean’s</i>, &amp; other printed news-related sources</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Secondary Sources</u></b></p> <p><b><u>BC Ministry of Education Produced Documents &amp; Reports</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School &amp; District Reports</li> <li>• Federation of Independent School (FISA) generated data</li> <li>• Garfield Weston Awards for Excellence in Education</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Tertiary Sources</u></b></p> <p><b><u>Interviews</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Webcasts</li> <li>• Radio and print interviews</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Personal Observations</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arbutus Club Dinner: Peter Cowley Guest Speaker</li> <li>• Twenty-one years experience working as a teacher, administrator, and leader in the independent school system of British Columbia (September 1991-December 2010)</li> </ul>

### **Data Sources Contextualized**

It is not an overstatement to say that the most important document source for a case study that focuses on the Fraser Institute's secondary school rankings comes from the Fraser Institute itself. By analyzing thirteen years of secondary school report cards I document and explain how the Fraser Institute has effectively managed to '*naturalize*' its ideological stance that it is possible to objectively determine the province's 'best' and 'worst' performing schools. By specifically "focusing attention upon the 'social institution' and upon discourses which are clearly associable with particular institutions, rather than on casual conversations" answering the question: "*How does the naturalization of ideologies come about?*" is possible (Fairclough, 1985, p. 747). Fairclough (1985) believed, as I do, that social institutions were "an apparatus of verbal interaction, or an 'order of discourse'" (Fairclough, 1985, p. 749). I will be analyzing the various iterations of the Fraser Institute's secondary school report cards to show how they operate as disciplinary '*order of discourse*' to reward and penalize different kinds of schools on the field of visibility. Moreover, the analysis of the report cards in this way will document how, and when, the ranking rubric has changed over time. This is important because I argue there exists a circumstantial relationship between the province's changing political context and the Fraser Institute's changing ranking rubric. As well, the analysis will show how changing the ranking over time has significantly reduced the likelihood that public secondary schools in British Columbia could achieve *top-ten-school* status. Finally, secondary school report cards that have been devised (and published) by the Fraser Institute on its website since 1999 contain important information that are not otherwise published in newspapers featuring the Fraser Institute school report cards.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> The kind of information that is presented in the Fraser Institute generated reports will be unpacked and problematized in sufficient detail in Chapters 4 and 5, but in general terms it relates to providing more detailed accounts of how key performance indicators are calculated; the kinds of schools not included in the ranking; relationships the Fraser Institute has developed with other like-minded organizations throughout the world; as well key insights made by the authors of the report card that are relevant to the analysis.

Another important textual source of data includes '*Fraser Institute Annual Reports*' that have been published online from 1998-2010. They are relevant to an investigation about school rankings because they serve to contextualize the Fraser Institute's scope of influence in shaping public health, environmental, and economic policies. As well the annual reports identify the *Board of Trustees* and the *Executive Advisory Board* by name. This is helpful information because it documents and situates people and groups that are associated with the Fraser Institute within broader networks of power relations. As well the reports contain additional information about the Fraser Institute and its membership that does not usually get reported.

The Federation of Independent Schools Association represents a cohort of private and independent schools in British Columbia that includes: the Association of Christian Schools International in British Columbia (ACSIBC), the Associate Member Group (AMG), Catholic Independent Schools (CIS),<sup>13</sup> the Independent Schools Association of British Columbia (ISABC), and the Society of Christian Schools in British Columbia (SCBC)<sup>14</sup> (The Federation of Independent Schools, 2010a). FISA is not unlike the Fraser Institute in that it also believes that "numbers supply quantitative evidence of a reality which exists" (The Federation of Independent Schools, 2010b). I will be drawing on FISA generated data that gives an accurate historical accounting of student enrolment in different kinds of independent schools since the Fraser Institute published its first school report card in British Columbia. This information is relevant because it will document any demonstrated relational trends that may exist between student enrolment patterns and the place independent schools consistently occupy as 'top' ranked schools by the Fraser Institute.

Another important source of data for this project comes from published newspaper and magazine articles, newsletters, and editorials. I will be using them to highlight and explain how and why the polemical debate around school rankings is ongoing and highly contestable. In a paper published in *Discourse & Society*, van Dijk (1993), notes that "one crucial presupposition of adequate critical discourse analysis is

---

<sup>13</sup> Formerly called Catholic Public Schools (CPS).

<sup>14</sup> Formerly called National Union of Christian Schools - District 12.

understanding the nature of social power and dominance” (van Dijk, 1993, p. 254). He indicates that “power involves control, namely by (members of) one group over (those of) other groups” (van Dijk, 1993, p. 254). Given that the Fraser Institute ranking exerts disciplinary power over schools through a statistical discourse it is not surprising that a counter discourse has emerged in response. The polemical debate that has defined the school ranking initiative is one that has emerged between ‘*the institution*’ and ‘*the client*’ (Fairclough, 1985, p. 749). The “client is an outsider rather than a member [of the institution] who nevertheless takes part in certain institutional interactions in accordance with norms laid down by the institution” (Fairclough, 1985, p. 749). By way of example Fairclough (1985) identifies the physician/patient relationship as being analogous to the institution/client relationship. This pairing is not unlike the relationship school rankings have with secondary schools because—like the patient—secondary schools are complicit in their own (institutional) examination by the Fraser Institute<sup>15</sup>. Clearly, schools cannot respond to the Fraser Institute ranking per se, but the people working within them can. An analysis of published media accounts of the school ranking phenomenon by the people who work closely with students is an essential part of this project.

Reports and documents produced by the British Columbia Ministry of Education about secondary schools constitute another important source of textual data. My intent is to highlight aspects of school and district reports that the Fraser Institute ignores in generating its school-ranking rubric. This is relevant because it underscores the statistical bias inherent in a ranking rubric that excludes—what is arguably—important data. Radio interviews, podcasts, and published online debates make up another tertiary source of data. These recordings will be analyzed critically in much the same way as the textual data described above, but that information is delivered verbally and

---

<sup>15</sup> I do not mean to suggest here that secondary schools in British Columbia willingly submit to the Fraser Institute’s ranking of them in the same way that willing patients submit to be examined by a physician. I am saying that secondary schools in British Columbia cannot opt out of being included in the Fraser Institute ranking and are therefore drafted into a process that many school leaders say they object to.

not textually serves to broaden “discursive event[s]” (Rogers, et al., 2005, p. 371) that constitute the case being analyzed.

Finally, the personal observations I’ve experienced as an educator and leader working within the independent school system for the past twenty-one years serve as an important source of data as well. This potentially rich source of data that has inspired and motivated me to study the Fraser Institute ranking of secondary schools in the first place is also a potential liability because it illustrates the “classic tension that exists between distance and closeness in the research setting [that] is often blurred in education research” (Rogers, et al., 2005, p. 382). This point will be taken up in the next section.

### **Limitations of Critical Discourse Analysis**

Reflexive intentions endeavor to account for the interpretative dimension of empirical research (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2003). That is to say it is impossible for the researcher to remove him or herself from the phenomenon under investigation completely, and that it is the responsibility of the researcher to recognize and acknowledge any positional bias (s)he may bring to the investigation. Rogers et al., (2005) notes that “reflexivity is crucial in research agendas involving CDA in education research” because “education researchers are often researchers of familiar education settings...and as such, we bring with us (often successful) histories of participation in those institutions as students, teachers, and parents” (Rogers et al., 2005, p. 382). In other words, the perspective of educators who work directly with students in different educational settings informs the understandings they have about teaching and learning. Rogers et al. (2005) emphasizes the important need, therefore, for researchers to situate themselves within the research project.

A second limitation of my conducting a CDA of the Fraser Institute school ranking is that all of my data is limited to publically available sources. Without exception, every document, article, report, and interview that is part of this project is also a part of the public domain. I did not conduct a single interview or collect any data. In fact, this

project unfolded without the need for an Ethics Committee to be struck at the University of British Columbia, but given the very public nature of the polemical debates that surround the school ranking issue limiting the CDA to public data in this way is—I believe—warranted.

Finally, it is important to note here that my experience as a teacher, administrator, and school leader is defined by my work in the British Columbia independent school system. As I have already mentioned, my interest in understanding the Fraser Institute ranking of secondary schools was born out of my experience working in one of Vancouver’s ‘elite’ independent schools that—initially—did not perform well on the ranking. An important part of my job then (as the Director of the Senior School) was to understand a ranking instrument that made York House School look ‘*bad*’ to parents, alumni, and—most importantly—prospective parents. This was especially important given that a number of (free) local public high schools outperformed York House. It is not a stretch to say that the long-term future of the school was potentially at risk *if* York House could not significantly improve its ranking score. I understood what it felt like to have an excellent school be reduced to a single measure and it was—in part—my job to understand and implement whatever strategic changes were necessary to play (and win) the Fraser Institute’s school ranking game of accountability. Furthermore, my professional practice as an educator is (mostly) informed by the relationships I have established and cultivated with other heads’ of independent schools that belong to the Independent Schools Association of British Columbia (ISABC)—a cohort defined by a group of schools that have consistently achieved ‘top’ ranked scores on the Fraser Institute’s school report card from the beginning (see Appendix G). It could be argued that the longstanding academic, financial, and institutional success these kinds of schools enjoy can be attributed to them effectively leveraging the very neoconservative and neoliberal forces that are the subject of critique in this project.

## CHAPTER 4: A Changing School Ranking Rubric

### Introduction

The purpose of Chapter 4 is not only to show how the ranking rubric devised by the Fraser Institute has changed over time, but to examine how these changes have shaped the field of visibility through which secondary schools are perceived in the public domain. Initially the changes made to the ranking rubric reflected new key performance indicators (KPIs) the Fraser Institute felt were important to introduce to its ranking like, for example, subject-specific gender gap measures that compared the achievement results of boys to girls in mathematics and English (Cowley & Easton, 2001). Other changes were introduced because the ranking rubric was not immune to modifications the Ministry of Education made to its own secondary school graduation program (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2004). As well, the recruitment of foreign ESL students to British Columbia's public school system, and changes to admission policy requirements by Canadian universities that de-emphasized the importance placed on Grade 12 examination results, altered how the Fraser Institute devised its school-ranking rubric (Cowley & Easton, 2003; McGill University, 2010; The University of British Columbia, 2009). The impact these (and other) changes had on the ranking rubric is depicted in Table 2. It documents how, and when, changes made by the Fraser Institute were incorporated into the statistical rankings to say something '*objective*' about schools from 1998-2010. The table also highlights the descriptive data used by the Fraser Institute to say something '*contextual*' about schools during the same period. My goal is to use the data presented in the table throughout this chapter to show how the Fraser Institute leveraged disciplinary power within its ranking discourse to tell particular kinds of stories about particular kinds of schools. It is important to note that the chapter has been organized around five key iterations<sup>16</sup> that I believe characterize important modifications that were made by the Fraser Institute to its school-ranking

---

<sup>16</sup> Iteration # 1 (1998-2000); Iteration #2 (2001-2002); Iteration #3 (2003-2006); Iteration # 4 (2007); Iteration #5 (2008-2010).

rubric over its thirteen-year history. These changes delineate the data points used in the analysis to address the following research questions:

1. How have the statistical components of the Fraser Institute's secondary school ranking in British Columbia changed over time in terms of their modes of statistical representation?
2. What implications do these statistical changes have for the way secondary schools come to be known by the public, and how do they shape the field of visibility through which secondary schools are viewed?

An analysis of the historical data presented will show that modifications made to the ranking's statistical formulae implemented by the Fraser Institute rewarded certain kinds of schools in British Columbia while statistically sanctioning others. Moreover, the data interpretation demonstrates that a revised method of calculating a school's overall rating by the Fraser Institute in 2001 (Iteration #2) resulted in a *significant* decline in the number of public schools achieving an overall ranking between 9.0 to 10.0—the highest decile score possible. This marked redistribution of British Columbia's 'best' schools has remained consistent since the first revision was made and it has not been well documented in the mainstream press, if it has been documented at all. Finally, by drawing principally on published media accounts and the Fraser Institute's own documents, this chapter will illustrate how—in devising a statistical narrative about the state of the secondary school system in British Columbia—the Fraser Institute has leveraged discursive power to control how schools are perceived in the public realm. In so doing I argue that the Fraser Institute has effectively managed to cast the public school system as being inferior to the private school system, which operates on competition, market forces, and parental choice. What follows is an analysis of how the Fraser Institute established the terms by which secondary schools in British Columbia were 'seen' within the public space.



## The Epistemology of Seeing

Initially, the Fraser Institute was motivated to devise and publish a secondary school report card because there was “no uniform system for evaluating the performance of schools in the province” of British Columbia (Cowley, et al., 1998, p. 4). Moreover, the authors noted that no evaluative procedure was contemplated by the British Columbia Ministry of Education to determine how well the school system worked. “The only way to find out whether our schools are doing their job satisfactorily”, the authors of the first school report card noted was, “to measure results in an objective and quantifiable way” (Cowley, et al., 1998, p. 4). The data-driven initiative of a school-ranking rubric resonated with the Fraser Institute’s emphasis on measurability given its institutional motto, “If it matters, measure it” (Levant, 2005, p. A19). Additionally, the Fraser Institute’s position that school performance could be measured with the goal of improving British Columbia’s high schools was clearly articulated by its then Executive Director, Michael Walker,<sup>17</sup> when he said,

“Let’s get past the notion that school performance cannot be measured. The process of continuous improvement, to which we all aspire, consists of measuring performance, making corrections to what we are doing and measuring once again to discover the next set of corrections. And so on” (Proctor, 1998d, p. A3).

It is important to note here that Walker’s understanding of educational reform through continuous improvement is positioned within a specific epistemology of seeing called positivism—“a theory of knowledge which contends that what should count as knowledge can only be validated through methods of observation which are derived

---

<sup>17</sup> Michael Walker was also a principal author of the Fraser Institute’s first published school report card (1998) in British Columbia.

Table 2: Changing iterations of the Fraser Institute ranking rubric (1998-2010)

Key Performance Indicator (KPI)	Iteration 1			Iteration 2		Iteration 3				Iteration 4	Iteration 5		
	1998	1999 <sup>18</sup>	2000 <sup>19</sup>	2001 <sup>20</sup>	2002 <sup>21</sup>	2003 <sup>22</sup>	2004	2005	2006 <sup>23</sup>	2007 <sup>24</sup>	2008	2009	2010
1. Average exam mark	20% Grade 12	20% Grade 12	20% Grade 12	20% Grade 12	20% Grade 12	20% Grade 12	20% Grade 12	20% Grade 12	20% Grade 12	15% (Grade 12) 5% (Grade 10)	25% Grade 10-12	25% Grade 10-12	25% Grade 10-12
2. Percentage of exams failed	20% Grade 12	20% Grade 12	20% Grade 12	20% Grade 12	20% Grade 12	20% Grade 12	20% Grade12	20% Grade12	20% Grade 12	20% Grade 10 & 12	25% Grade 10-12	25% Grade 10-12	25% Grade 10-12
3. School vs. Exam	20%	20%	20%	10% 20% (sss)	10% 20% (sss)	10% 20% (sss)	10% 20% (sss)	10% 20% (sss)	10% 20% (sss)	10% 20% (sss)	13% 25% (sss)	13% 25% (sss)	13% 25% (sss)
4. Graduation Rate	20%	20%	20%	20%	20%	10% 20% if composite dropout is 0%	10% 20% if composite dropout is 0%	10% 20% if delayed advancement rate is 0%	10% 20% if delayed advancement rate is 0%	10% 20% if delayed advancement rate is 0%	12.5% 25% if delayed advancement rate is 0%	12.5% 25% if delayed advancement rate is 0% %	12.5% 25% if delayed advancement rate is 0% %
5. Number of exams taken per student	20%	20%	20%	20%	20%	20%	20%	20%	20%	20%	Revised Graduation Program		
6. MATH 12 gender gap			D	5% n/a (sss)	5% n/a (sss)	5% n/a (sss)	5% n/a (sss)	5% n/a (sss)	5% n/a (sss)	5% n/a (sss)			
7. ENGLISH 12 gender gap			D	5% n/a (sss)	5% n/a (sss)	5% n/a (sss)	5% n/a (sss)	5% n/a (sss)	5% n/a (sss)	5% n/a (sss)			
8. Composite Dropout Rate / Delayed Advancement rate (Doesn't count for elites)						10% 0% if there is no composite dropout rate	10% 0% if there is no composite dropout rate	10% 0% if there is no delayed advancement rate	10% 0% if there is no delayed advancement rate	10% 0% if there is no delayed advancement rate	12.5% 0% if there is no delayed advancement rate	12.5% 0% if there is no delayed advancement rate	12.5% 0% if there is no delayed advancement rate
9. MATH 10 gender gap											6% n/a (sss)	6% n/a (sss)	6% n/a (sss)
10. ENGLISH 10 gender gap											6% n/a (sss)	6% n/a (sss)	6% n/a (sss)
11. Average Income	D <sup>25</sup>	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/	n/a	n/a	n/a	D	D
12. Parents avg. education in yrs.	n/a	D <sup>26</sup>	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D
13. Kind of School (Public/Private)	n/a	n/a	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D
14. Socio-economic indicator (Actual vs. Predicted)		n/a	D <sup>27</sup>	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D
15. Grade 12 Enrolment	n/a	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D
16. Trend/Progress Indicator	n/a	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	D	Removed	Removed	Removed
17. Subject Specific Exam Averages & student participation rate			D	D <sup>28</sup>	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
18. % ESL Students & % Special needs	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	D	D	D	D	D	D	D
19. Sports Participation Rate	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	D	D	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
20. % French Immersion	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	D	D	D	D

Table compiled from the following sources: (Cowley & Easton, 2000, 2001; Cowley & Easton, 2002; Cowley & Easton, 2003, 2004b; Cowley & Easton, 2005, 2007, 2008; Cowley & Easton, 2009; Cowley, Easton, & Thomas, 2010; Cowley, et al., 1998; Cowley, et al., 1999; Cowley & Easton, 2006)

Legend: sss= single sex schools; D = Descriptive; n/a = not applicable

<sup>18</sup> Gender Report Published by Cowley indicating girls outperform boys on school-issued marks but that boys outperform girls on provincial exams.

<sup>19</sup> Value-added trend indicator for SES; Gender gap reported but not counted; subject-specific exam averages reported; subject-specific participation rate reported but not counted.

<sup>20</sup> The BIG statistical switch (new method of calculating overall rating); Gender counts; Fraser Institute recalculated the rankings given the new gender indicator.

<sup>21</sup> Introduction of the ‘Composite Drop Out’ KPI as a description. This KPI was first used in France.

<sup>22</sup> Student cohort is “refined” to exclude international students from the ranking. This results in a re-calculation of previous ranking scores with the “revised data”.

<sup>23</sup> First time Yukon is included in the British Columbia report card.

<sup>24</sup> First ranking published with Grade 10 exam data.

<sup>25</sup> Reported for public school parents only in 1998. Median income of parents sending their children to independent/private schools not included.

<sup>26</sup> Initially reported for public school parents only.

<sup>27</sup> Reported for all schools included in the Fraser Institute ranking. A larger positive difference would suggest that the school is effective in enabling its students to succeed regardless of their socio-economic background.

<sup>28</sup> ENGLISH 12 (provincial exam averages compared with school).

from the example set by the physical sciences” (Sedgwick & Edgar, 2003, p. 290). This position privileges *sense-making* born out of *data-gathering* and it serves to highlight the prevailing ideological discursive formation (IDF) the Fraser Institute used to promote its school-ranking rubric from the beginning. Moreover, Walker clearly established the initial boundaries of the accountability field when he proclaimed, “[f]or the first time, a variety of relevant and publically available data were combined to produce academic rating of public and independent schools” (Cowley, et al., 1999, p. 3). In this way the Fraser Institute established the initial boundaries of the accountability playing field. They were: Ministry collected data about public, private, and independent secondary schools throughout British Columbia compiled according to a Fraser Institute developed statistical rubric. Given the original five key performance indicators (KPIs) initially chosen by the Fraser Institute to rank secondary schools in British Columbia it is essential to highlight the source of their data.

In their first published ‘Occasional Paper’ entitled, ‘*A Secondary Schools Report Card for British Columbia*’, Cowley, Easton, and Walker (1998) explain how—in the interest of transparency—the statistical manipulation of the Ministry’s raw data was kept to the “very minimum” (Cowley, et al., 1998, p. 6). As well, they described how the KPIs used in the first school ranking Iteration #1 (1998-2000) were derived from publically accessible databases maintained by two different Ministry of Education organizational branches: (1) the *School Finance and Data Management Branch*, and (2) the *Evaluation and Accountability Branch* (Cowley, et al., 1998). The Ministry of Education used some of the information obtained from these ministerial branches to quantify student enrolment numbers, as well as to provide information to school districts about annual per-student operating grants. The Fraser Institute used some of the data they extracted from the same ministerial databases to develop their first five KPIs. It is important to problematize the sources of data used by the Fraser Institute to develop its school-ranking rubric at this juncture for two principal reasons: (1) it highlights the nature of selective *data mining* in the construction of statistical storytelling, and (2) it illustrates how the Fraser Institute begins to exert control on the field of power by exercising—

what Foucault (1977) calls—a distinctly modern technique for observing subjects. What follows is my analysis of these two points.

In selecting the data it wanted to use to construct its school-ranking rubric the Fraser Institute made a decision about what information to include, and what information to disregard. It did not, for example, use data available from the *Ministry of Social Services* to construct its school-ranking rubric. Nor did it use all of the data provided by the *School Finance and Data Management Branch*, and the *Evaluation and Accountability Branch*. It did, however, recognize the statistical limitation of extracting—and using—some of the data provided from two different ministerial branches to construct its first school-ranking rubric when the authors of the first report card noted,

“[b]ecause these databases were not created by the Ministry of Education for the purpose of evaluating the performance of schools, they are not entirely suited to the purpose and the indicators derived from them are far from perfect. Nevertheless, the databases include valuable information from which we have been able to extract five statistics for the initial ‘*Secondary Schools Report Card for BC*’ (Cowley, et al., 1998, pp. 5-6).

What is relevant to note is the *value* the Fraser Institute places on its ability to *extract information* it deems useful from an available source. Here, we have an example of how the Fraser Institute mines raw data that—like any raw material taken from the Earth’s crust—is first processed before it becomes valuable. As well, the authors acknowledged the inherent bias contained within the KPIs when they noted in their first published report “[t]he only *built-in bias* is in the selection of the data itself” (Cowley, et al., 1998, p. 6).

Secondly, we see in the Fraser Institute’s strategy to avail itself of Ministry-acquired data the exercise of disciplinary power. Here is an example of how hierarchical observations made about student achievement are leveraged by the Fraser Institute to construct a school-ranking rubric that operates like Bentham’s Panoptic prison tower. They are similar because they both have structural dimensions that are designed to locate, fix, and observe their respective subjects. This is made possible because school

rankings and panoptic prisons have surveillance at their functional core. And just as panoptic prisons have at its center a single imposing tower from which guards could cast their omnipresent gaze on incarcerated prisoners without being seen, so too do school rankings have at their centre statistical rubrics that cast their omnipresent gaze on secondary schools and—by implication—the teachers working within them. Published school rankings, however, are different from prison towers because they have a multiplying effect. Hundreds of thousands of papers are published daily for the public to read and—every spring—a provincial newspaper publishes the Fraser Institute’s school report card. As such, every single published newspaper that contains the school ranking tables acts like a single panoptic prison tower because the public’s gaze is cast on the object of scrutiny—secondary schools. The collection and analysis of data by the Fraser Institute in this way is tied directly to disclosure and the (new) politic of visibility because—like Panoptic prison towers—the school accountability system is also predicated on surveillance.

Notwithstanding the inherent limitations embedded—not only within the Ministry databases used to manufacture the school-ranking rubric, but with the KPIs derived from them—the Fraser Institute published its first school report card in *The Province* newspaper (Cowley, et al., 1998). What follows is a descriptive and critical analysis of each of the five key iterations developed by the Fraser Institute from 1998-2010. A number of tables and graphs appear throughout this chapter that reflect—not only how entire populations of secondary schools were impacted by the Fraser Institute’s ranking rubric over time—but as importantly, how a single school was impacted by the statistical mechanics underpinning the ranking rubric.

### **Iteration #1 (1998-2000): Five Key Performance Indicators**

There were initially five KPIs identified by the Fraser Institute to construct its inaugural school-ranking rubric. They were: (1) average exam mark, (2) percentage of exams failed, (3) school vs. exam mark difference, (4) exams taken per student, and (5)

graduation rate. These KPIs are noted in Table 3 along with their relative percentage weights for both co-educational and single sex schools.

**Table 3: Relative percentage weights of KPIs for iteration #1**

	Iteration #1: 1998, 1999, and 2000		
Key Performance Indicator (KPI)	Co-Educational <i>and</i> Single Sex Schools		
1. Average Exam Mark	20%		
2. Percentage of Exams Failed	20%		
3. School vs. Exam Mark Difference	20%		
4. Exams Taken per Student	20%		
5. Graduation Rate	20%		
TOTAL	100%		
Descriptive Measures	1998	1999	2000
6. Parents' Average Education in Years	<i>n/a</i>	<i>Descriptive</i>	
7. Kind of School (Public or Private)	<i>Descriptive</i>		
8. Grade 12 Enrolment	<i>n/a</i>	<i>Descriptive</i>	
9. Semiotic Trend Progress Indicators	<i>n/a</i>	<i>Descriptive</i>	
10. Subject-specific exam averages <sup>29</sup>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>Descriptive</i>
11. Student Participation Rate	<i>n/a</i>	<i>Descriptive</i>	
12. Gender Gap Indicator	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>Descriptive</i>

*Table compiled from the following sources: (Cowley et al., 1998, 1999; Cowley & Easton, 2000)*

What is important to note here is that descriptive measures were absent in the first year (1998) the ranking was published. As well, it is essential to bear in mind that during the first three years that the Fraser Institute published its school report card the same five KPIs were uniformly applied to all of the schools they ranked. This meant that secondary school report cards that were published in British Columbia in 1998, 1999, and 2000 did not statistically distinguish between public, private, independent, co-educational, and single sex schools.<sup>30</sup> In this way the statistical logic embedded within the ranking rubric

<sup>29</sup> The following Grade 12 provincially examinable subjects were noted in the 2000 version of the Fraser Institute school report card: English, math, biology, chemistry, geography, history, physics, and French. The participation rates associated with each subject were also noted.

<sup>30</sup> Single sex schools are comprised of all-boys or all-girls. Single sex schools are de facto private and independent schools because there are no public schools in British Columbia that are also single sex schools.

itself was uniformly discerning because it was uniformly applied to all schools captured in the Fraser Institute's secondary school report card throughout the first three years that defined iteration #1.

Table 4 shows how a single Vancouver school—York House School—was depicted in the Fraser Institute's first published school ranking, as that table appeared in the Fraser Institute published document, *'A Secondary Schools Report Card for British Columbia'* (Cowley, et al., 1998). KPIs 1-3 were devised by the Fraser Institute to reflect effective teaching practices (Teaching) within schools, while KPIs 4 and 5 were devised to reflect effective student counseling practices (Advising). It is evident from the table that York House School achieved an overall ranking of nine-point-zero (9.0) on the first secondary school report card published by the Fraser Institute in British Columbia.

**Table 4: First school ranking table published for YHS (1998)**

	York House School (YHS)					
	Teaching			Advising		
Year	KPI 1	KPI 2	KPI 3	KPI 4	KPI 5	Overall
1996/97	2.4 / 10	77.9 / 10	5.9 / 5	100.0 / 10	5.8 / 10	9.0
1995/96	1.2 / 10	79.5 / 10	4.3 / 8	96.2 / 9	4.8 / 10	9.4
1994/95	1.0 / 10	78.2 / 10	5.9 / 5	100.0 / 10	5.1 / 10	9.0
1993/94	1.5 / 10	79.7 / 10	4.9 / 7	100.0 / 10	5.1 / 10	9.4
1992/93	1.4 / 10	76.6 / 10	4.7 / 8	100.0 / 10	5.0 / 10	9.6

Table compiled from the following source: (Cowley, et al., 1998, p. 41).

**Legend:**

KPI 1 = Exams Failed / Fraser Institute Ranking

KPI 2 = Average Exam Mark / Fraser Institute Ranking

KPI 3 = Exam vs. School Mark / Fraser Institute Ranking

KPI 4 = Graduation Rate / Fraser Institute Ranking

KPI 5 = # Courses Taken / Fraser Institute Ranking

Overall = Average score of five KPIs

What follows is a descriptive and critical analysis of each of the five KPIs used during this time. As well the descriptive measures introduced by the Fraser Institute to its school-ranking rubric will also be described and analyzed.

**KPI #1: Average Exam Mark**<sup>31</sup>

“For each school, the indicator is the average of the mean scores achieved by the school’s students in each of the provincial examinations at all sittings during the year, weighted by the relative number of students who wrote the examination” (Cowley & Easton, 2000; Cowley, et al., 1998, 1999).

It is not uncommon for mean scores to be included in a statistical analysis of any kind, and its measure can say something meaningful about any given data set. However, average examination scores in a school setting have been shown in the literature to be directly impacted by two variables: (1) class size, and (2) the amount of out-of-class support that students get from private tutoring. In an article about class size, student achievement, and the policy implications associated with their relationship, Odden (1990), reported on meta-analysis investigations and concluded “there was a clear and strong relationship between class size and student achievement” (Odden, 1990, p. 213). In the same paper he also reported that “research is rather consistent in showing that smaller classes have a positive impact on teachers’ classroom attitude and behavior” (Odden, 1990, p. 218). Not only were teachers able to develop their lessons in more depth and move through the curriculum more quickly, but the study noted that “teachers were better able to manage their classes” (Odden, 1990, p. 218). Studies also indicated that small classes function more smoothly; that less time gets spent on discipline; and that student absences are proportionately lower (Odden, 1990). Boozer and Rouse’s (2001) study on the patterns and implications of intra-school class size

---

<sup>31</sup> Cowley & Easton (2000) reported the examination averages achieved by students on the most “popular” provincially examinable courses “so that comparisons could be made between different department’s teaching effectiveness” (Cowley & Easton, 2000, p. 11). They also reported on the participation rate—the ratio for a school between the number of students writing the provincial examination in a particular subject and the number of students in grade 12. This data served a descriptive purpose only because the results did not affect a school’s overall ranking. This subject-specific data did not appear in later iterations of the Fraser Institute’s school report card, as it was published in British Columbia.



variation indicated that “lower class sizes appears to lead to larger test score gains” (Boozar & Rouse, 2001, p. 187).

This kind of research is relevant to a school ranking system that compares student achievement results between public and private schools because—in general—private schools have smaller class sizes than do their public school counterparts. This distinction is used by many fee-paying schools as being an important difference between private schools, and many private and independent school personnel spend considerable energy highlighting the difference to prospective parents. At York House School, for example, the largest class size was twenty students, and it was not uncommon for senior classes to have between twelve and sixteen students.<sup>32</sup> As well, some Advanced Placement (AP) courses were offered at York House School to classes of seven to ten students. In addressing prospective families admissions personnel working in many of Vancouver’s ‘top’ ranked schools emphasize how difficult it is for students to fall between the cracks in schools that offer small class sizes.

Another factor that has been shown to correlate positively with student achievement is the amount of out-of-school-support students obtain. My experience working at York House School helped me understand that it was not uncommon for some of the school’s ‘top’ students to receive additional (out-of-school) tutoring support in mathematics, English, and French—a phenomenon called ‘*shadow education*’ in the literature (Ireson, 2004). Students engaged in this kind of after-school, subject-specific support have been shown to outperform control students on examinations (Cohen, Kulik, & Kulik, 1982). As well, the authors’ findings on the educational outcomes of tutoring indicated that tutored students developed more positive attitudes toward the subject matter covered in the tutorial program (Cohen, et al., 1982). More recently, Mischo and Haag (2002) conducted an empirical study to determine the effectiveness of private tutoring in a prepost-control-group-design. They compared the results of a group of one hundred and twenty-two students that received private tutoring over a period of nine months to a same-sized group that did not receive private tutoring. Their

---

<sup>32</sup> In British Columbia class sizes have been enshrined in law since 2002. There can be a maximum of 32 students in any regular class.

results showed that “[p]upils receiving paid tutoring as remedial instruction showed an improvement in school marks significantly higher than pupils without tutoring” (Mischo, 2002, p. 270).

These findings are relevant to consider for a school-ranking rubric that includes student examination results as a KPI because they demonstrate the relationship between the positive impact that small class sizes and additional after school tutoring can have on improving student achievement. The presumption made by the authors of the ranking is that good examination results reflect good classroom teaching. The KPI does not make room—or account—for conditions that exist *outside* the classroom that positively, and negatively, affect the level of student achievement *inside* the classroom.

#### **KPI #2: Percentage of Examinations Failed**

“This indicator provides the rate of failure (as a percentage) in the provincial examinations.<sup>33</sup> It was derived by dividing the sum, for each school, of all provincial examinations written where a failing grade was awarded by the total number of such examinations written by the students of that school” (Cowley & Easton, 2000; Cowley, et al., 1998, 1999).

While this index may approximate a fair measure of exam performance within schools, it is important to note that ‘best’ schools received top marks from 1998-2000 when less than 6.2% of the class failed. This is problematic when one considers the adverse effect very small increases in the failure rate above 6.2% have on a school's over-all ranking. The implication here is that schools (in which 2% of the class fail) receive the same top score as schools in which 6.2% of the class fail. This scaling creates a relatively wide margin for accountability in ‘best’ performing schools (0-6.2%) when other schools are significantly penalized for the slightest increase in the rate of “failures” (1.37-2.61%) in the percentage of provincial exams failed (see Appendix A).

---

<sup>33</sup> Provincially examinable courses during 1992-1997 included: Biology 12, Chemistry 12, Communications 12, English 12, English Literature 12, French 12, Français Langue 12, Geography 12, Geology 12, German 12, History 12, Japanese 12, Latin 12, Mandarin 12, Mathematics 12, Physics 12, Spanish 12. In the 1997/98 school year, three new courses—Technical and Professional Communications 12, Applications of Mathematics 12, and Punjabi 12—were added to the list of examinable subjects and Latin 12 was eliminated.

Finally, students who fail provincial exams could end up passing the course because a student's final mark in any provincially examinable subject was achieved in 1998-2000 by blending the school-issued mark (40%) with the provincial exam mark (60%). There is no KPI that reflects the *percentage of courses failed* by students which—arguably—presents a more holistic and comprehensive picture of the student's experience in any given provincially examinable course. The Fraser Institute places an emphasis on the *percentage of exams failed*. Finally, it is not uncommon for students who may want pursue a post-secondary discipline like Architecture, for example, to take a subject like Principles of Math 12 because their post-secondary admission requires that students successfully complete that compulsory course. As such, the assumption made by the Fraser Institute that Grade 12 students have the “freedom” to choose subjects they enjoy and/or are genuinely interested in does not square with students who are compelled to take required courses based on their university and post-secondary aspirations (Cowley, et al., 1999, p. 78). This is especially true for students pursuing undergraduate engineering, science, and computer science programs. As well the assumption that all schools require students to complete prerequisite courses before taking provincially examinable subjects is not always true. Some courses like Biology 12, for example, did not require students to take a prerequisite Biology 11 course because the course syllabi were very different from one another. This made it possible for Grade 11 (or Grade 12) students to take Biology 12 without having taken Biology 11. Geography 12 and History 12 were two other provincially examinable courses that did not require prerequisites.

### **KPI #3: School vs. Exam Mark Difference**

“This indicator gives the average of the absolute value of the difference between the average mark contained on the provincial examinations and the average final “school” mark—the accumulation of all the results from tests, essays, quizzes, and so on given in class—for all the provincially examinable grade 12 courses. Top marks are awarded to schools that predict how closely students' final exam marks correlate with their school-issued mark in provincially examinable subjects” (Cowley & Easton, 2000; Cowley, et al., 1998, 1999).

The Fraser Institute's rationale for including this particular KPI is that marks assigned by the school should be roughly the same as the mark achieved by the student on the provincial examination. "Thus, if a school has accurately assessed a student as consistently working at a C+ level, the student's examination result will be at a similar level" (Cowley, et al., 1998, p. 74). Expecting such a direct correlation to exist between school-issued and provincial examination marks reflects a particular logic that is embraced by the Fraser Institute while concurrently discounting the possibility that different schools have different visions for how to measure student achievement. The assumption made by the Fraser Institute is that students perform on time-limited, standardized, provincial examinations in the same way they perform throughout the year under the guidance of their respective subject teachers who are trained (and expected) to assess student progress and understanding in ways that expand the limits imposed by pen-and-paper testing. The assumption here also undermines some of the subject-specific prescribed learning outcomes (PLOs) that can't be assessed by teachers using traditional pen and paper tests and exams like, for example, the ability of students to work effectively in groups.<sup>34</sup> Embedded within this KPI, therefore, is the tacit implication by the Fraser Institute that teachers artificially inflate school-issued marks. Cowley et al. (1999) noted that "in 1997/98, for instance, almost 78% of reported average school marks were higher than the corresponding average examination marks" (Cowley, et al., 1999, p. 6). This statistical observation does not make room for the fact that the vast majority of classroom teachers throughout the province *know* their students in ways standardized examinations cannot. It is a statistical construction that does not account for the lived experiences of teachers working with students in ways that allow them to authentically gauge and assess a student's subject-specific strengths and limitations. As well it can be argued that some teachers are especially discerning in awarding marks to their students in an attempt to raise the intellectual standard in the

---

<sup>34</sup> The prescribed learning outcomes (PLOs) set the learning standards for the provincial K-12 education system and form the prescribed curriculum for British Columbia. They are statements of what students are expected to know and do at the end of an indicated grade or course. Schools have the responsibility to ensure that all subject-specific PLOs are met.

classroom. If, for example, a student receives 86% from a hard-marking teacher and 93% on the provincial exam, the school (and teacher) is penalized by for preparing the student to write a stellar final exam with confidence. What else would be at stake if schools adopted the Fraser Institute's policy of assessment? Science teachers might well decide not to devote considerable class time developing students' lab skills because lab skills are never assessed in an exam setting. The province's 'best' schools would be the ones in which educators taught to the provincial exam. Student achievement would best be measured by a series of tests, quizzes, and mid-term exams that reflected the types of questions on final examinations. These assessment strategies are not only limiting in scope but, used to exclusion; promote a particular kind of knowledge.

**KPI #4: Exams Taken per Student**

"This performance indicator measures the average number of provincially examinable courses taken by students at any given school and is derived by first summing the number of students at each school who wrote provincially examinable subjects ( $\sum x$ ) and then dividing by the number of grade 12 students enrolled in the school ( $n$ ). Average # of exams taken per student =  $\sum x \div n$ " (Cowley & Easton, 2000; Cowley, et al., 1998, 1999).

The assumption made by the Fraser Institute is twofold: (1) that most high school students are bound for post-secondary institutions; and (2) the more provincially examinable subjects students take the more opportunity they will have once they graduate. These assumptions do not apply to all secondary school students, but they are made by the Fraser Institute to gauge how effective schools counsel their students to make good course selection choices. Many graduating students pursue careers in the trades whereby—in 1998—they were required to take a single (compulsory) Language Arts examination in Grade 12 (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 1997). Here we have an example of how the Fraser Institute's ranking rubric under-estimates the strategies that some high school students leverage to plan for their future because it does not make room for continuing their educational trajectory along unconventional

post-secondary paths in the arts, science, business, nursing, engineering, and education (to name but a few).

Another limitation of this KPI is that it doesn't account for Grade 11 students who take Grade 12 provincially examinable subjects in their Grade 11 year. It is not uncommon for Grade 11 students attending Vancouver's 'top' ranked independent schools, for example, to take French 12, Geography 12, History 12, and/or English 12 in their Grade 11 year. This very real possibility artificially inflates the total number of provincially examinable courses taken at any given school because the total number of provincial exams taken (the numerator in the statistical equation) is really the total sum total of Grade 11 and 12 students that take Grade 12 exams—an inflated measure. When this measure is divided by the total number of Grade 12 students enrolled at the school the 'average number of exams taken per student' KPI becomes inflated.

Ken Denike, the then chairman of the Vancouver School Board, noted another explanation for why the average number of exams taken per student KPI was problematic. He questioned the correlation between how the Fraser Institute made meaning of the exam data it used to rank secondary schools when he said,

“excellence in some public school programs may actually result in a lower ranking. For instance, excellent International Baccalaureate, fine arts, trades and athletics programs may drag a school's ranking down because students interested in such programs take fewer courses that are tested using provincial exams, and are also less focused on those courses” (Chung, 2006, p. B1).

As well, schools that have developed a specific program focus like, for example, Langley Fine Arts School (LFAS), which provides “a comprehensive education for students, while focusing on the development of aesthetic intelligence through programmes in the Visual Arts, Literary Arts, Dance, Drama, and Music” (Langley Fine Arts School, 2010) operates from a different epistemic foundation than does the Fraser Institute with its focus on school examination data. The Fraser Institute's assumption that 'top' ranked schools

have students writing (on average) at least 3.49<sup>35</sup> provincial exams to achieve a top-ranked score underscores a prevailing limitation of the school report card because it ignores the cultural, epistemic, and contextual dimensions of mission-driven schools that make possible different kinds of post-secondary opportunities beyond traditional college and university admission tracts. The Fraser Institute's 2000 report card indicate that students from LFAS took 2.63 provincial examinations—on average—between the years of 1994 to 1999 (Cowley & Easton, 2000). By comparison, students from 'top' ranked Crofton House School (CHS) took—on average—5.52 provincial examinations over the same time period (Cowley & Easton, 2000). CHS is also a mission-driven school but unlike LFAS it prepares its graduates for university admission into some of the most selective post-secondary institutions in North America. The possibility, of course, exists for LFAS graduates to be accepted into equally selective fine arts schools in North America like, for example, New York City's Julliard School for the performing arts, Vancouver's Emily Carr University, or Toronto's Ryerson University. However, the criteria for admission into post-secondary fine arts programs is not the same as it would be for science, engineering, and arts degrees because student applicants submit portfolios and/or are required to audition in order to be accepted. The overall number of provincial examinations taken by students applying to these kinds of post-secondary programs is not necessarily consequential.

#### **KPI #5: Graduation Rate**

"This indicator compares the number of "potential" graduates enrolled in the school on September 30 with the number of students who actually graduate by the end of the same school year. Only those enrollees who are capable of graduating with their class within the current school year are included in the count of potential graduates" (Cowley & Easton, 2000; Cowley, et al., 1998, 1999).

The Fraser Institute maintains that—for the majority of students in British Columbia—the "minimum requirements for graduation are not onerous" (Cowley, et al.,

---

<sup>35</sup> See Appendix A: Decile Range Table.

1999, pp. 77-78). The authors of the ranking believe the likelihood that students will not graduate solely because they are unable to meet the intellectual demands of the curriculum is small. “Nevertheless, the graduation rate varies quite widely from school to school throughout the province...[and] there is no reason to expect these factors to influence particular schools systematically” (Cowley, et al., 1999, p. 78). Accordingly, Cowley et al. (1999) perceive variations in the graduation rate to be an indicator of the extent to which students are being ‘*well counseled*’ in their educational choices. While having students complete the entire graduation program is the goal for most secondary schools in British Columbia the literature is replete with studies that document the positive correlation that exists between poverty, parental education (especially the mother’s) and the failure of students to complete high school (Desimone, 1999; Ensminger & Slusarcick, 1992; Haveman, Wolfe, & Spaulding, 1991). In a paper entitled, ‘*Childhood Events and Circumstances Influencing High School Completion*’, Haveman and colleagues found that “growing up in a family with more children (who compete for resources), being persistently poor and on welfare, and moving one’s residence as a child have significant negative impacts on high school completion (Haveman, Wolfe, & Spaulding, 1991, p. 133). The Fraser Institute does not statistically factor the impact these socioeconomic influences have on student retention rates into a single ranking iteration—ever.

#### **Descriptive Indicators: Enrolment Data, Trend Indicators, and Parents’ Education**

Cowley, Easton, and Walker recognized the public controversy generated by their first report card when, in the introduction to the second report card, they acknowledged the “frustration, confusion, and antagonism among parents, teachers, and administrators” (Cowley et al., 1999, p. 3). This was countered by their observation that “others accepted the Report Card 1998’s overall ratings as the only evidence they needed that public schools in the province were failing miserably” (Cowley et al., 1999, p. 3). Both of these remarks are important to note at this juncture because they highlight divergent epistemic positions embraced by professionals working in schools



(on one hand) and the Fraser Institute and its supporters (on the other). Embedded in the language of statistical representation the “principle of rarefaction” (Foucault, 1984, p. 8). The principle of rarefaction describes the relationship between epistemologies and discursive practices whereby one position supplants another. Here we have an example of how the principle of rarefaction operates within school ranking discourses to supplant counter discourses made by teachers, and the political organizations to which they belong. While some critics objected to the school ranking ‘others’ accepted the ‘overall ratings’ as being the ‘only’ evidence they needed that ‘public’ schools were ‘failing’. The tacit implication here is that private schools were not failing students, because private schools outperformed public schools. Moreover, the data used by the Fraser Institute to determine a school’s overall rating was all that some people needed to see. The data spoke for itself.

Notwithstanding, the authors did take into consideration the opinions voiced by critics after the 1998 report card was published and responded to seven key points that emerged from the debate about how the Fraser Institute could improve their report card. These points related to: (1) an expansion of the KPIs to include “other aspects of school performance” (Cowley et al., 1999, p. 4); (2) the focus on Grade 12 examinations;<sup>36</sup> (3) including public and private schools in the same ranking; (4) schools being ranked on different provincially examination data;<sup>37</sup> (5) accounting for discrepancies between school-issued marks awarded by teachers and marks obtained by students on provincial exams;<sup>38</sup> (6) the exclusion of “certain socioeconomic

---

<sup>36</sup> The Fraser Institute wanted to incorporate school-performance data derived from Grade 10 results, which at the time could only be obtained from Grade 10 Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA) data obtained from the Ministry of Education. This data was not made available to the Fraser Institute.

<sup>37</sup> The only compulsory, provincially examinable, grade 12 course that every British Columbia student had to take was Language Arts 12. Students could satisfy this requirement by taking English 12 or Technical and Professional Communications 12. The latter course was considered to be easier by teachers, who objected to the Communications 12 exam results being statistically equal to the English 12 exam results for the purpose of school rankings. (University-bound students had to take English 12—the more challenging course.)

<sup>38</sup> Cowley et al. (1999) expected for there to be a fairly normal distribution of the difference between school- and exam-based assessments but there was not. Their analysis of the data indicated that 78% of school-issued marks were higher than the exam marks achieved by students. This implied that teachers were inflating their school-issued grades.

characteristics of the student body” (Cowley et al., 1999, p. 6); and (7) the exclusion of “school-level changes over the study period” (Cowley et al., 1999, p. 7). As a result of the criticisms expressed after the 1998 report was published, three new variables appeared in the school ranking tables by the Fraser Institute. These variables, however, served to provide additional (contextual) information to *The Province’s* readers about the schools being ranked. They were descriptive in nature, but they were not factored into the school ranking formula. They included: Grade 12 enrolment data, semiotic trend/progress indicators, and the average years of education achieved by parents.

The inclusion of Grade 12 enrolment data allowed for parents to gauge the overall size of the school being ranked. Large public schools, for example, like Alberni District Secondary (ranked 7.2/10), had five hundred-and-six students enrolled in its Grade 12 class, while small independent schools, like York House (ranked 8.6/10), only had forty-three (43), Grade 12 students by comparison (Cowley, et al., 1999). Cowley et al. (1999) reminded *The Province’s* readers that “the smaller the school the more caution should be used in interpreting these results” (Cowley & Easton, 1999b, p. A21). The inclusion of this kind of additional information helped parents contextualize school rankings in ways that were not possible before. The acknowledgement, however, that factors outside the school environment also had an impact on student achievement was an important one. In the introduction to its second report card Cowley et al. (1999) recognized the impact socioeconomic factors had on student achievement when they noted:

“Research by the Fraser Institute has shown that the level of parents’ education is more closely associated with school performance than parents’ income. So, for each public school, the average years of education of the female parent (or lone parent in a single family) is reported. This statistic was derived by matching 1996 Census data from Statistics Canada with postal code enrolment data for each school. Researchers found higher levels of parental education were more closely associated with better school performance. When schools with similar parent education values record different results, it suggests that one school is more successful in taking the student’s home life into account in its teaching and counseling practices” (Cowley & Easton, 1999b, p. A21).

This acknowledgement by the Fraser Institute not only supported extensive research that suggested the same relational effect, but signaled to school ranking detractors an acquiescence, of sorts, that factors outside the teacher's control played an important determinant role in the success of students at school. Notwithstanding, however relevant this statistic was deemed to be it served only a descriptive purpose: The measure did not then—nor does it now—statistically factor into the school's overall average. Moreover, this measure was not included for independent and private school parents, but there was no explanation why.<sup>39</sup>

In their 2000 report card the Cowley & Easton (2000) used parents' average education "as an indication of the socio-economic background of the student body" (Cowley & Easton, 2000, p. 15). This descriptive measure was reported in the school report card tables as 'Actual rating vs. predicted (based on parents' education)'. "A positive difference suggests that the school is effective in enabling its students to succeed regardless of their socio-economic background" (Cowley & Easton, 2000, p. 15). Here is an example of two competing ideological discursive formations (IDFs) overlapping in a space that moves beyond polemical discourse because we see the Fraser Institute attempting to *quantitatively* account for a *qualitative* measure that teachers say matter—a student's home experience. And yet, this variable does not factor into a school's overall rating. The spirit underpinning its calculation and inclusion as a descriptive measure, however, was encouraging. Cowley (2001) hoped that,

"instead of using socio-economic status as an excuse for poor school performance, let's identify where the kids have overcome disadvantages and succeed. Then let's find out what these schools are doing right" (Canada NewsWire, 2000, p. 1).

---

<sup>39</sup> The *Parents' average education (yrs.)* did appear in the next iteration of the report card, and every report thereafter. This statistic is used to calculate the difference between the school's actual overall rating of academic performance and the rating that one might expect when the parents' level of education is taken into account. A larger positive difference would suggest that the school is effective in enabling its students to succeed regardless of their socio-economic background. The *Parents' average education (yrs.)* can also be used to identify other schools whose students have similar socio-economic backgrounds. A comparison of the results of these similar schools can identify those schools that are particularly effective in taking socio-economic conditions into account in their teaching and counselling practice (Cowley & Easton, 2001).

This perspective points to the possibility of redress embedded within a school ranking system that has not gained much traction in the press. Although individual schools have been held up by the Fraser Institute as being exemplar schools for making significant gains in their overall ranking there is no common theme that can be cited as being *the* cause for a school's improved ranking score—an observation that will be thoroughly addressed in Chapter 5. However despite the inherent limitations and assumptions made by the Fraser Institute in extracting and using Ministry data to compile its first iteration of British Columbia's secondary school ranking report card it must be noted that the same five KPIs were uniformly applied to every co-educational, single-sex, public, private, and independent school included in its first three reports. The statistical leveling of schools in this way would be disrupted in the next—and every other—successive school ranking iteration. Table 5 shows how York House School was depicted in the Fraser Institute's published school report card in 1999. Descriptive KPIs were integrated throughout the top of the table. In this (second) edition of the ranking York House School achieved an overall score of 8.6—a drop of 0.4 points when compared to the previous year.

**Table 5: Second school ranking table published for YHS (1999)**

	York House School (YHS)					D3 = Private	
	D1 = Parent's Avg. Income: n/a			D2 = Grade 12 Enrolment: 43			
Year	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	S1
KPI 1	76.6	79.7	78.2	79.5	77.9	77.1	↔
KPI 2	1.4	1.5	1.0	1.2	2.4	3.3	↓
KPI 3	4.7	4.9	5.9	4.3	5.9	7.3	↔
KPI 4	100.0	100.0	100.0	96.2	100.0	100.0	↔
KPI 5	5.0	5.1	5.1	4.8	5.8	6.0	↑
Overall	9.6	9.4	9.0	9.4	9.0	8.6	↓

Source taken from (Cowley, et al., 1999, p. 43).

#### Legend

KPI 1 = Average provincial exam mark

KPI 2 = Percentage of provincial exams failed

KPI 3 = Difference between exam mark and school mark

KPI 4 = Graduation rate

KPI 5 = Provincial taken per student

D1 = Descriptive indicator: Parent's average education in years

D2 = Descriptive indicator: Grade 12 enrolment

D3 = Descriptive indicator: Kind of School (public or private)

S1 = Semiotic progress trend indicators: improvement (↑); decline (↓); no change (↔)

#### Iteration #2 (2001-2002): Gender Matters

In May of 1999, Cowley and Easton co-authored a 'Fraser Institute Occasional Paper' entitled, *'Boys, Girls, and Grades: Academic Gender Balance in British Columbia's Secondary Schools'*. The authors suggested in their report that, "it was boys who were getting short-changed" in British Columbia's classrooms (Cowley & Easton, 1999, p. 3). Additionally, Cowley and Easton (1999) indicated in the *Executive Summary* portion of their paper that "no conclusive evidence could be found that boys and girls were destined to achieve at different levels in any aspect of the academic program" (Cowley & Easton, 1999, p. 3). Their analysis of the eight most popular provincially examinable courses taken by students in British Columbia revealed that "girls received higher grades on school-based assessments in all subjects regardless of their relative performance on the provincial examinations" (Cowley & Easton, 1999, p. 9). The data marshaled by

Cowley and Easton (1999) in their report was used to promote the idea that classroom teachers were treating boys and girls differently and they pointed to the discrepancy between school-issued and provincial examination results as evidence of teacher bias in the classroom—girls were being favoured over boys in British Columbian classrooms. The data presented in the Fraser Institute’s gender study showed that girls consistently outperformed boys on the school-issued marks they received in all eight of the most popular provincially examinable subjects taken by students in British Columbia, but that boys outperformed girls on the provincial examination marks they received in five of eight subjects. The results prompted Cowley and Easton to pose the following question: “Are girls actually learning more or are school-based assessments systematically biased against boys?” (Cowley & Easton, 1999b, p. 3). Because the Fraser Institute deemed the gender gap issue as being “vitally important” (Cowley & Easton, 2000, p. 4), the authors included it as descriptive measure for the first time in their 2000 report card, which meant that gender was not weighted in the ranking as a KPI.

Table 6 depicts the relative percentage weights of the seven KPIs that were used by the Fraser Institute to rank secondary schools in its second report card iteration. It is followed by a description of two additional gender gap KPIs that were included in the ranking for co-educational schools. It is important to note how the relative percentage weight assigned to KPI #3 was changed for co-educational schools for the first time. Note as well how two new KPIs (#6 and #7) were introduced to the sample of co-educational schools included in the Fraser Institute’s school report card. These indices were excluded for single-sex schools.

**Table 6: Relative percentage weights of KPIs for iteration #2**

Key Performance Indicator (KPI)	Iteration #2: (2001 and 2002)	
	Co-Educational Schools	Single Sex Schools
1. Average Exam Mark	20%	
2. Percentage of Exams Failed	20%	
3. School vs. Exam Mark Difference	10%	20%
4. Exams Taken per Student	20%	
5. Graduation Rate	20%	
6. English 12 Gender Gap	5%	n/a
7. Math 12 Gender Gap	5%	n/a
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100%</b>	
8. Composite Dropout Indicator <sup>40</sup>	Descriptive	
9. Kind of School (Public or Private)	Descriptive	
10. Grade 12 Enrolment	Descriptive	
11. Semiotic Trend Progress Indicators	Descriptive	
12. Parents' Average Education	Descriptive	
13. Actual vs. Predicted Rating	Descriptive	

Table compiled from the following sources: (Cowley & Easton, 2001; Cowley & Easton, 2002)

What follows is a descriptive and critical analysis of each KPI used during this time.

#### **KPI #6: English 12 Gender Gap**

"This indicator measures the difference (in percentage points) between boys and girls in the extent to which their school marks in English 12 are different from their examination marks. The indicator reports which sex received the highest average school mark in English 12 as well as the actual difference in percentage points between the two results. It shows how effective the school has been in minimizing the differences in results between the sexes. Where the difference favours girls, the value is preceded by an F; where the difference favours boys, the value is preceded by an M. An E means there is no difference between the boys and girls on this measure" (Cowley & Easton, 2000, 2001; Cowley & Easton, 2002; Cowley & Easton, 2003, 2004b; Cowley & Easton, 2005; Cowley & Easton, 2006; Cowley & Easton, 2007).

<sup>40</sup> This measure was first introduced in the 2002 report card edition. It served a descriptive purpose initially, but it was included by the Fraser Institute as a KPI in the iteration that was to follow in 2003.

#### **KPI #7: “Math 12 Gender Gap”**

“This indicator measures the difference (in percentage points) between boys and girls in the extent to which their school marks in Math 12 are different from their examination marks. The indicator reports which sex received the highest average school mark in Math 12 as well as the actual difference in percentage points between the two results. It shows how effective the school has been in minimizing the differences in results between the sexes. Where the difference favours girls, the value is preceded by an F; where the difference favours boys, the value is preceded by an M. An E means there is no difference between the boys and girls on this measure” (Cowley & Easton, 2000, 2001; Cowley & Easton, 2002; Cowley & Easton, 2003, 2004b; Cowley & Easton, 2005; Cowley & Easton, 2006; Cowley & Easton, 2007).

The Fraser Institute’s rationale for including gender gap KPIs is captured by the comment “that *every* student has special needs” (Cowley & Easton, 1999, p. 6). This statement was made in relation to the “concept of accounting for differences among students in the teaching process—teaching in context—[a concept] routinely touted as a critical component of the school system’s mission and as an achievable goal of effective teaching and counseling” (Cowley & Easton, 1999, p. 5). Cowley and Easton (1999) suggested in their gender report that the BCTF’s commitment to “establish strong guarantees that children with special needs have those needs met” (Cowley & Easton, 1999, p. 5) extend beyond students with “specific physical, mental, or social challenges” (Cowley & Easton, 1999, p. 6) to include boys. In the same report the authors noted that subject-specific gender data was collected by the Ministry that could be used by the Fraser Institute to take “into account one aspect of context: student gender” (Cowley & Easton, 1999, p. 6). To be meaningful this statement needs to be examined in relation to other contextual data the Fraser Institute had access to—and used—for descriptive purposes when it published its first iteration of school rankings from 1998-2000. Establishing a KPI in 2001 that accounts for gender differences in mathematics 12 and English 12 while—at the same time—choosing *not* to establish a KPI that *statistically* accounts for measured socioeconomic disparities is problematic. This is especially true given the Fraser Institute’s demonstrated ability to quantitatively account for the impact



parents' average educational experience has on student achievement in all schools (Cowley & Easton, 2001). When new 'contextual' KPIs are included in the ranking rubric that account for gender-related differences in this way the Fraser Institute is deploying a modern technique for observing its subjects. Foucault (1977) describes how disciplinary power is exercised through a normalization process that is not only anchored in judgment, but that compares individual actions to a whole. In this case, one 'individual' may be considered the entire population of boys while the other 'individual' may be considered the entire population of girls. When the examination results of each 'individual' can be introduced to the broader field of visibility for comparison the "constraint of conformity" has been achieved (Foucault, 1977, p. 183). The Fraser Institute's expectation is that boys and girls should achieve similar school-issued grades in provincially examinable subjects. Although the gender gap indicator would not factor into a school's overall ranking in a material way until 2001, the gender report authored by Cowley and Easton (1999) demonstrates a strategic and focused attempt by the Fraser Institute to disrupt the public's confidence in the status quo secondary school system because all the single-sex schools in British Columbia were de facto private and independent schools. As such it was impossible for the public to judge the educational experience of students attending single sex schools in the same way because there was no basis for the comparison to be made.

The implication of assigning subject-specific gender gap indicators in "the two most popular provincially examinable courses—Mathematics 12 and English 12" (Cowley & Easton, 2000, p. 13) proved to be statistically consequential for both coeducational (Co-Ed) and single-sex schools (SSS) because their inclusion changed the relative percentage weightings of the KPIs used to rank single-sex and coeducational schools. Table 7 depicts the changes in the KPIs from Iteration #1 (1998-2000) to Iteration #2 (2001-2002) for coeducational and single-sex schools in British Columbia. Note how subject-specific gender gap indicators in English 12 and mathematics 12 do not apply to single-sex schools, which consequently resulted in corresponding shifts in the relative weightings of KPIs between co-educational and single sex schools. Whereas single sex schools were

subject to five KPIs; co-educational schools were now subject to seven KPIs. The implication was statistically consequential inasmuch as subject-specific gender gap indicators accounted for 10% of the variation between public and private schools. As well, the Fraser Institute could no longer say about its school-ranking rubric that it was uniformly applied to all public, private, and independent schools in British Columbia. Iteration #2, therefore, marks the first time the Fraser Institute's school report card begins to exert discretionary disciplinary power on the field of accountability because we see in the ranking rubric statistical differences between how public and private/independent schools are treated. This is important to note at this juncture because it illustrates how the Fraser Institute leverages its objective ranking rubric matrix to emphasize differences between public and private school systems.

**Table 7: Relative percentage weights of KPIs from iteration #1 to iteration #2**

	Iteration #1 (1998-2000)	Iteration #2 (2001-2002)	
Key Performance Indicator (KPI)	Co-Ed and Single Sex Schools	Co-Ed	SSS
1. Average Exam Mark	20%		
2. Percentage of Exams Failed	20%		
3. School vs. Exam Mark Difference	20%	10%	20%
4. Exams Taken per Student	20%		
5. Graduation Rate	20%		
6. English 12 Gender Gap	-	5%	n/a
7. Math 12 Gender Gap	-	5%	n/a
TOTAL	100%		
8. Composite Dropout Indicator	-	Descriptive	
9. Parents' Average Education in Years	Descriptive		
10. Actual vs. Predicted Rating	Descriptive		
11. Kind of School (Public or Private)	Descriptive		
12. Grade 12 Enrolment	Descriptive		
13. Semiotic Trend Progress Indicators	Descriptive		
14. Subject-specific exam averages	Descriptive	-	

Table compiled from the following sources: (Cowley & Easton, 2001; Cowley & Easton, 2002; Cowley, et al., 1998, 1999; Cowley & Easton, 2000)

The authors of the report card believed the revised rubric (as it was reflected in iteration #2) had been improved from its previous iteration—"For the first time, each

school's overall rating will be affected by the extent to which the school ensures that both boys and girls are able to succeed" (Cowley & Easton, 2001, p. 4). As importantly,

"the recalculation of all previous overall ratings allowed us to reflect the *Gender gap* in the historical results. The introduction of this new indicator will change some schools' past overall ratings" (Cowley & Easton, 2001, p. 4).

This statement is relevant because it illustrates how the Fraser Institute exerts discretionary disciplinary power on the school-wide accountability field. Here, we have an example of the Fraser Institute changing the ranking rubric in ways that make sense to the Fraser Institute. Gender related issues were not part of the broader school ranking debate before 2001, but the Fraser Institute leveraged Ministry data to show that boys and girls were not performing equally on school-based and exam-based assessments for students attending co-educational schools. They did not show the same statistical trend was true (or false) for students attending single sex schools. Such discrepant statistical approaches to how co-education (public) schools were treated in comparison to their (private/independent) school counterparts illustrates how the Fraser Institute exercised discretionary disciplinary power on the field of visibility. This bifurcation in the ranking rubric is relevant to consider because it shows how the Fraser Institute imports and expands a discourse of difference between schools and school systems.

Cowley and Easton's statement is important for a second reason. The expressed logic of including gender-gap KPIs to ensure that boys and girls are able to achieve equally in the classroom once again speaks to the emancipatory potential of redress embedded in the ranking rubric. In highlighting the achievement variation between boys and girls the possibility exists for that variation to be addressed by teachers within the classroom setting—if it can be addressed at all. However, the Fraser Institute is selectively discerning about what data-driven differences it highlights. For example, although it can statistically measure a socioeconomic index that ranking critics say

accounts for significant between-school variation the Fraser Institute chooses not to include the index in its ranking in a material way.

The combined effect of adding the gender gap indicator to the second iteration of the Fraser Institute school report card *and* recalculating previously published school rankings considerably changed the distribution of ‘*top*’ ranked schools in British Columbia appreciably. However, the resulting discourse appearing in newspapers had nothing to do with the Fraser Institute implementing a different, “well accepted statistical method...to make differing data sets more comparable” (Cowley & Easton, 2001, p. 4). Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly, the resulting discourse in newspapers did not highlight an essential change to the Fraser Institute’s school-ranking rubric that no longer reduced schools to identical—common—performance indicators for the basis of comparison. Whereas the previous iteration made possible the same kinds of statistical assumptions for all public and private schools throughout the province, the inclusion of gender gap differences as a performance indicator resulted in single-sex schools being treated differently than co-educational ones—at least statistically. It was impossible, therefore, for single sex schools (all of which were independent and private schools) to gain or lose points in the gender gap category because that performance indicator measured how aligned boys and girls performed on provincial exams and school-issued marks in English 12 and mathematics 12 respectively. Given that all-girl schools didn’t have any boys enrolled in their sample populations, and given that all-boy schools didn’t have any girls enrolled in their sample populations, it was impossible for the Fraser Institute to include the gender gap measure in the same way it was able to for co-ed public (and co-ed private) schools. Gender mattered, therefore, because there were no gender gap differences to measure in single sex schools, which were all private and independent schools. That important demographic gender disparity resulted in a redistribution of top ranked schools in the province such that perfect-scoring (10/10) schools were all single-sex, private schools in 2001 (Cowley & Easton, 2001).

Table 8 depicts five years of school ranking data as published by the Fraser Institute during its first two iterations. It shows how public and private<sup>41</sup> schools were distributed, and re-distributed, across decile ranges for Iterations #1 and #2 respectively. What is relevant to note here is the percentage of public (PU) schools that occupied the ‘top’<sup>42</sup> decile range in the Fraser Institute’s ranking during the first iteration (1998-2000) compared to the percentage of public schools that occupied the same ‘top’ position during the second iteration. Before gender gap indices were included in the ranking rubric approximately 5% of *all* the public schools then ranked by the Fraser Institute achieved ‘top’ scores. After gender gap indices were introduced by the Fraser Institute the percentage of ‘top’ ranked public schools occupying the same decile range dropped to 0.4%. This represents a 92% decline in the number of potential public schools that achieved scores within the 9.0-10.0 range. By way of comparison, before gender gap indices were included in the ranking rubric approximately 31% of all private/independent (PV) schools then ranked by the Fraser Institute achieved ‘top’ scores. After gender gap indices were introduced the percentage of ‘top’ ranked private/independent schools occupying the same ‘top’ decile range dropped to approximately 21%. This decline represents a 34% decline in the number of ‘top’ ranked private/independent schools. So while public and private school systems were both adversely affected by the introduction of a new ranking rubric that included gender gap indices during iteration #2, public schools fared significantly worse as a result.

---

<sup>41</sup> In this case ‘Private’ (PV) schools represent all non-public schools (Independent and Private) as those terms have been defined previously.

<sup>42</sup> In this analysis ‘top’ ranked schools occupy the highest decile range possible as determined by the Fraser Institute’s ranking rubric; (i.e.) 9-10.

**Table 8: Percentage distribution of public (PU) and private (PV) schools for iterations #1 and #2**

	Iteration #1 <sup>43</sup>						Iteration #2 <sup>44</sup>			
	1998		1999		2000		2001		2002	
Rank	PU	PV	PU	PV	PU	PV	PU	PV	PU	PV
9-10	6.3	34	4.4	32.4	4.3	27.5	0.4	20.9	0.4	20.0
8-8.9	16.6	12.5	15.0	29.4	14.3	32.5	2.5	16.3	1.7	17.5
7-7.9	16.6	37.5	19.8	11.8	21.7	12.5	15.1	16.3	13.4	30
6-6.9	20.6	6.3	19.8	14.7	21.2	17.5	34.9	23.3	37.4	20
5-5.9	17.9	6.3	18.1	5.9	13.4	2.5	27.3	11.6	27.3	5.0
4-4.9	9.4	3.1	9.7	8.8	11.7	7.5	12.6	9.3	10.1	2.3
3-3.9	8.1	0	9.7	0	9.1	0	2.1	0	4.6	5.0
2-2.9	2.7	0	2.2	0	3.0	0	1.7	2.3	2.5	0
1-1.9	1.4	0	1.3	0	1.3	0	1.2	0	0.01	0
0-0.9	0.4	0	0	0	0	0	2.1	0	0.01	0
N=	223	32	227	34	231	40	238	43	238	40

*Table compiled from the following sources: (Cowley & Easton, 2000; Cowley & Easton, 2002; Cowley, et al., 1998, 1999; Cowley & Easton, 2001)*

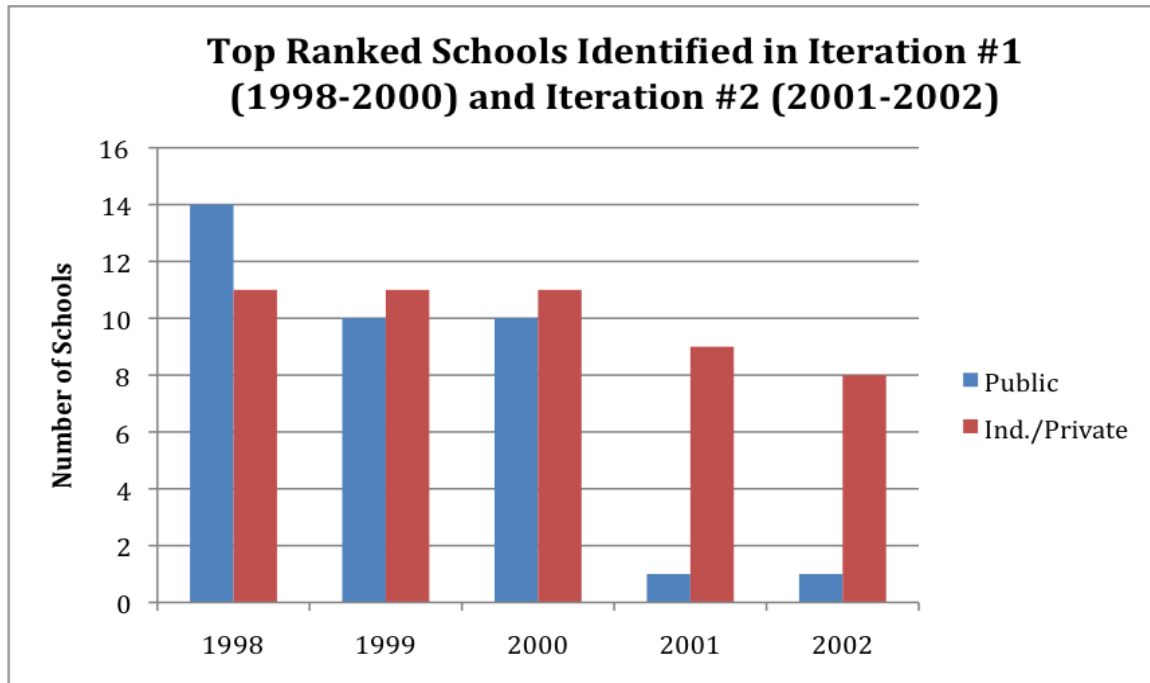
Figure 5 shows the number of public (PU) and private<sup>45</sup> (PV) schools that achieved an overall school rating between 9.0 and 10.0 for iteration # 1 and iteration #2. It shows that before the Fraser Institute introduced its revised method of calculating a school's overall ranking forty-six percent (46%) of British Columbia's 'best' schools were identified as being public schools. After the Fraser Institute revised its method of calculating a school's overall ranking the percentage of 'top' ranked public schools dropped ten percent (10%).

<sup>43</sup> The ranking rubric was uniformly applied to all public and independent/private schools. Each KPI is weighted at 20% in each of the five KPIs.

<sup>44</sup> Gender gap indicators introduced for English 12 and Math 12 respectively. KPI weightings shift proportionately to reflect the change. (This KPI does not apply to single-sex schools). The Fraser Institute recalculates all previous school rankings published in British Columbia from 1998-2000.

<sup>45</sup> Private (PV) in this table conflates independent (IN) and private (faith-based) schools.

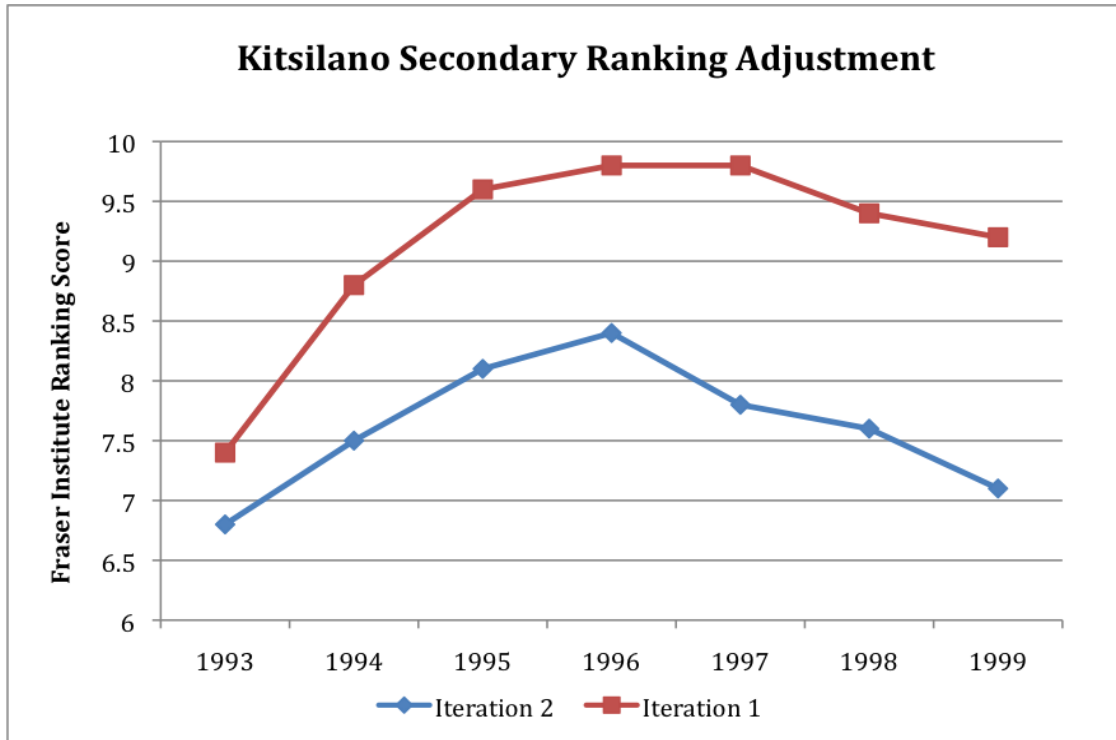
**Figure 5: Number of 'top' ranked public and private schools for iterations #1 and #2**



*Compiled from data provided in the following sources: Cowley & Easton, 2001; Cowley & Easton, 2002; Cowley, et al., 1998, 1999; Cowley & Easton, 2000)*

Not only were entire categories of schools (public and private) affected by the revised ranking during the second iteration (2001-2002), but so too were individual schools affected in ways that seemed to reward and punish them. Take, for example, the case of Kitsilano Secondary (a public, co-educational, grade 8-12) school, and York House (an independent, single-sex, k-12) school. Figure 6 illustrates how the introduction of gender gap indicators in the report card's second iteration resulted in an overall (historical) reduction of Kitsilano Secondary's school rating.

**Figure 6: Kitsilano Secondary's overall school ranking for iterations #1 and #2**

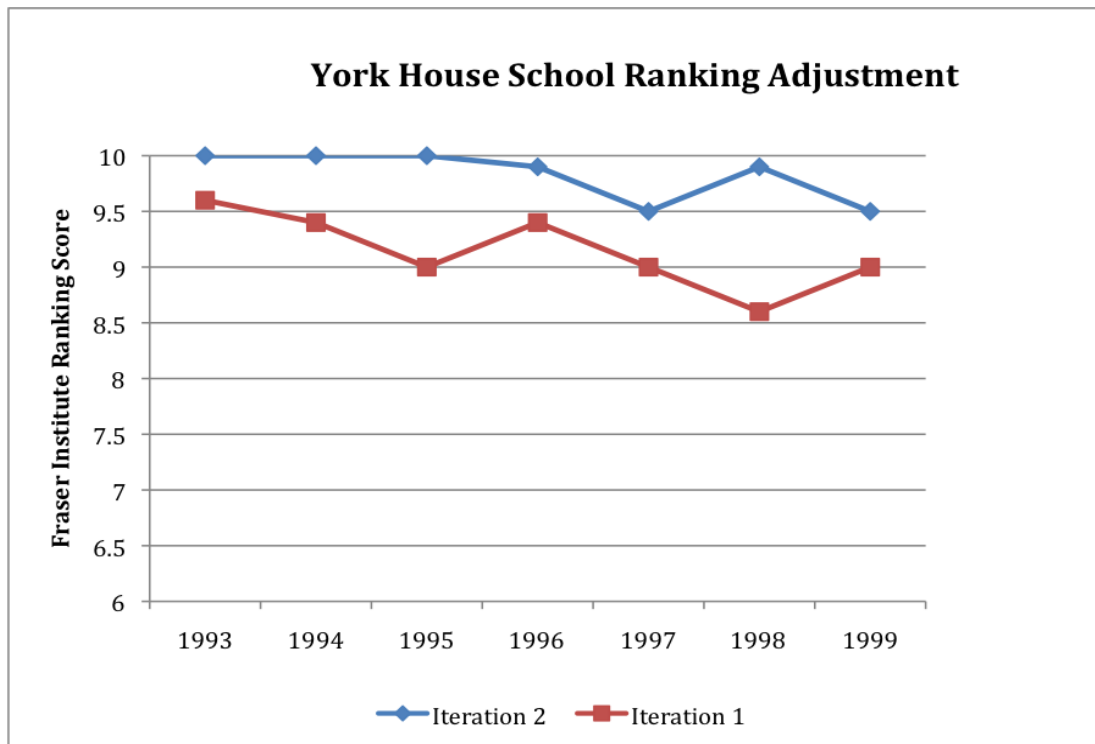


*Compiled from data obtained in the following sources: (Cowley & Easton, 2001; Cowley & Easton, 2002; Cowley, et al., 1998, 1999; Cowley & Easton, 2000)*

Before the revision Kitsilano Secondary achieved overall higher ranking scores (Iteration 1, which is identified in the upper graph in red). After the revision the same school's results were adjusted, which resulted in consistently lower scores (Iteration 2, which is identified in the lower graph in blue). By comparison, Figure 7 shows how York House School—a school exempt from the imposition of gender gap indicators in the report card's second iteration—improved its overall (historical) school ranking from iteration #1 (which is identified in the lower graph in red) to iteration #2 (which is identified in the upper graph in blue).



**Figure 7: York House School's overall school ranking for iterations #1 and #2**



*Compiled from data obtained from the following sources: (Cowley & Easton, 2001; Cowley & Easton, 2002; Cowley, et al., 1998, 1999; Cowley & Easton, 2000)*

Here, we have an example of how one kind of single-sex, independent, k-12 school was rewarded by the statistical revision imposed by the Fraser Institute in its second iteration (represented by an overall shift upwards in the ranking graph from iteration #1 to 2) and how a different kind of co-ed, public, 8-12 school was punished by the same statistical iteration (represented by an overall shift downwards in the ranking graph from iteration # 1 to 2)—if reward and punishment is understood as a correlate of corresponding increases and decreases in a school's overall rating out of ten.

While these examples illustrate how the Fraser Institute's second ranking iteration impacted two specific schools it does not say anything meaningful about how the greater population of British Columbia's schools were impacted overall. Appendix F, however, depicts the 'top' ranked (9.0-10.0) secondary schools in British Columbia between 1998-2010. It shows that single-sex schools would continue to achieve

disproportionately ‘perfect’ overall ratings of 10/10 after the Fraser Institute introduced the gender gap indicator in 2001. That the percentage of public (and by implication co-educational) schools achieving school rankings between 9.0 and 10.0 had significantly decreased since the gender KPIs was first introduced points to an important relational trend that cannot be ignored—that is, there exists a statistical bias embedded in the KPIs used to rank schools because single sex schools cannot be penalized for discrepant, gender-related, school-issued and examination results in the same way co-educational schools can. This bias is evident by noting the kinds of schools that have achieved perfect scores on the Fraser Institute’s ranking since 1998.

Table 9 shows that schools achieving a ‘perfect’ 10/10 score share similar characteristic school profiles: They are mostly k-12 schools; they are mostly independent/private; they are mostly day schools; all of the independent and private schools are Group 2 funded; and they all prepare students to pursue highly competitive degree-granting programs at universities and colleges throughout North America.

By comparison, of the fourteen schools identified by the Fraser Institute to achieve a perfect score on its ranking over a thirteen year span only two public schools are noted—University Hill Secondary and Prince of Wales Secondary.

**Table 9: Schools attaining a score of ten on the Fraser Institute ranking (1998-2010)**

School Name	School Profile Characteristics										Year(s)	@
	PU	IN	PV	CE	SS	K-12	8-12	D	B	D/B		
St. George's		X			X	X		X			2000-2009	10
Little Flower			X		X		X	X			2000-2008	9
York House		X			X	X		X			2001, 2003-2010	9
Crofton House		X			X	X		X			2001-2007	7
Southridge		X		X		X		X			2002, 2005-2009	6
WPGA		X		X		X		X			2005-2007, 2009	4
St. Margaret's		X			X	X				X	1998, 2003	2
University Hill	X			X			X	X			2003, 2004	2
Van. College			X		X		X	X			2005, 2008	2
Prince of Wales	X			X			X	X			1999	1
St. Thomas Aq.			X	X			X	X			1999	1
Brentwood		X		X			X		X		2003	1
Saint Michael's		X		X		X				X	2003	1
GLN		X		X		X		X			2003	1
Total	2	9	3	8	6	6	6	11	1	2		

*Table compiled from the following sources: (Cowley, 2005b; Cowley & Easton, 2000, 2001; Cowley & Easton, 2002; Cowley & Easton, 2003, 2004b; Cowley & Easton, 2007, 2008; Cowley & Easton, 2009; Cowley, et al., 2010; Cowley, et al., 1998, 1999; Cowley & Easton, 2006)*

#### **LEGEND**

Year(s) = documents the calendar year(s) in which a school achieved a 'perfect' score of ten; @ = the total number of times that a school achieved a 'perfect' score of ten; PU = Public School; IN = Independent School; PV = Private (faith-based) School; CE = Co-Educational; SS = Single Sex; (k-12) or (8-12) = Grades offered at School; D = Day School; B = Boarding School; D/B = Day and Boarding School

A question that begs to be asked at this juncture is: *Why did the Fraser Institute redefine its school-ranking rubric to capture gender-related data provided by the Ministry of Education?* If nothing else, the introduction of gender-related-data by the Fraser Institute alluding to gender-biased-teaching in secondary schools effectively expanded the field of visibility on which the school wide accountability game was played. Henceforward boys and girls could be seen as separate populations where they were otherwise blended together as a single student population in the first iteration of the report card. This was strategically important for the Fraser Institute because in pointing to discrepant educational experiences boys and girls seemed to be having in British

Columbia high schools, the Fraser Institute introduced a new visual asymmetry to the greater field of school wide accountability. It is essential this be problematized at this juncture given that fields are—by definition—socially constructed areas of activity where struggles take place between agents in a supply and demand market. Brighenti (2007) reminds us of this point:

“[W]hen something becomes more visible or less visible than before, we should ask ourselves who is acting on and reacting to the properties of the field, and which specific relationships are being shaped. Shaping and managing visibility is huge work that human beings do tirelessly. As communication technologies enlarge the field of the socially visible, visibility becomes a supply and demand market. At any enlargement of the field, the question arises of what is worth being seen at which price—along with the normative question of what should and what should not be seen. These questions are never simply a technical matter: they are inherently practical and political” (Brighenti, 2007, p. 327).

Whereas the previous (first) iteration of the Fraser Institute ranking reflected and highlighted what critics noted were class-based distinctions that existed between schools (Proctor, 1998a; Steffenhagen, 2002b), the introduction of gender-biased data into the school wide accountability issue reflected and highlighted gender-based distinctions the Fraser Institute wanted the general public to see was operating in secondary schools (Cowley & Easton, 2003; Cowley & Easton, 1999c; Ferry, 2000). Expanding the field of visibility to include gender-related data in this way effectively marked—what was previously an unmarked—social category. This was an important strategy because as Brighenti (2007) notes in her paper on visibility, “[o]nce a way of marking and dividing people is set up...the resulting classification is a tool that can be applied to every case” (Brighenti, 2007, p. 334). The effect, therefore, of the Fraser Institute reconfiguring whole school populations into gender-constructed, sub-populations was to cast a wider statistical net that captured public-private school distinctions, which otherwise remained hidden. In this way, the Fraser Institute effectively amplified its power of surveillance on the field of visibility by widening its scope of vision. Whereas the previous iteration of the ranking pitted school against

school, the second iteration pitted boys against girls—and by implication, public schools against private schools, because all of the single sex schools ranked by the Fraser Institute were de facto independent and private schools.

Including gender-related KPIs in the ranking rubric also made it possible for a greater population of parents to become interested in the ranking where they might not have been interested before because—for the first time in the history of the ranking—‘top’ ranked schools could be exposed for not meeting the subject-specific educational needs of boys and girls, equally—something every informed (good) parent, teacher, and administrator could know about. In this way, generic school rankings that treated all schools the same became more discerning in nature because the broader population of students under investigation was further delineated along gender lines in the serialization of Ministry-collected data. Expanding the field of visibility by creating two new categories of students (boys and girls), therefore, effectively widened the report card’s sphere of influence in British Columbia. For the first time parents sending their children to ‘top’ ranked public and co-educational independent/private schools could know if their sons and daughters academic potential was being met equally in the eight subject areas held up for public scrutiny by the Fraser Institute. As such, more *parents were called to action* in ways that only a published school ranking could muster because more *parents were called to care* in ways they had not been in previous ranking iterations. The gender debate also served to deflect and redirect some of the criticisms levied by school ranking opponents as they pertained to discrepant socioeconomic indicators that, like poverty, the ranking didn’t consider because socioeconomic indicators were contestable. Gender was not.

### **Descriptive Indicator: Dropout Rate**

In the ‘*Report Card on British Columbia’s Secondary Schools: 2002 Edition*’, Cowley & Easton (2002) described their newest contextual measure of teaching and counseling effectiveness. It was labeled the ‘*Dropout Rate*’ indicator and it measured “the extent to which schools keeps their students in school and on task” (Cowley &

Easton, 2002, p. 4). Interestingly, the Fraser Institute adopted “a technique first used by France’s national ministry of education to calculate the likelihood that a student will graduate from a given school in the normal time” (Cowley & Easton, 2002, p. 4). This point illustrates how the Fraser Institute imported aspects of other school ranking report systems that were developed internationally. This is problematic because it implies that British Columbia’s secondary school system is like France’s secondary school system. But schools operate contextually—within cultural, financial, and political boundaries that are as unique to Canadian provinces as they are to France, Germany, Iceland, and Spain. Notwithstanding the contextual differences that quite naturally exist between British Columbia and France, the Fraser Institute determined for itself that the “normal” composite dropout rate for students attending British Columbia’s high schools was 13%<sup>46</sup> based on the authors’ analysis of elementary school data “where students are unlikely to leave the school system for reasons other than emigration or death” (Cowley & Easton, 2002, p. 5). The Fraser Institute felt it necessary to include the new contextual measure because, as they noted in their 2002 school report card,

“it appears that the existing *Graduation rate* indicator will soon be little use in differentiating among schools. The average value for all schools on this indicator has risen steadily from 82.5% in the 1992/93 school year to nearly 94% in 2000/2001. As a matter of simple mechanics, an indicator that is unvarying is not a useful one in determining differences in effectiveness among schools” (Cowley & Easton, 2002, pp. 5-6).

This statement underscores the prevailing ideological formation at play in the Fraser Institute manufacturing a ranking rubric that has been designed to reward and punish schools. It made no sense to the Fraser Institute to include an important contextual measure on which most schools in the province had improved—despite its claim that measuring schools “will determine whether our schools are doing their jobs

---

<sup>46</sup> Cowley & Easton (2002) determined the average annual rate of disappearance from the system to be roughly 2.75%. Applying that level of disappearance as a benchmark for the five years of secondary school (Grades 8-12) the authors concluded that normative disappearance rates by students in the secondary school system approximated 13%.

satisfactorily” (Cowley et al., 1999, p. 4). Here, is an example of secondary schools making a positive difference in the lives of students because we see in the ‘*Graduation Rate KPI*’ quantitative evidence of more students completing the high school graduation program. Replacing the ‘Graduation Rate’ indicator (an index on which public schools were noted to have improved their standing) with the ‘Dropout’ indicator (an index on which public schools could be statistically penalized) the Fraser Institute changes what it wants the public to see on the field of visibility. Where there was little variance in the ‘Graduation Rate’ KPI between public and private schools the Fraser Institute simply eliminated the index from its rubric and replaced it with a ‘Dropout’ index on which there was greater variation between public and private schools. Metaphorically speaking, when public schools could clear the same hurdle that private and independent schools could the Fraser Institute simply replaced it with a new hurdle that many public schools found difficult to clear. When the Fraser Institute selectively uses KPIs to hide and amplify differences between public and private schools disciplinary power is being exercised.

### **Iteration #3 (2003-2006): Refining the Student Cohort**

In part the expansion of descriptive statistical measures introduced by the Fraser Institute to its school report card paralleled an expansion of British Columbia’s graduation program internationally. In an article published in B.C. Teachers’ Federation (BCTF) magazine, Larry Kuehn (2002), opposed then Premier Gordon Campbell’s political agenda when he said, “[t]he B.C. Liberal government is reshaping public education through privatization and a market approach to education” (Kuehn, 2002, p. 1). The article cited specific policies that supported Kuehn’s position, but one government policy in particular changed the way data was manipulated by the Fraser Institute in compiling its secondary school ranking. That policy was directed at recruiting international students to British Columbia’s secondary school system.

“Many districts have moved quickly to bring in international students, who pay high tuition and top up the district budget. In 2000-01, districts charged an average tuition of \$10,000. On average, they spent \$5,000 per student, leaving an average profit of \$5,000. Lots of businesses would like to work on such a margin. Between 2000-01 and 20001-02, the number of international students jumped from 2,947 to 4,035. The revenue from international student tuitions totaled \$40 million in 2001-02” (Kuehn, 2002, p. 1).

The BCTF, therefore, saw the international expansion of British Columbia’s graduation program into Pacific-Rim countries as a lucrative business venture that would subsidize the high cost of public education and objected to the privatization of public education. The (public) school model being sold abroad was not unlike the (private) school model being sold within British Columbia on two fronts: (1) prospective students applied to attend public schools in the same way prospective students applied to private schools, and (2) parents of foreign students accepted into British Columbia’s public schools paid annual tuition in the same way parents of Canadian and landed immigrant status students paid annual tuition fees to private schools. And while schools, and school districts, may have benefited from the added revenue that foreign ESL students brought into the public school system their resulting public school rankings did not. This problematic situation was resolved in 2003 when the Fraser Institute established a third iteration of its school report card—one that would statistically negate the impact foreign ESL students had on a school’s English 12 examination results. All that was required for the Fraser Institute was to recast its statistical net by “refining the student cohort” on which school rankings would be based (Cowley & Easton, 2003, p. 4). The rationale of incorporating this statistical refinement into their ranking rubric was explained in the introduction to the 2003 report card. The authors explained that,

“Administrators were also concerned that while they were being encouraged by the ministry to recruit international students as a means by which to earn revenue for the operation of their schools, these transient students’ academic results were not necessarily reflective of the quality of teaching at the school. Administrators encouraged us to explore ways to rate the schools only on the basis of students normally



resident in British Columbia. We believe that this is a reasonable refinement of our approach and, using revised data provided by the ministry, have excluded these students' results from the calculation. The revised data were used to calculate the indicator and rating values for the school years 1997/98 through 2001/2003 that appear in this edition" (Cowley & Easton, 2003, p. 4).

Here, we have evidence for how the Fraser Institute continues to exert discretionary power on the accountability field by rendering invisible an entire population of *'transient'* students that serve an economic purpose. The attraction of foreign ESL students to public schools brings with it additional revenue streams to a public educational system the Fraser Institute critiques. Embedded within a model for schooling that seeks to increase revenue streams in this way is an alignment of public policy initiatives with the Fraser Institute's mission of privatizing public education through choice-based reforms. The off-shore interest of foreign students choosing British Columbian schools can be seen through a business lens as a lucrative niche market to be developed by the government. However, an unintended consequence of attracting the same population of foreign ESL students to British Columbian secondary schools is that their collective school-wide presence adversely affects a school's overall ranking. The Fraser Institute effectively managed the situation by removing the statistical impact foreign students had on a school's ranking position. Furthermore, the Fraser Institute leveraged the ground swell of support from school administrators that called on the Fraser Institute to address this issue because they felt their overall school ranking scores were being unfairly compromised by the presence of high populations of ESL students. Here, we have an example of how the Fraser Institute co-opts school administrators into accepting its manufactured régime of performativity because school administrators accept the presence of the Fraser Institute's ranking rubric as being a permanent fixture in shaping a school's operational *habitus*. When individuals, schools, and school districts are co-opted into performing a particular way for the sake of being publically rewarded by achieving higher school ranking scores in this way Ball (2003) suggests that a new policy technology has been deployed. In this case, public school

principals are rewarded for recruiting foreign ESL students to their institutions because their annual school budgets increase in proportion to the number of foreign students they attract, but their schools are not penalized on the ranking as a result. This outcome can be viewed as a win-win for both school administrators and the Fraser Institute.

Table 10 depicts the redistribution of public and private schools identified by the Fraser Institute in its 2003 report card (Report Card #6, Iteration #3). What is noteworthy is the increase in the percentage of public schools identified by the Fraser Institute that occupied the top-two decile<sup>47</sup> ranges from 2002 (iteration #2) to 2003 (iteration #3). The table shows that when English 12 examination results from foreign ESL students were included in the 2002 ranking rubric 0.52% of all public schools included by the Fraser Institute in its annual report achieved an overall school rating between 8.0-10.0. After the Fraser Institute '*refined*' the cohort by excluding English 12 examination results achieved from '*transient*' students from their ranking calculations the number of public schools included by the Fraser Institute in its annual report occupying the top-two decile ranges increased to 5.42%. This reflects a ten-fold increase in the percentage of public schools occupying the top-two decile scores. Excluding the ESL examination data from independent/private schools occupying the same top two-decile ranges in iteration #3 did not affect their overall distribution in the same marked way. Approximately 37.5% of all private/independent schools ranked by the Fraser Institute achieved scores in the top-two decile ranges when ESL students were included in the ranking as compared to 43.8% when the same population of students was statistically removed. These discrepant shifts suggest that a greater number of public schools in British Columbia serve a population of students whose first language is not English.

---

<sup>47</sup> The top-two decile ranges are defined by schools achieving overall ratings between 8.0-10.0.

**Table 10: Percentage of schools ranked in the top two decile ranges for iterations #2 and #3**

Rank	Iteration #2 (2002)		Iteration #3 (2003)	
	Public	Private	Public	Private
9-10	0.4	20.0	0.42	31.6
8-8.9	0.12	17.5	5.0	13.2
7-7.9	13.5	30.0	20.0	31.6
6-6.9	37.4	20.0	32.0	7.9
5-5.9	27.3	5.0	26.3	10.5
4-4.9	10.1	2.5	10.4	0
3-3.9	4.6	5.0	2.1	2.6
2-2.9	2.5	0	1.67	0
1-1.9	0.84	0	0.42	0
0-0.9	1.7	0	2.08	0
<b>Total %</b>	100	100	100	100
<b>N</b>	238	40	240	38

*Table compiled from the following sources: (Cowley & Easton, 2002; Cowley & Easton, 2003)*

While promoting the graduation program abroad was seen by the BCTF as being an integral part of Premier Campbell's strategic plan to increase government coffers, ranking opponents began characterizing the Fraser Institute's school ranking report card as "predictable" (Steffenhagen, 2002b, p. B3). They argued that independent and public schools that catered to privileged families and were located in wealthy neighbourhoods consistently (and predictably) ranked high, while schools in disadvantaged areas (predictably) fell to the bottom. By the spring of 2003, however, the Fraser Institute's secondary school-ranking rubric had undergone its third iteration. The original five key performance indicators had grown to eight with the inclusion of composite dropout indicator in the 2003 report card.

#### **KPI #8: Composite Dropout Indicator<sup>48</sup>**

"This indicator measures the extent to which schools keep their students in school and progressing in a timely manner toward completion of their diploma program" (Cowley & Easton, 2003, p. 8).

<sup>48</sup> Where no *Composite dropout rate* could be calculated, the *Graduation rate* was weighted at 20%.

What is relevant to note about this KPI is how the authors of the report card cite its inclusion as being sensitive to the concerns expressed by report card critics. The authors explained their rationale for including the eighth KPI in the *'Report Card on British Columbia's Secondary Schools: 2003 Edition'*.

"Many administrators felt that because the *Report Card* was based almost entirely on events and results that occurred in grade 12, no weight was given to the efforts made by schools to ensure their students' success in the junior grades. The composite dropout rate is a first step in addressing the imbalance" (Cowley & Easton, 2003, p. 4).

What is striking about the composite dropout key performance indicator is the extent to which schools were not uniformly subjected to the statistical assumptions underpinning it.

"Where a school does not enroll grade-8 students, the net dropout rate is calculated using the three-year average grade-8 dropout rate for the school district in which the school is located. Where a school does not enroll grade 10 or grade 11 students, no *Composite dropout rate* can be calculated" (Cowley & Easton, 2003, p. 9).

Here, the Fraser Institute acknowledges that imbalances exist within its school-ranking rubric because not every secondary school is comprised of students in Grades 8 through 12. This serves as more evidence of how the Fraser Institute uses its accountability ranking tool on the field of power in different ways to establish what is relevant and what is not; what is normative and what is not. Embedded, therefore within the selected KPIs are disparate approaches to how KPIs are used to tell stories about schools. Table 11 depicts the relative weightings of the KPIs included in the Fraser Institute's third iteration of its secondary school-ranking rubric; that is from 2003-2006. Note that the *'Composite Dropout'* indicator was formerly called the *'Delayed Advancement Rate'* in 2005. Although this KPI was calculated in the same way the Fraser Institute did not account for why the measure was renamed. At the surface, however, it

can be argued that ‘*Delayed Advancement Rate*’ is a more euphemistic way to account for dropouts in the coded discourse of competence. As well it is important to note in Table 11 that for schools in which no dropout rates were noted the percentage weighting for a school’s graduation rate (KPI #5) increased from 10% to 20%.

**Table 11: Relative percentage weights of KPIs for iteration #3**

Key Performance Indicator (KPI)	Iteration #3 (2003-2006)			
	2003-2004		2005-2006	
	Co-Ed	SSS	Co-Ed	SSS
1. Avg. Exam Mark	20%			
2. Percentage of Exams Failed	20%			
3. School vs. Exam Mark Difference <sup>49</sup>	10%	20%	10%	20%
4. Exams Taken per Student	20%			
5. Graduation Rate <sup>50</sup>	10% or 20%			
6. English 12 Gender Gap	5%	n/a	5%	n/a
7. Math 12 Gender Gap	5%	n/a	5%	n/a
8. Composite Dropout Rate / Delayed Advancement Rate	10% or 0%			
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100%</b>			
9. Parents’ Education (SES) Indicator	Descriptive			
10. Kind of School (Public or Private)	Descriptive			
11. Grade 12 Enrolment	Descriptive			
12. Semiotic Trend Progress Indicators	Descriptive			
13. % ESL Students	Descriptive			
14. % Special Needs Students	Descriptive			
15. Sports Participation Rate	Descriptive			

Table compiled from the following sources: (Cowley & Easton, 2003, 2004b; Cowley & Easton, 2005; Cowley & Easton, 2006)

### **Descriptive Indicator: Extracurricular Activities**

In 2005 and 2006 the Fraser Institute included a new descriptive performance indicator. It was called the ‘*Sports Participation Rate*’ and its inclusion signaled the

<sup>49</sup> “For schools for which there were no gender-gap results because only boys or girls were enrolled, the *School vs exam mark difference* was weighted at 20%” (Cowley & Easton, 2003, p. 57).

<sup>50</sup> “Where no *Composite dropout rate* could be calculated, the *Graduation rate* was weighted at 20%” (Cowley & Easton, 2003, p. 57).

Fraser Institute's "desire to broaden the focus of the *Report Card*" (Cowley & Easton, 2005, p. 4) beyond academic results.

### **Sports Participation Rate**

"The indicator provides a measure of the extent to which each school encourages its students to adopt and maintain a healthy and active lifestyle. The indicator reports the proportion of the students at each school who were registered members of at least one interschool sports team during the school year" (Cowley & Easton, 2005, p. 4).

Although the Fraser Institute hoped that sports participation rate would become a KPI that factored into a school's overall rating, it ceased being included in the school report card—even as a descriptive measure—in 2006 for a number of reasons. To begin with, smaller schools would not have the resources available to run a myriad of extracurricular sport teams larger schools in the province would have. As well, the rationale given by the Fraser Institute for including the measure that "interschool sports teams encourage students to participate in an active and healthy life style, to engage in positive competition, and to build teamwork and leadership skills" (Cowley & Easton, 2005, p. 4) discounts the very real possibility that students playing non-competitive, 'fun', intramural sports during lunch and afterschool are acquiring the same skills and/or making the same active, healthy, lifestyle choices as student athletes. Finally it is entirely possible that students develop teamwork and leadership skills by engaging in positive competition beyond the *habitus* of sports. Public speaking, debating, participating in band ensembles, and school drama productions also promotes important skill sets in students the Fraser Institute identifies as being associated with competitive sports. Here then we see another example of how the Fraser Institute makes visible dimensions of school culture that define, limit, and homogenize the experience of students because the Fraser Institute had "access to data" (Cowley & Easton, 2005, p. 4) that make such comparisons possible.<sup>51</sup> Such access was short-lived,

---

<sup>51</sup> "The data used to calculate this indicator only represent those students actually registered on school teams sanctioned by BC School Sports and regulated by its 18 Sports Commissions. There are other popular sports such as Hockey, Lacrosse, and Girl's Rugby, that are not sanctioned by BCSS and are,

however, when “the Board of Directors of British Columbia School Sports Association decided that these data would no longer be shared with us. For this reason, this valuable indicator of a non-academic aspect of school performance is no longer included in the *Report Card*” (Cowley & Easton, 2007, p. 4). It is relevant to note here the extent to which the Fraser Institute is limited in developing its ranking rubric when it is denied access to data that it deems important.

#### **Iteration #4 (2007): A Revised Graduation Program**

The Fraser Institute’s school-ranking rubric increased from eight KPIs to nine in the spring of 2007. This change reflected the Ministry-imposed changes that had previously defined a 52-credit graduation program over two years (Grades 11 and 12) to a revised, 80-credit graduation program over three years (Grades 10, 11, and 12). The 2007 edition of the Fraser Institute’s school report card in British Columbia reflected this change and the results of compulsory Grade 10 exam data were included for the first time (Cowley & Easton, 2007).

Table 12 shows the composition and relative weighting of KPIs used by the Fraser Institute during its fourth iteration to rank secondary schools in British Columbia for co-educational (Co-Ed) and single sex schools (SSS).

---

therefore, not included in these data. In addition, some schools may not have registered their grades 7, 8 or 9 teams, even though it is a requirement of BCSS” (Cowley & Easton, 2006, p. 14).

**Table 12: Relative percentage weights of KPIs for iteration #4**

Key Performance Indicator (KPI)	Iteration #4 (2007)	
	Co-Ed	SSS
1. Avg. Exam Mark (Grade 12) <sup>52</sup>	15%	
2. Avg. Exam Mark (Grade 10) <sup>53</sup>	5%	
3. Percentage of Exams Failed <sup>54</sup> (Grade 10 & 12 Exams)	20%	
4. School vs. Exam Mark Difference <sup>55</sup> (English 12)	10%	20%
5. Exams Taken per Student	20%	
6. Graduation Rate <sup>56</sup>	10% or 20%	
7. English 12 Gender Gap	5%	n/a
8. Math 12 Gender Gap	5%	n/a
9. Delayed Advancement Rate	10% or 0%	
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	
10. Parents' Average Income	Descriptive	
11. Kind of School (Public vs. Private)	Descriptive	
12. Socioeconomic Indicator (SES)	Descriptive	
13. Grade 12 Enrolment	Descriptive	
14. Semiotic Trend Progress Indicators	Descriptive	
15. % ESL Students	Descriptive	
16. % Special Needs Students	Descriptive	
17. % French Immersion Students	Descriptive	

Table compiled from the following sources: (Cowley & Easton, 2007)

Not only were Grade 10 examination results in math, science, and English included for the first time in a school's overall rating, but as importantly the Fraser Institute changed how the average examination mark was calculated for each school as

<sup>52</sup> Applications of Mathematics 12; BC First Nations Studies 12; Biology 12; Chemistry 12; Communications 12; English 12; English Literature 12; Français Langue Première 12; Français Langue Seconde-Immersion 12; French 12; Geography 12; Geology 12; German 12; History 12; Japanese 12; Mandarin Chinese 12; Physics 12; Principles of Mathematics 12; Punjabi 12; Spanish 12; and Technical Professional Communications 12.

<sup>53</sup> Applications of Mathematics 10; Essentials of Mathematics 10; Principles of Mathematics 10; English 10; Science 10. (Students enrol in one of the three mathematics courses: Applications, Essentials, or Principles.)

<sup>54</sup> This KPI reflects the percentage of grade-10 and grade-12 provincial examinations failed.

<sup>55</sup> The weighting of this KPI is markedly different in Co-Ed. and SSS because subject-specific gender gap indicators not applicable to SSSs. In 2007 the gender gap KPI reflected English 12 results only.

<sup>56</sup> "Where no *Composite dropout rate* could be calculated, the *Graduation rate* was weighted at 20%" (Cowley & Easton, 2007, p. 49)



well. Whereas previous iterations assigned a value to the percentage of Grade 12 exams failed within any given school, the revised iteration assigned a value to the percentage of Grade 10 *and* Grade 12 examinations failed. This marked the first time in the history of the ranking that data sets obtained from separate grades within the same the school were conflated under a single KPI (Cowley & Easton, 2007). In 2007 the Fraser Institute also expanded the categories of students it made visible within schools by including the percentage of French Immersion students; the percentage of special needs students; and the percentage of ESL students registered at each school. “When you want to compare academic results, these statistics can be used to find other schools where the student body has similar characteristics” (Cowley & Easton, 2007, p. 13). This is an important statement because it underscores that one of the ranking’s principal authors recognizes the influence contextual factors play in a school’s overall achievement. It also suggests that the Fraser Institute could change the way it presents schools to the public. Instead of comparing all schools to each other the Fraser Institute could group schools by common organizational capacity characteristics. That is to say, instead of making invisible entire populations of ESL students the Fraser Institute could choose to include them and group schools that share similar student profile characteristics. In this way, parents could identify schools the Fraser Institute deems as being effective in helping ESL students achieve levels of success in the classroom as opposed to negating their statistical presence described earlier.

#### **Iteration #5 (2008-2010): Revised University Admission Policy Changes**

The fifth—and most current—iteration of the Fraser Institute’s British Columbia report card not only reflected changes in Ministry of Education’s compulsory examination assessment policy, but it also reflected Canadian university admission policies that no longer required Grade 12 students to write Grade 12 provincial examinations (McGill University, 2010). The implication of this policy shift by some Canadian universities meant that British Columbian students could be accepted into post-secondary, degree-granting programs based on their school-issued (year-end)

grades without having to write compulsory provincial examinations.<sup>57</sup> The Ministry's revised graduation program also meant that students would have to write a total of five compulsory exams over the three years that defined the 2004 Graduation Program. They were: math 10, science 10, English 10, socials 11, and English 12. The Fraser Institute conflated the average examination data obtained from students in grades 10, 11, and 12 into a single measure. These changes affected how KPIs were devised and used by the Fraser Institute to rank secondary schools in British Columbia.

Table 13 identifies the KPIs devised by the Fraser Institute to construct its school-ranking rubric in its latest iteration—Iteration #5. It also shows the relative percentage weights of each KPI in 2008, 2009, and 2010. It is important to note here that gender gap KPIs in math and English reflected data obtained from Grade 10 students only. “This change was made because the provincial examination in Principals of Mathematics 12—the results from which were previously used in the calculation of the mathematics gender gap—is no longer mandatory” (Cowley & Easton, 2008, p. 4). This was also true of every other grade 12 course that was also a provincially examinable course. That is to say, students enrolled in provincially examinable Grade 12 courses no longer had to write compulsory Grade 12 subject exams in order to receive credit for the course. This significantly diminished the importance Grade 12 examination results had to a schools' overall ranking. As such, the revised graduation program refocused the examination spotlight to direct its attention on the examination results achieved by Grade 10 students. There were some other notable changes to the Fraser Institute's latest iteration. As a result of the changes to the ministry's testing policy noted above and “possible further changes to the admissions policies of the province's universities” (Cowley & Easton, 2008, p. 4) the Fraser Institute removed the participation rate KPI indicator from their report card because it no longer served as a way to differentiate between schools. Under the Ministry's revised graduation program *all* students were

---

<sup>57</sup> English 12 is still a compulsory course every university-bound student is required to take. Final English 12 grades in British Columbia continued to reflect a student's blended mark between their school-issued mark and their compulsory English 12 examination mark.

required to write five provincial examinations over three years. As well, the gender gap index accounted for 12% of the variation between co-educational (public) schools and single sex (private and Independent) schools—up 2% from the previous iteration. Finally, “where no *Composite dropout rate* could be calculated, the *Graduation rate* was weighted at 25%” (Cowley & Easton, 2008, p. 42). We see embedded in the fifth iteration of the ranking, therefore, a revised rubric that makes it more difficult to capture the statistical variability between schools in a uniform way because the relative weightings of KPIs used to tell stories about schools are used in different ways. This is especially problematic given the logic underpinning standardized formulae that—by 2008—makes room for increasing states of exception between schools.

**Table 13: Relative percentage weights of KPIs for iteration #5**

Key Performance Indicator (KPI)	Iteration #5 (2008 <sup>58</sup> , 2009, & 2010)	
	Co-Educational	Single Sex School
<b>1. Avg. Exam Mark</b>	<b>25%</b>	
<b>2. Percentage of Exams Failed</b>	<b>25%</b>	
<b>3. School vs. Exam Mark Difference<sup>59</sup></b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>25%</b>
<b>4. English 10 Gender Gap<sup>60</sup></b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>n/a</b>
<b>5. Math 10 Gender Gap</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>n/a</b>
<b>6. Graduation Rate<sup>61</sup></b>	<b>12.5% or 25%</b>	
<b>7. Delayed Advancement Rate<sup>62</sup></b>	<b>12.5% or 0%</b>	
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	
<i>8. Parents Average Education</i>	<i>Descriptive</i>	
<i>9. Kind of School (Public vs. Private)</i>	<i>Descriptive</i>	
<i>10. Socioeconomic Indicator (SES)</i>	<i>Descriptive</i>	
<i>11. Grade 12 Enrolment</i>	<i>Descriptive</i>	
<i>12. %ESL Students</i>	<i>Descriptive</i>	
<i>13. %Special Needs Students</i>	<i>Descriptive</i>	
<i>14. %French Immersion Students</i>	<i>Descriptive</i>	

Table compiled from the following sources: (Cowley & Easton, 2008; Cowley & Easton, 2009; Cowley, et al., 2010)

<sup>58</sup> Mandatory provincial examinations were administered in the following grade-10, grade-11, and grade-12 subjects: Applications of Mathematics 10; Principles of Mathematics 10; Essentials of Mathematics 10; Science 10; English 10; Social Studies 11; Civic Studies 11; BC First Nations Studies 12; Communications 12; English 12; Français Langue Première 10; Français Langue Première 12; and Technical Professional Communications 12.

<sup>59</sup> The school vs exam mark indicator was redesigned for the 2009 and 2010 report cards. “For each school, this indicator (in the tables School vs. exam mark difference) gives the average amount (for all grade-10, grade-11, and grade-12 courses with a mandatory provincial exam) by which the “school” mark—the assessment of each student’s learning that is made by the school—exceeds the exam mark in that course” (Cowley, et al., 2010, p. 6).

<sup>60</sup> “For schools for which there were no gender-gap results because only boys or girls were enrolled, the *School vs exam mark difference* was weighted at 25%” (Cowley & Easton, 2008, p. 42).

<sup>61</sup> For schools in which every student graduates this KPI counts for 25%. For schools in which not every student graduates this KPI counts for 12.5%.

<sup>62</sup> For schools in which every student graduates there is no “delayed advancement rate” and this KPI counts as 0%. For schools in which some students don’t graduate this KPI counts for 12.5%.

**KPI# 6: Graduation Rate**  
**(2008-2010)**

“This indicator, related to the *Delayed advancement rate*, compares the number of students eligible to graduate enrolled in the school on September 30 with the number of students who actually graduate by the end of the same school year. Only those enrollees who are capable of graduating with their class within the current school year are included in the count of eligible graduates” (Cowley & Easton, 2008, p. 9).

**KPI #7: Delayed Advancement Rate**  
**(2008-2010)**

“This indicator measures the extent to which schools keep their students in school and progressing in a timely manner toward completion of their diploma program. It uses data that report the educational status of students one year after they have enrolled in a given grade at a school in British Columbia” (Cowley & Easton, 2008, p. 8).

In 2008 the Fraser Institute acknowledged something that many of its critics had been saying since the first time the school report card was published ten years earlier—“When a school had higher income parents, the *Overall rating* at the school was likely to be higher” (Cowley & Easton, 2009, p. 10). What is interesting to note about this admission is Cowley and Easton’s (2009) footnote that accompanies the statement. It points the reader to a related—but different—finding in their 2000 report whereby the authors “identified one characteristic that was significantly associated with the *Overall rating*: the average number of years of education of the most educated parent in a two-parent family (or of the lone parent in a single parent-family)” (Cowley & Easton, 2000, p. 12). The same footnote also points the reader to Appendix 2 in the *‘Third Annual Report Card on British Columbia’s Secondary Schools’* entitled, “Measuring socio-economic context” (Cowley & Easton, 2000, p. 119). Here a number of ‘independent variable names’ describe the socio-economic familial context the Fraser Institute is able to quantify. They include: average parental income, average parental government transfer payment income, average parental other income, percentage of target families in which the principal parent claims no knowledge of either official language, average age of the principal parent in the target families, percentage of target families in which

there is only one parent that resides in the home, and the average number of years of education of the most educated parent. The coefficients assigned to each of these variables were also noted. It is clear from the data presented that a parents' average educational experience was shown to significantly impact a school's overall rating at the 99% confidence level (Cowley & Easton, 2000, p. 119). These detailed statistical disclosures, however, did not appear in the appendices of successive Fraser Institute reports.

What is important to note here is the demonstrated ability of the Fraser Institute to capture a myriad of socio-economic factors it believes contribute to a school's overall rating beyond. This statistical recognition highlights an inherent limitation embedded in the school ranking reports in every one of its ranking iterations—that conditions exist for students *outside* the classroom that (positively and negatively) affect their levels of achievement *inside* the classroom over which teachers have absolutely no control. This fact disrupts the legitimacy of a school ranking system that has been manufactured by the Fraser Institute to measure the effectiveness of teachers in secondary school classrooms through British Columbia. When the Fraser Institute acknowledges that (at least) two socioeconomic factors—parents' income *and* parents' average education—are determinant factors in how schools rank on its annual school report card but renders them statistically invisible in their ranking rubric disciplinary power is being exercised by one group on another.

It is relevant to—not only how the Fraser Institute manages to capture and quantify socioeconomic contextual measures that are known to affect how students perform at school—but the way such indices are used by the Fraser Institute to “measure of the success of schools to account for the socioeconomic characteristics of the student body” (Cowley & Easton, 2009, p. 10). The authors illustrate the potential its data has to tell different kinds of stories about schools by way of an example.

“[D]uring the 2007/2008 school year, Pinetree Secondary, a public school in Coquitlam, achieved an *Overall rating* of 7.6 and yet, when the average parental income of the student body is taken into account, the school

was expected to achieve a rating of only about 5.9. The difference of 1.7 is reported in the tables. On the other hand, the actual *Overall rating* of H. D. Stafford Secondary in Langley was 4.6, although its predicted rating was 6.2. The reported difference for H. D. Stafford is –1.6. This measurement suggests that Pinetree is more successful than H. D. Stafford in enabling all of its students to reach their potential” (Cowley & Easton, 2009, p. 10).

What is striking about this example is the how the Fraser Institute’s prevailing ideological formation (IDF)—its ‘*way of seeing*’ schools—statistically recognizes the challenges classroom teachers face. However sensitive the Fraser Institute may be to external conditions that have been shown to impact student performance in this way they choose not to include them as KPIs in their ranking. That is, socioeconomic indices serve a descriptive purpose and their inclusion in the report does not impact the overall rating of schools in a material way. Despite providing a clear rationale for why the Fraser Institute changed how the report card was manufactured for its fifth iteration<sup>63</sup> edition it is important to note that single sex schools continued to be treated differently from co-educational schools—at least statistically. As well it was possible for ‘top’ ranked single sex schools to be ranked according to four KPIs (each worth 25%) if the school’s delayed advancement rates approximated zero. Their public school (co-educational) counterparts like, for example, Prince of Wales Secondary, were ranked according to seven KPIs. This discrepancy is especially noteworthy because it underscores the statistical variation that exists in—what has been promoted by the Fraser Institute as being—an *objective* measure of school performance. When gender differences that account for 12% of the statistical variation are combined with delayed advanced rates that account for another 12.5% of the variation there exists a potential for 24.5% of the statistical variation between schools to be unequally accounted for.

---

<sup>63</sup> Gender gap indicators were re-designed in the 2009 and 2010 report cards. Whereas previous iterations had the gender gap indicators reflect the difference between school-issued and provincial examination results the revised KPI calculated the difference between boys and the girls in the marks they received on the mandatory provincial exams in each of the compulsory courses. The relative percentage weighting of the KPI, however, remained the same.

## Conclusion

The Fraser Institute has shaped how secondary schools are perceived in British Columbia by developing a ranking rubric that forces an epistemic consciousness on the public about what they think matters in education. Their vision for holding schools accountable is grounded in the belief that complex organizations (like schools) can be understood in objective and discrete terms called key performance indicators (KPIs). In devising its own accountability system the Fraser Institute has imported its mission-driven logic of practice onto the field of education; a logic that is highly contested given the mandate schools have to serve the diverse educational needs of students.

In devising an accountability tool that establishes what is relevant and what is not within the field of education, the Fraser Institute promotes a régime of truth that exerts disciplinary power on schools and school systems. I have shown that a ranking instrument that is promoted by the Fraser Institute as being objective does not serve all schools in the same way. An analysis of ranking data available in British Columbia from 1998-2010 shows that the percentage of public schools occupying 'top' (9-10) ranked decile scores initially equaled, or surpassed, the percentage of independent/private schools occupying the same 'top' spots during the first iteration of the report card. However, successive statistical iterations brought with it notable changes in how public schools fared on the Fraser Institute's report card. *'Iteration #2'* (2001-2002) resulted in a significant redistribution of 'top' ranked schools in British Columbia. Specifically, an analysis of the data shows a marked reduction in the percentage of public schools occupying 'top' ranked positions when gender differences were included in the ranking rubric. During the three years that defined *'Iteration #1'* approximately fifty-percent (50%) of the province's 'top' ranked schools were public schools. After gender-related data was introduced into the school-ranking rubric for *'Iteration #2'* the number of 'top' ranked public schools dropped to ten-percent (10%). Despite another statistical revision to the ranking rubric in 2003 that rendered invisible the impact ESL students had on examination averages the number of public schools occupying *'top'* positions has not reached the same on-par level they experienced during the first iteration. This suggests



an inherent bias in the ranking rubric that rewards and punishes certain kinds of schools.

The art and science of rewarding and punishing schools in this way relies on a whole technology of representation that has at its functional core surveillance. School rankings act like 17<sup>th</sup> century Panoptic prison towers because they operationalize power in similar ways. They are similar because both constructs serve as instruments of disciplinary power that have been designed to monitor and scrutinize human activity. As instruments, however, panoptic prisons and school-ranking rubrics limit what can be ‘seen’ on the field of visibility. The Fraser Institute limits its field of visibility by reducing schools to a number of discrete measures called KPIs while at the same time disregards the impact descriptive measures have on student achievement patterns. The selective use and manipulation of data in this way—not only limits the kinds of stories that can be told about schools—but, as importantly may be viewed as an act of discretionary power in and of itself: The Fraser Institute chooses what KPIs it uses to construct its ranking while schools have no say in the matter. Herein lies one of the principal objections that critics of school rankings have to the Fraser Institute’s epistemic vision in the accountability debate: It is considered by most teachers to be contextually void of meaning because it discounts the out-of-class experiences that students quite naturally bring with them to school. Moreover the emancipatory possibility of redress—the place where surveillance, disclosure, transparency, knowledge, language, and régimes of truth collide on the broader field of judgment—is diminished by a ranking discourse that perceives redress through the single lens of performativity. This one-dimensional perspective has very real implications because it limits how an instrument of power can be used to address social justice related issues that have always existed—and will continue to exist—in schools of every imaginable type.

Measurement is not the enemy. Establishing data-driven achievement patterns in students from different backgrounds is—in fact—a key first step to improving the educational experience for all students. If gender-gap KPIs, for example, suggest that boys and girls have significantly different student achievement patterns within the

classroom context then redress is possible to the extent this variation is determined to be a function of discrepant pedagogical practices that discriminate based on gender and the extent to which discriminating practices change to address the learning needs of boys and girls equally. But when the same possibility exists to statistically demarcate student achievement patterns that are more closely aligned to socioeconomic condition in a material way the Fraser Institute ranking falls short.

The disciplinary power embedded within the ranking rubric, therefore, is a power that is born out of a régime of truth that identifies KPIs in the first place and assigns relative percentage weights to each of them in the second place. Descriptive measures do not exercise disciplinary power in the same way because they are—metaphorically—silenced. They are ‘seen’ but not heard. The privileging of KPIs within the ranking rubric over descriptive measures in this way stands at its functional core. It has been manufactured this way. Moreover, it demonstrates how power is operationalized through the principle of rarefaction because we see in the elevated KPI-status (these measures are ‘seen’ and heard) the statistical subjugation of its descriptive-measure-counterpart. Were the Fraser Institute to redefine the KPIs used in its ranking rubric to include descriptive measures the instrument could be used to exert a different kind of disciplinary power on the field of education—a power that addressed contextual differences that continue to exist between students beyond the limits imposed by gender. A deliberate attempt by the Fraser Institute to include a more nuanced and balanced portrayal of schools in this way would result in a radically different picture of what success looks like for secondary students in British Columbia’s classrooms.

## CHAPTER 5: Discursive Practices and the Mechanics of Capital Mobilization

### Introduction

The purpose of Chapter 5 is two-fold: (1) to show how competing agents use language to mediate relationships of power; and (2) to show how competing agents acquire, consolidate, and leverage capital on the field of power to promote divergent visions about the role school rankings should play in holding teachers accountable for their work. Drawing chiefly on published media accounts, and the Fraser Institute's own documents, the analysis shows how a reality effect was created in the public's mind over time that private schools were better than public schools. This impression moved beyond published ranking scores and was bolstered by articles, letters, and editorials that appeared in newspapers, which highlighted the differences between public and private school systems, and the teachers working within them. The chapter has been organized to show how knowledge discourses (that initially characterized the school-wide accountability debate) shifted over time to become action discourses (that focused the public's attention on the relationship between school improvement and school choice.) Problematizing the impact discourse had on shaping public perception in this way is key to understanding why student enrolment patterns in private and public schools changed appreciably since the ranking was first published in 1998. This is an important consideration because once choice is successfully admitted as a regulative rhetorical device on the field of power in which public, private, and independent schools compete for limited resources new forces emerge that can alter the educational landscape. The chapter also explores the methods by which the Fraser Institute inserted itself into the lives of elementary and Aboriginal students—both within and beyond the borders of British Columbia—because, I believe, it says something about the techniques and instruments of power used by the Fraser Institute to gain political and symbolic capital on an expanding field of accountability. To this end I focus on how the Fraser Institute established relationships with other political agents that share a similar *habitus* to expand and promote its privatization agenda in British Columbia and elsewhere.

The chapter is organized around the following research questions:

1. How can agents use language to mediate relationships of power and privilege in social interactions, institutions, and bodies of knowledge? How does the naturalization of ideologies come about?
2. What particular régimes of truth are manufactured by the media about secondary schools to construct a reality effect in the public's mind about the state of secondary school education in British Columbia?
3. How do different agents involved in the ranking debate mobilize different forms of capital on the field of power to promote their respective agendas with respect to schools?

These questions will be addressed by drawing on elements of the schematic that I presented in Figure 4. It is important to note that when I talk about Bourdieu's notion of 'fields' throughout this chapter that I think about them as being a myriad of different fields: The field of visibility; the field of accountability; the field of education; the field of judgment; the field of politic; and the field of power. All of these fields occupy the social space; a space inhabited by different agents who compete for, acquire, and leverage capital on different but interdependent fields at the same time. As well it is essential to note here that I perceive discourse to be a form of Bourdieu-ian capital that is used by competing agents to naturalize their ideological perspectives and régimes of truth. What follows is an analysis of how discourse is leveraged on multiple fields by different agents to effect an outcome—an outcome that has at its core the public's perception of secondary schools in British Columbia.

### **Knowledge Discourses**

Delineating the accountability field with the goal of identifying the 'best' and 'worst' performing schools in British Columbia proved controversial from the beginning. The then president of the British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF), Kit Krieger, described the high school report card as being an "unfair and spurious grading system"

(Proctor, 1998d, p. A37). He went on to characterize the Fraser Institute as being “right-wing” and directly challenged, not only the relevance of the report, but also the credibility of Peter Cowley when he said, “the grading was done by someone with a background in marketing” (Proctor, 1998d, p. A3). Krieger further questioned the journalistic integrity of *The Province* by attacking the newspaper for publishing the ranking in the first place when he said, “[o]bjectivity, credibility, balance, fairness—surely *The Province* expects to be held accountable to these basic journalistic standards” (Proctor, 1998d, p. A3).

In marked contrast, Michael Walker, the then Executive Director of the Fraser Institute, disclosed the think tank’s motives for producing the ranking when he said,

“The primary [reason] is to provide the consumers of education with the equivalent of a “consumer’s report”. A second reason is to inform parents and children who have no choice how their school performs relative to schools in other areas. We also wish to inform the producers of education” (Proctor, 1998d, p. A37).

The school-wide accountability framework, therefore, was originally positioned within a broader knowledge discourse that: (1) provided information to consumers of education, (2) made comparisons between public, private, and independent high schools, and (3) informed educators, administrators, and school trustees about how well they were doing their jobs. With one broad-sweeping accountability stroke the published report card on secondary schools rendered judgment on an educational collective that cut through the vertical slice of the entire educational system. In creating a report whereby schools were pitted against schools under the guise of a *parent’s right to know*, neighbourhood, district, regional, and socio-economic boundaries were obliterated in a ranking that focused exclusively on provincial exam results. In Walker’s own words, “the process of making more precise distinctions between schools”, had begun (Proctor, 1998d, p. A37). This is an important statement because it underscores the distinct epistemic framework on which the Fraser Institute approached school wide

accountability from the beginning—that it *was* possible to measure school performance and to rank schools accordingly.

Not surprisingly Walker's remarks did not go unchallenged. Other agents appeared on the playing field of school wide accountability. They positioned themselves in direct opposition to Walker's rhetoric and the logic presented by the school ranking rubric. Their agenda was to redefine and expand the boundaries of play by changing the discourse about how schools were characterized by the Fraser Institute's school report card. These agents included thousands of teachers and administrators who had been engaged in the school wide accountability game long before the Fraser Institute stepped onto their field of play. They were more interested in having conversations about what the Fraser Institute could not measure in the life world of students attending British Columbia's high schools, and not surprisingly, Krieger rallied to their defense. He objected to the bias he believed was inherent in the Fraser Institute's published school ranking. Krieger spoke for thousands of hard working, committed, high school teachers throughout the province when he said the Fraser Institute was not measuring what really mattered in schools: "Poverty and parents education are the greatest predictors for a high-ranked school" (Proctor, 1998d, p. A3).

The Fraser Institute was not detracted by oppositional voices and sought to expand its readership base by publishing its own material about schools. In the spring of 1998 the Fraser Institute published a policy paper called, *'A Secondary Schools Report Card for British Columbia'* for the first time (Cowley et al., 1998). This policy document—A Fraser Institute Occasional Paper—has been published every year since and can be downloaded from the Fraser Institute's website. These documents describe aspects of the Fraser Institute's school ranking in ways that are not covered in the mainstream press. They are important because they serve as the scaffolding from which the Fraser Institute initially builds (and later promotes) its commanding presence on the field of school wide accountability.

The second report published in this series was especially relevant because it describes four salient points that contextualize and outline the Fraser Institute's

strategy in promoting school choice as well as the tactics by which the strategy is orchestrated. The first point makes clear that Fraser Institute school rankings are “based on student results data provided by the B.C. Ministry of Education” (Cowley et al., 1999, p. 3). Strategically, it was imperative for the Fraser Institute to align itself with the data provided by the Ministry of Education in the beginning because the ranking garnered a degree of legitimacy as a result—the Ministry was not in a position to devalue the data used by the Fraser Institute to compile its ranking because the Ministry had collected the data in the first place. This put the Ministry in an awkward position because the Fraser Institute was able to use data that had been collected by the Ministry about schools and student achievement in any way it deemed necessary. This effectively buffered the Fraser Institute in a way that was very important because the data used by the Fraser Institute to compile its first secondary school report card could not be challenged on its epistemic foundation as being invalid and/or unreliable. This was the principal strategic foundation upon which the Fraser Institute ranking of schools was built. It also served as the principal foundation on which to legitimize school rankings from the beginning.

The second point speaks to a mounting public critique by the Fraser Institute—not only on the state of secondary schools in British Columbia—but as importantly, on the state of an ineffective government. The rationale for establishing the ranking within the broader discourse of critique helped position the Fraser Institute within the broader context of political forces at play during the time. Specifically, there were two reasons cited for why the Fraser Institute felt it necessary to rank British Columbia’s secondary schools. The first was to improve the overall performance of schools operating within a broken (and expensive) educational system. “[A]lthough it is responsible for the \$4 billion spent each year educating students from kindergarten to grade 12, the British Columbia Ministry of Education makes no systematic effort to determine whether each school is effective in the discharge of its duties” (Cowley et al., 1999, p. 4). The inference made here was that the left-leaning NDP government was not being responsible to the electorate. Even though billions of tax dollars were being directed toward the k-12

educational system the Fraser Institute pointed out that there was no systematic effort to determine the overall effectiveness of schools by the government. If nothing else, the Fraser Institute ranking of schools made the NDP seem ineffectual because there was no discernable system in place by the NDP government to hold itself accountable for how taxpaying dollars were being spent within the Ministry of Education. The second reason given by the Fraser Institute to rank British Columbian high schools was to promote consumer awareness. In highlighting the ability of some<sup>64</sup> parents and students “in many parts of the province...to choose among education providers”, the Fraser Institute once again begins to shift public discourse away from ‘parental knowledge discourses’ toward ‘parental choice discourses” (Cowley, et al., 1999, p. 4). The extent to which parental choice lessens the financial burden on British Columbian taxpayers is something the Fraser Institute values given its belief that “individuals benefit from greater choice, competitive markets, and personal responsibility” (The Fraser Institute, 2010d).

The third point addressed key criticisms that were levied by a chorus of vocal critics in response to the first report card published in 1998. Of the seven criticisms addressed by the Fraser Institute in its policy document all but one are related to the statistical aspects of the ranking, which have been discussed in Chapter 4. The remaining criticism levied at the Fraser Institute pertained to their practice of comparing public with private schools in the same report. Many critics believed that “it would be better to have two leagues, one for public schools, which, it was maintained, do not select their students in any way and another—a sort of Premier league—for the independent schools that are selective in their admission policies and therefore can create a student body of excellent, motivated, and supported students” (Cowley, et al., 1999, p. 5). The authors of the report categorically rejected this criticism given their ideological stance that parental “awareness of the success (or failure) of alternative education delivery systems

---

<sup>64</sup> At the time, parents and students throughout the province were given some ability to choose among education providers. They could, for example, choose between neighbourhood public schools, magnet schools, independent and private schools, and even home schooling. The number of choices that parents and students had, however, was informed by the geographical and socio-economic factors the Fraser Institute deemphasized.



provides useful information for the effort to improve all schools, public and private” (Cowley, et al., 1999, p. 5).

The fourth and final point describes Fraser Institute plans to develop an expanded network of data gathering with the goal of making the ranking more statistically relevant in future report cards. Consider the following plans the Fraser Institute had for its future reports: “[W]e shall investigate the possibility of adding to our database school performance measures that are only available at the district and school level.” (Cowley, et al., 1999, p. 4). This kind of documented, long-range, plan-making demonstrates the methods by which the Fraser Institute intended to strengthen its statistical report from the beginning. As well, it established the kinds of relationships the Fraser Institute hoped to cultivate in order to access the kind of data it needed to produce a more statistically nuanced school ranking. At issue for the Fraser Institute was developing a methodology for determining the value-added measure of school effectiveness in the marketplace of schools.

“In next year’s report card we will measure each school’s success in developing its students over the secondary school years with more accuracy. We will incorporate into the report card newly available school performance data derived from certain Grade 10 results. By doing so, we hope to provide a measure of the value added by the school over time” (Cowley, et al., 1999, p. 5).

What is relevant to note at this juncture is the extent to which the Fraser Institute relies, not only on the Ministry of Education to expand its database of school performance measures, but also on districts and individual schools. In this way the breaking down (or serialization) of the larger system by the Fraser Institute makes possible inferences at other levels as well: (1) the school level (secondary schools); (2) the system level (public versus private), and (3) the professional level (teachers and administrators). The presentation of data in this way gives the Fraser Institute more totalizing power because the field of visibility changes on which the school accountability game is played. There is no escape from the Fraser Institute’s gaze. The same document described the

relationship between the Fraser Institute's reporting of school performance and school improvement when it pronounced,

"easily accessible reporting of school performance is a necessary element of an effective program of continuous improvement in the delivery of education. With such a régime in place parents and students can make rational choices when considering educational alternatives" (Cowley, et al., 1999, p. 74).

The foreshadowing, then, of the Fraser Institute's shifting of the school-wide accountability framework away from knowledge discourses and towards choice discourses is made possible to the extent statistical gathering régimes are in place to support the initiative.

As well, the media played an important role in managing the discourse around published school rankings from the beginning. In an Editorial that appeared on the front page of its March 24<sup>th</sup>, 1999, issue the Fraser Institute's rationale for publishing the first school ranking the previous spring was clearly articulated and positioned within a discursive strategy that privileged a *parent's right to know*. In fact, the fourteen paragraph, front-page, article contained the sentence—"parents have a right to know"—at three different places in the copy that, to some, may have resembled a political speech (Editorial, 1999, p. A1). Regardless of how the text had been interpreted by the reader, however, it was clear that the Fraser Institute was committed to its goal of making more precise the distinctions between schools, districts, and the students populating them. *The Province* newspaper articulated its position about where it stood in the ranking debate in an "exclusive report" when it said,

"By referring to the report card, which was prepared by the prestigious Vancouver-based Fraser Institute, parents will have information they need to decide if their school's doing a good job. And they can do something about it" (Editorial, 1999, p. A1).

Establishing a relationship with a provincial newspaper was critical in order for the Fraser Institute to gain a stronghold on shaping the discourse on educational matters because it provided the think tank with direct access to a significant population within British Columbia who were already loyal *Province* readers. The newspaper publication also provided its readership with an artifact of the ranking itself because the tables generated by the report could be saved, examined, and scrutinized. In this relationship the Fraser Institute devised different iterations of the school ranking rubrics over time while media outlets published the Fraser Institute's findings in its newspaper. This was true for British Columbia as much as it was true for other iterations of the Fraser Institute report card that would be published in other provinces. In a statement published in the Fraser Institute's 2002 Annual Report, Board Chair, Mr. Ray Addington, qualified the nature of the relationship between the Fraser Institute and the media when he noted,

"The distribution of the report card has been a critical factor, since we want to ensure that every educator, parent, and child in the province has access to the results. Accordingly, in each province we have chosen to partner with a widely distributed newspaper or magazine. In British Columbia, we chose *The Province*, the newspaper with the largest circulation in BC, and a demographic appropriate to our goal" (The Fraser Institute, 2002, p. 2).

In mobilizing the media in this way the Fraser Institute effectively managed to direct parents' attention on what mattered most to the Fraser Institute—measuring specific aspects of school performance.<sup>65</sup>

The Fraser Institute's policy think tank counterpart, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA), entered the school ranking debate in 2000—two years after the first school report card was published. This is an important development because it shows how local school rankings (and the debates it generates) transcend the normal

---

<sup>65</sup> The coverage of the school ranking report changed (most notably) in the past two years as it now appears in the *Vancouver Sun*. The 'stand alone' school ranking section that was central to the depiction of schools in *The Province* newspaper no longer exists.

field of schools to become a national policy issue of interest to the CCPA. Like the Fraser Institute, the CCPA is also an independent, non-partisan research institute. Unlike the Vancouver-based Fraser Institute, the CCPA is head quartered in Ottawa and has four other Canadian offices in Vancouver, Winnipeg, Halifax, and Regina.<sup>66</sup> The CCPA and the Fraser Institute have conflicting institutional ideologies. Whereas the CCPA concerns itself with “issues of social and economic justice” (Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2010) the Fraser Institute concerns itself with “the impact competitive markets and government interventions [have] on the welfare of individuals” (The Fraser Institute, 2008b). Given the ideological clash between the left-leaning social justice perspective of the CCPA and the right-leaning market driven perspective of the Fraser Institute, it was not surprising when the CCPA spoke out against school rankings for the first time in March of 2000 when it said,

“[m]ost parents want their children to have an excellent education. The Fraser Institute (FI) taps into this concern with their much-ballyhooed “Report Card.” This manipulation of public opinion is meant to undermine confidence in public education. It doesn’t help schools serve our kids” (Gaskell & Vogel, 2000).

This position prompted a strong reaction from one individual in particular. In an article published in Fort St. John’s *Alaska Highway News*, a Mr. Hubert Beyer noted,

“in the absence of other methods to assess the effectiveness of our high schools, the Fraser Institute’s annual report card will do just fine. And while we’re at it, I think testing teachers every so often is a swell idea” (Beyer, 2000, p. 4).

This comment illustrates how school rankings that were developed to focus the public’s attention on student performance could be used to focus the public’s attention on teacher performance. Beyer (2000) suggests that it is the teachers who should be assessed and not the students. In this way school rankings begin to impose on the

---

<sup>66</sup> The Fraser Institute has offices in Vancouver, Calgary, Toronto, Ottawa, and Montréal.

public's consciousness a new gaze that seeks to secure its hold—not only on teachers working within individual schools—but on the field of public education.

Evidence for shifting the focus away from students and towards classroom teachers can also be found in the Fraser Institute's 2001 Report Card itself. The authors dismiss arguments made by educators that schools exist for purposes other than those deemed important by the Fraser Institute. As well, Cowley and Easton (2001) were highly skeptical of teachers and their roles they played in the lives of students when they said,

"They point to their schools' mission statements as evidence of their breadth of purpose. These statements suggest that taxpayers are paying the schools to provide far more than academic training. Schools have taken upon themselves the responsibility of teaching the fine arts to their students. They promise to instill in the students an understanding of sport as an important aspect of a well-rounded life. They declare their graduates will fully appreciate their rights and responsibilities as citizens of Canada. Are educators delivering on their promises? Do they have the slightest idea of their degree of success?" (Cowley & Easton, 2001, p. 3).

The rhetoric used by Cowley and Easton challenges assumptions about how schools operate and what purpose they serve. Notwithstanding the myriad of perspectives that students, parents, and teachers will have to the question is a position taken by the Fraser Institute that teachers might not be doing their jobs. The issue here is no longer about school rankings but about regulating the work of teachers—'*Do they have the slightest idea of their degree of success?*'. The position taken by the Fraser Institute here is also relevant because it describes an expanding political configuration of alliances that includes all 'taxpayers'—including those in the province who do not have school-aged children. This serves an important strategic function because the Fraser Institute's published ranking makes possible the ability of all taxpayers in the province to see how well their neighbourhood school is doing in relation to all schools, and in so doing, invites them to participate in the accountability debate. Whereas previous iterations of the Fraser Institute's report emphasized a *parent's right to know* how well their child's

school was doing relative to others, now the Fraser Institute emphasized that *taxpayers right to know* as well because they were paying for school program perks that fell beyond the Fraser Institute's measurement mandate; things like band, debating, drama, leadership, citizenship, fine arts, and athletic programs (to name but a few). The fact that British Columbia high schools were not measuring how successful they were in these mission-relevant activities frustrated Cowley and Easton.

“they have not provided us with any data that records their results in non-academic activities. Nor have they established their own annual reporting mechanisms so that parents, taxpayers, and other interested parties can compare and judge the schools in the areas. Why not? The results of the teaching students fine arts, physical education, leadership, and citizenship can be measured. Yet it appears that schools only report results that they are required to report” (Cowley & Easton, 2001, p. 3).

The position taken by the authors here dramatically underscore the inherent epistemic tension that exists between teachers and the Fraser Institute at its core—a tension shaped and defined by measurement as a precursor to holding schools accountable. For however clear Cowley and Easton may be about the possibility that successful citizenship and leadership programs, for example, can somehow be measured in high schools throughout British Columbia, they are silent in proposing how such measures could be obtained in the first place. And while secondary schools report only what the Ministry requests of them it is important to note that they also report on measures the Fraser Institute does not include in its annual ranking like, for example, student award and scholarship data. What clearly emerges in the fourth school report card is the strategic importance the Fraser Institute places on casting public school teachers and public school administrators unfavourably. Consider what Cowley and Easton had to say about the embedded accountability that existed at mission-driven independent schools.

“If individual parents were paying for their student's education and if each could choose [my emphasis - MJS] from a variety of education

providers, then some might be willing to credit the promises made in school mission statements. Other parents would require objective evidence of past success and expect regular report cards that measure school effectiveness against a variety of measures in much the same way that the Consumers' Union organization measures the performance of a wide variety of goods and services" (Cowley & Easton, 2001, p. 3).

This is an important statement by the authors of the school report cards because it signals to parents how school rankings could be used to replace teacher unions with parent unions that exist to consume an industrial good—education. The inference made here is that public school teachers are not to be trusted in the same way private school teachers can because inherent in fee-paying schools is a level of accountability by fee-paying parents of teachers working within them. What Cowley and Easton (2001) are proposing is an economic model of schooling that sees education as an industrial good to be valued in the marketplace; a model that aligns with the ideology espoused by *political liberalism*. This position stands in marked contrast to the stance taken by the BCTF, which sees education as a democratic right; a model that aligns more with the ideology espoused by *progressive liberalism*. This marks the first time the Fraser Institute shifts the school-wide accountability issue away from parental *knowledge discourses* towards parental *choice discourses* that overtly challenge the authority of a teachers' union. The Fraser Institute also casts public school administrators as being uncooperative in its quest to improve the educational condition for secondary students in British Columbia. Consider what Cowley and Easton say about them en masse.

"Since the province's public school districts refused to provide us with data on student attendance, we requested the information under the Freedom of Information Act. By fall of 2000, we had received historical data from almost all of the districts and are currently analyzing these data to determine its value" (Cowley & Easton, 2001, p. 5).

What is noteworthy about this statement is the way the Fraser Institute effectively casts public school districts in a negative light because they '*refuse*' to comply with the Fraser

Institute's request to provide it with particular data as if they had something to hide. The districts are portrayed as being contrary and inflexible to the point the Fraser Institute gained access to the data it sought through other means. In this way the authors effectively leverage the institute's political capital by demonstrating its ability to target (and obtain) any data it deems worthy. It is also telling that the Fraser Institute authorizes itself to determine of what value the data will have in the next version of the school ranking report card. What is unquestionably valuable to the Fraser Institute, however, is widening its potential base of support by appealing to a broader target audience—the British Columbian taxpayer.

“it is taxpayers and not only parents of today's students who foot the bill for the education of the next generation. As long as this is the case, taxpayers should have easy access to reports about the effectiveness of every school in all areas for which funding is provided. The Ministry of Education should insist: “No results reporting. No funds. Period”” (Cowley & Easton, 2001, p. 4).

In actual fact schools and school districts have always provided the Ministry of Education with the data it has requested; reporting on a myriad of factors from class size to graduation rates (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2011). The Fraser Institute, however, implies otherwise and calls on taxpayers to hold the Ministry accountable for collecting, and sharing, data the Fraser Institute deems important and relevant in ranking secondary schools throughout British Columbia. This is an especially important tactic given 2001 was an election year for British Columbian taxpayers. It would mark the end of one political party's influence in the province and the beginning of another. The change of political parties at the legislative level meant that new kinds of relationships could be formed between the Fraser Institute and the newly elected Liberal government.



## Common Sense Discourses

What is noteworthy about the discourse surrounding many of the reports card is the extent to which *The Province* newspaper normalized school rankings in the construction of common sense. It did so by invoking discursive phrases associated with regular school-issued report cards in its reporting of the ranking itself. Most parents were used to reading and, by extension, interpreting a school-issued report card. It was possible, therefore, for *The Province* to appeal to the emotions and anxieties parents of school-aged children commonly associated with the reporting process itself. For example, a published headline could erode the confidence parents may have for their children's high schools by asking the question, "*Does your school make the grade?*" (Anonymous, 1999a). The question was answered in the form of a list of British Columbia high schools that were ranked from number one to number two hundred and sixty-two. Implicit in the published ranking was the understanding that top-ranked high schools at the time (Prince of Wales and St. Thomas Aquinas) had achieved top ranked grades (10.0) while bottom-ranked schools, like Salmo Secondary (1.2), had achieved failing grades (Anonymous, 1999a).

Another article in the special educational report asked the question, "*How is your high school performing?*" (Anonymous, 1999b). Once again, the ranking discourse was normalized because it was predicated on traditional reporting practices that have always been implemented by teachers everywhere; that is to say, teachers have always commented on student achievement through a document intended for parents called a school report card: What parent doesn't want to know how well their son or daughter is performing in math, science, or English in relation to the other students? The same question could also be discursively framed through the market-driven, business culture associated with stock markets whereby performance is closely aligned with profitability: *How is your portfolio performing in this market?* Still another headline promoted the ranking as being the solution to poor teaching and/or poor administrative planning when it proclaimed, "*School rankings offer useful lessons to teachers and planners*" (Raham, 1999, p. A46). This article was written by Helen Raham, then Executive Director

of the Society for the Advancement of Excellence in Education (SAEE). (The SAEE had a connection with the Fraser Institute when Stephen Easton<sup>67</sup> sat on its Board of Directors in 2004/05). In 1999 Helen Raham had this to say about the Fraser Institute's second published ranking,

"The Fraser Institute's annual school report card helps consumers of the system assess individual school performance. As educators, we ought to be encouraged by [the ranking's] numbers to look for answers that will help all our students grow and learn. But it seems in some corners the opposite has happened—as a result of a direct request from the B.C. Teachers' Federation, the deputy minister recently announced that he would not be releasing the school-level data to districts and schools anymore, thus removing an important aid in improving B.C. school performances. All the more reason for continuing the Fraser Institute's report card initiatives" (Raham, 1999, p. A46).

Raham's op-ed piece is significant for three reasons: (1) she casts parents as consumers of education, (2) she casts the Fraser Institute as a consumers' union that produces economic goods for public consumption called report cards, and (3) she criticizes the NDP Ministry of Education by making public its reluctance to release data to schools and districts. This is especially important in the context of régime change because in portraying the Ministry, in general, and Paul Ramsey<sup>68</sup>, in particular, as being insensitive to the needs of discerning consumers of education, Raham effectively positioned government officials as also being insensitive to the needs of parents, and by extension, taxpayers. Also, by referring to the report card as being an annual publication she effectively normalizes the school ranking phenomenon in British Columbia. She does so within the context of ecological fallacy—a situation that occurs when data (collected at one level) is used to draw misleading inferences on another level. In this instance, Raham infers that school ranking scores (which is comprised of aggregate data from an entire population of students attending any school in the province) is used to say

---

<sup>67</sup> Stephen T. Easton is professor of Economics at Simon Fraser University. He is a senior research fellow of The Fraser Institute and co-authors the annual secondary school report card with Peter Cowley.

<sup>68</sup> NDP Minister of Education (February 1998-September 1999).

something definitive about individual students attending the schools being ranked. “Assumptions made about individuals based on aggregate data are vulnerable to the ecological fallacy” (Ratcliff, 2011).

While the inferences made about the school ranking data presented by the Fraser Institute may be called into question, the focus of the 1999 school report card was to position the school ranking system within the discursive context of a normalized school reporting system. This served to make the ranking discursively palatable to both public and private school parents because it was discursively familiar—every parent in the province understood what distinguished an ‘A’ from an ‘F’ because they had been the product of a school system that, like the Fraser Institute, focused on ranking students. The difference between the Fraser Institute’s ranking of schools (and classroom teachers ranking their students through published letter grades or percentages to parents in the form of take-home report cards) had everything to do with scale. Whereas individual student report cards had always been a matter for private concern, the Fraser Institute’s published school report card was—by the spring of 1999—a matter for public concern in British Columbia.

## **Expanding the Surveillance Gaze**

### **Alberta School Rankings**

School rankings became a matter for public concern to Albertans as well, because June 1999 marked the first time the Fraser Institute published its secondary school ranking beyond British Columbia’s borders. Interestingly, the *Calgary Herald* used the same discursive technique *The Province* had used in drawing the public’s attention to the rankings—British Columbian and Albertan high schools were “under the microscope” (Editorial, 1999; Heyman, 1999, p. A1). The copy appearing in *The Province* newspaper ran alongside an image of a student placing a slide on the stage of a compound microscope. She is about to examine the biological specimen the reader assumes she has prepared. The ocular and objective lenses of the microscope figure prominently in the image, filling one-third of the page. The microscope serves as a

potent metaphor for how disciplinary power operates on the field of visibility. The Fraser Institute and *The Province* newspaper provided the general public with a school-ranking apparatus that, like the girl's microscope, focused its magnified gaze on British Columbia's secondary schools according to its own logic of practice—a logic that has been shown in Chapter 4 to privilege an epistemic vision that is steeped in surveillance, standardization, and performativity. This is remarkable achievement because it underscores how the logic underpinning the Fraser Institute's ranking rubric can be exported to other educational fields beyond the limits imposed by the geographical boundaries of British Columbia. Furthermore, school-ranking results published in Alberta pitted Calgary area schools against their Edmonton school counterparts as if the *Calgary Herald* was reporting on the final outcome of a hockey match between the Edmonton Oilers and the Calgary Flames. The same held true for religious and non-sectarian schools.

“Calgary's high schools, with an average of 5.94, came out ahead of those in Edmonton, which had a 5.48 rating. The Catholic district's six schools, with a 6.18 average, beat out the public system's 18 schools, which had a 5.86 rating” (Heyman, 1999, p. A1).

Alberta's educational establishment did not embrace the published report card. “Both the *Calgary Herald* and the *Edmonton Journal* swiped at it, and the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA)—the counterpart of British Columbia's BCTF—complained that the ranking system did not account for economic factors, unfairly comparing wealthy students with poor” (Steel, 1999, p. 50). The Fraser Institute's ranking did, however, find a champion in David King, Alberta's Minister of Education from 1979-1986, and “the man responsible for bringing departmental [Grade 12] exams back to the public school system” (Steel, 1999, p. 50).

“Mr. King says the Fraser Institute report is a necessary spur toward excellence in education. He has no sympathy for educational establishment complaints” (Steel, 1999, p. 51).

Like its British Columbia counterpart, the inaugural Albertan report ranked schools on the same five performance indicators, but unlike reports published in British Columbia, the Albertan report excluded private schools from the mix of schools.

“For this inaugural edition, we were only able to obtain results from public and separate schools from Alberta Education. We hope that next year the results from the province’s private schools will be added since private schools are a choice that will be considered by some parents. More importantly, an awareness of the success (or failure) of alternative education delivery systems provides useful information for the effort to improve all schools—public, separate, and private” (Cowley & Easton, 1999a, p. 5).

While the focus of this project is on the Fraser Institute’s ranking of secondary schools in British Columbia, it is important at this juncture to underscore—not only the expanding presence the Fraser Institute was beginning to have in the school wide accountability movement outside its home province by 1999—but the relationship the Fraser Institute had to establish with government itself if it were to have access to the data it needed to produce its report: “We hope that next year the results from the province’s private schools will be added” (Cowley & Easton, 1999a, p. 5). The reconcilable, hopeful, tone of the authors rhetoric regarding the withholding of data from Alberta’s private school’s stands in marked contrast to the tone underpinning Raham’s (1999) rhetoric calling for the Fraser Institute to persist publishing its school report. As well, it is clear that the Fraser Institute continues to frame the success and failure of schools in Alberta through performance indicators it deems as being relevant to include in the first place. In this way, the Fraser Institute continues to be active on the educational terrain of British Columbia and Alberta in similar ways.

### **Elementary School Rankings**

When the Fraser Institute widened its circle of influence from the secondary school system into the elementary school system by creating an elementary school report card it marked a significant achievement for three principal reasons: (1) it made visible a

whole population of students, teachers, and schools that were not previously subjected to school ranking metrics by focusing on schools that it had not accounted for previously, (2) it significantly expanded the target audience of parents for whom its school ranking reports might appeal, and (3) it bolstered the public's perception that the Fraser Institute had something definitive to say about the state of education in British Columbia and elsewhere. The Fraser Institute's expanding presence on the school-wide accountability field in British Columbia seemed to parallel a significant shift in the political landscape in that province with the onset of a new millennium.

Appendix B documents the sequence of events that define the Fraser Institute's school ranking initiative from 1998-2009. It also highlights British Columbia's shifting political landscape from the winter of 1998 to the spring of 2001. It shows that three different premiers held political office with the same political party within three successive years. The then New Democratic Party (NDP) Premier Glen Clark resigned in August 1999 because of a conflict-of-interest political scandal in which he was implicated (Hunter, 1999). Clark was replaced in February 2000 by the then Interim NDP Premier, Dan Miller. Soon thereafter Miller was replaced by the then former NDP Attorney General of British Columbia, Ujjal Dosanjh, who would go on to become British Columbia's 33<sup>rd</sup> premier. In April—just weeks after NDP Premier Dosanjh had been sworn in—the Ministry of Education announced its decision to “release individual [Foundation Skills Assessment] results for the first time since the assessment began 25 years ago” (Steffenhagen, 2000, p. A4). The decision was perceived as weakening the BCTF's authority inasmuch as it served to “undermine their autonomy in assessing student performance” (Steffenhagen, 2000, p. A4). This position stood in marked contrast to the position taken by the British Columbia Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils; a group that had “lobbied for the release of individual [student] results” (Steffenhagen, 2000). The Parent Advisory Council believed that parents and students should have “access to any and all data that help[ed] them gauge performance” (Steffenhagen, 2000, p. A4). The BCTF, however, voiced their concern that the Ministry's disclosure of Foundation Skill Assessment (FSA) data providing school-by-school results

would “encourage comparisons similar to the Fraser Institute’s ranking of schools” (Steffenhagen, 2000, p. A4). The concern proved to be a legitimate one. In May 2001 Liberal candidate, Gordon Campbell, defeated NDP Premier, Ujjal Dosanjh, in a provincial election. The political landscape in British Columbia had changed. By June of 2003, the Fraser Institute had published its first elementary school ranking in British Columbia based on the Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA) results of standardized assessment tools in reading comprehension, writing, and numeracy in Grades 4 and 7 respectively.

Not surprisingly, the elementary school report card was met with a maelstrom of controversy. The then President of the British Columbia School Trustees Association, Gordon Comeau, worried that parents would “yank their kids from schools that ranked poorly even when the ranking is based on one year’s test results” (Steffenhagen, 2003b, p. A19). One independent school Head, Hugh Burke,<sup>69</sup> whose elementary school was ranked number-one, rejected the Fraser Institute’s elementary report card as being “nonsensical and meaningless” (Burke, 2003, p. A19). Mr. Burke had this to say about his school’s top-placed ranking in a letter that was published in *The Vancouver Sun*:

“We reject our ranking, as any good school will do. I would be most suspicious of any school that actually boasted about such results. Real results do not reside in three tests, composed by a few people working for the government, scored by people who never met the kids, generating data that are highly dependent on testing circumstances, used inappropriately in statistical terms, for ideological purposes” (Burke, 2003, p. A19)

Mr. Burke’s stance about the placement of his elementary school ranking is relevant to a study that is focused primarily on secondary school report cards because it marks the first time that an educational leader from a top-ranked, independent, school publically discounts the Fraser Institute ranking of schools for all the same reasons that ranking opponents had articulated in the past. This time, however, the Headmaster’s

---

<sup>69</sup> Hugh Burke is the Head of Maple Ridge’s Meadowridge School and was the Independent School Association of British Columbia (ISABC) president from 2008-2011.

voice is imbued with the social, political, and cultural capital acquired by an educational leader from a top-ranked school. When a school-wide-accountability-game ‘winner’ denounces the school-wide-accountability-game itself as being ‘*nonsensical and meaningless*’ the criticism must be perceived in a new light. A private school Headmaster has nothing to gain by denouncing a ranking that serves as a de facto endorsement for his school. In discounting the Fraser Institute ‘honour’ of being a top-ranked school, therefore, Mr. Burke casts doubt on the relevancy of the ranking itself in ways that school leaders from low ranked schools were not in a position to do so simply because their schools were low-ranked to begin with.

Despite the controversy surrounding the elementary school ranking report the ability of the Fraser Institute to manage the public’s perception about the state of the educational system now spanned the entire educational spectrum—from kindergarten through to Grade 12. In this way the “high-stakes gaze of surveillance” (Pignatelli, 2002, p. 158) could be cast and recast, not only on a broader population of schools, but also on the teachers working within them. The Fraser Institute had effectively increased its client base by repackaging its secondary-school-ranking-report-card-product into a similar product that appealed to another niche market of educational consumers; namely, the parents of elementary school-aged children. In this way, the Fraser Institute very strategically focused the public’s gaze on what they deemed important about elementary schooling because, as Pignatelli (2002) pointed out in her paper on surveillance, “sorting and marking children, schools, and staff...based on norm-referenced, high-stakes tests reduces the notion of school effectiveness to something akin to a military campaign” (Pignatelli, 2002, p. 172). Clearly, the Fraser Institute did not mount a military campaign when it published its first elementary school ranking in British Columbia, but it is possible to think about the publishing of elementary (and secondary) school rankings—symbolically—as being an assault on the state of public school education by the Fraser Institute because private and independent schools (and the systems within which they operated) were consistently held up as being model schools.



Two-thousand-and-four (2004) was significant to the Fraser Institute for three principal reasons: (1) the think-tank turned thirty, (2) the secondary school report card was published in New Brunswick for the first time, which meant that the Fraser Institute had a coast-to-coast influence on how parents across the country perceived schools,<sup>70</sup> and (3) the Fraser Institute ventured into the life world of Aboriginal students by publishing a secondary *'Report Card on Aboriginal Education'*. Any single one of these achievements could be viewed as a milestone in the life of the Fraser Institute, but taken collectively they speak to an expanded presence the institute was mounting on the school wide accountability field, not only geographically, but culturally as well.

### **New Brunswick School Rankings**

The Fraser Institute used the same techniques they had developed in British Columbia from 1998-2003 to promote its Maritime school report card in 2004. A posting on *Canada NewsWire* emphasized how the ranking used a variety of publicly available, objectively relevant, school performance indicators to, in general, answer the question: How is this school doing academically? New Brunswickers were drawn to the overall structure and ease by which “parents, school administrators, teachers students, and taxpayers [could] analyze and compare the performance of individual schools” (Anonymous, 2004, p. 1). The news report advanced the Fraser Institute’s school choice agenda when it noted, “the Report Card alerts parents to those nearby schools that appear to have more effective academic programs” (Anonymous, 2004, p. 1). Most importantly, however, the *Canada NewsWire* report identified the kind of school leader that would accept the results presented in the Fraser Institute’s ranking as being anything but arbitrary. The report card, the article indicated, was useful to those “[s]chool administrators who are dedicated to improvement” (Anonymous, 2004, p. 1). This statement is relevant to note because it underscores how the Fraser Institute casts school leaders in one of two lights. Principals were either: (1) caring and effectual because they valued the results of a school report card made for them by the Fraser

---

<sup>70</sup> The Fraser Institute only ranked Anglophone schools in New Brunswick. Their Francophone and bilingual counterparts were not included.

Institute, or (2) uncaring and ineffectual because they devalued the relevance and legitimacy of the school report itself. What is noteworthy about the New Brunswick school ranking, therefore, is not the statistical nuances of the ranking that make it different from its British Columbian counterpart, but the parallel capital acquisition and discursive strategies the Fraser Institute used to present its secondary school report card to a Maritime audience. At its core, the discursive techniques used were identical to the ones that have been described previously: (1) they were anchored in a parents right to know and choose; (2) they emphasized visible asymmetries that made possible distinctions between schools and school systems; (3) they were hermeneutically packaged to discount important contextual interpretations that were relevant in the life world of students; and (4) the report card was promoted as being objective. Together these report card elements were leveraged by the Fraser Institute to gain political capital on the broader field of power in New Brunswick.

### **Aboriginal Report Card**

These same discursive techniques were at play in the Fraser Institute's *'Report Card on Aboriginal Education in British Columbia'*—a report that established what Aboriginal leaders, educators, and provincial and federal government officials already knew: "British Columbia's education system is failing the province's Aboriginal students" (Cowley & Easton, 2004a, p. 3). Cowley and Easton were surprised to learn this was true of Aboriginal students attending "even the highest ranked schools" in the province (Cowley & Easton, 2004a). While it is beyond the scope of this project to analyze a corollary school ranking that focuses on the performance of Aboriginal students attending British Columbian high schools, it is relevant to note that the Fraser Institute's proposal to the "Ministry of Education, local school boards, and Aboriginal education authorities [who have collectively] intended to remedy this long standing failure" was for these agents to implement two key strategies: (1) to allow Aboriginal parents to enroll their children in any school they chose, and (2) to provide interested parties with access to "easy-to-understand, school-by-school reports of student achievement"

(Cowley & Easton, 2004a, p. 3). The Fraser Institute, therefore, not only felt authorized to promote its school ranking report to improve the educational experience of Aboriginal students, but as importantly it called on members of government and the Aboriginal community to adopt the Fraser Institute's mission of free-market-driven educational reform.

Response to the Fraser Institute's Aboriginal report card was met with considerable opposition in many circles. In an article appearing in *Teacher Newsmagazine* the Director of the BCTF's Professional and Social Issues division, Pat Clarke, had this to say about the '*Report Card on Aboriginal Education in British Columbia*':

"[t]he approach the Fraser Institute is using ... is the research equivalent of the big-lie strategy in public relations—repeat often enough, and belief begins to set in.... We know that an obsession with counting tends to focus our attention only on what is counted. For students who come to school with a complex array of issues from poverty to cultural dislocation, factory-model approaches to learning are too often exactly the wrong thing to do. A lock-step devotion to testing for example, is a good way to keep Aboriginal students away from schools, not in them" (Clarke, 2004).

Clarke's position is relevant because it highlights a conflicting epistemic understanding about how to improve the educational experience for Aboriginal students attending British Columbia's secondary schools. This position stands in complete opposition to the Fraser Institute's position that market-driven educational reforms lead to an overall improvement in student achievement. Here is an example of how two different political agents (the BCTF on one side, and the Fraser Institute on the other) compete for capital acquisition on the field of power by making visible different aspects of students' experiences. Whereas the BCTF (vis-à-vis Clarke) focuses on socioeconomic and cultural aspects of the Aboriginal student's experience that can adversely impact student achievement patterns in secondary schools, the Fraser Institute (vis-à-vis Cowley) focuses on provincial examination data; Clarke speaks for the Professional and Social Issues division of the BCTF, while Cowley speaks for the School Performance Studies

department of the Fraser Institute. Their respective positions are at epistemic and ontological odds.

With the publication of elementary school, secondary school, and Aboriginal report cards within, and beyond, British Columbia's borders, the Fraser Institute declared in its *2004 Annual Report* that "rankings [were] changing the educational debate" (The Fraser Institute, 2004, p. 6). A record nine school report cards were published by Peter Cowley's School Performance Studies department that "ranked approximately 3,100,000 students in almost 5,900 schools in British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario, Quebec, and New Brunswick" (The Fraser Institute, 2004, p. 13). Within British Columbia, a "dearth of data" regarding other aspects of school performance would allow the Fraser Institute "to broaden the focus of the Report Card" beyond academic achievement measures (Cowley & Easton, 2004, p. 5).

While the dearth of (statistical) information appealed to the data-centric nature of the Fraser Institute, one B.C. educator—David Denyer—believed the province's schools were turning into "work camps where children [are] simply compliant human capital to be equipped with marketable skills" (Steffenhagen, 2004a, p. A1). Denyer had been involved in developing B.C. curriculum for B.C. schools and was reported in *The Vancouver Sun* to say, "[w]e are witnessing a war on childhood" (Steffenhagen, 2004a, p. A1). Denyer's criticism focused as well on the language around achievement that had come to dominate the public discourse around accountability. He noted,

"achievement doesn't include mention of enjoyment, pleasure, or recreation. Instead there are accountability, data collection and, most recently, supervision of teachers, conducted by principals who are themselves supposedly supervised by directors and superintendents, who are in turn supervised by the deputy minister and the minister. It's a top-down, paternalistic model of continuous surveillance, ostensibly aimed at improving instruction and of course achievement as measured by tests" (Steffenhagen, 2004a, p. A1).

This statement is relevant because it illustrates an underlying frustration that many educators had about the relational role between data-gathering and sense-making as

that relationship was articulated against an expanding school accountability backdrop. Here is an example of how hierarchical observations (data-gathering) combines with sense-making and is used as a technique of disciplinary power by the Fraser Institute. When individual cases (schools) are introduced by the Fraser Institute to the field of accountability through documentation disciplinary power is exercised. Embedded, therefore, in the *technology of representation* is the *politic of representation*. Political agents on the school wide accountability field, therefore, play the accountability game according to visible asymmetries that are rendered by the Fraser Institute through a technology of representation that has as its principal focus—the ranking of individual schools.

### **School Improvement Discourses**

With the publication of the third ranking in 2000, the Fraser Institute had analyzed enough information that had been collected about secondary schools from 1993-1999 that it felt confident to publicly acknowledge eleven of the province's most improved high schools in its *'Third Annual Report Card on British Columbia's Secondary Schools'*. The schools had "recorded a significant improvement in at least four of the Report Card's five academic performance indicators" (Cowley & Easton, 2000, p. 3). *The Province* featured an article about one of the Fraser Institute endorsed schools.

Chatelech Secondary was located in the Sunshine Coast District. It had managed to move up 4.8 points in the ranking from a low of 3.8 to 8.6. The article attributed the school's significant improvement to the leadership stability provided when principal Bruce Janssen signed a five-year contract at the school—the first in a long line of previous principals to commit to the school in that way. Before Janssen became principal there, Chatelech Secondary had experienced "fifteen administrators in eighteen years" (Austin, 2000, p. A9). This revelation has tremendous implications in the context of a secondary school ranking that focuses primarily on examination results because it shifts the emphasis away from a focus on effective teaching practices in classrooms towards a focus on effective leadership practices in schools. In this way the

public's gaze is redirected away from teachers and towards principals—the people to which teachers report.

It is important to note as well that a number of other articles about the ranking appeared in smaller regional newspapers throughout the province. A *Nelson Daily News* journalist described Salmo Secondary's climb "out of the basement" from 1.2 (in 1999) to 4.6 in 2000 (Schroeder, 2000, p. 1). Schroeder continued to document the overall improvement in two other regional schools: L.V. Rogers (8.4 to 8.8) and J. V. Humphries (6.0 to 6.4). Dawson Creek's *Peace River Block Daily News* reported on the rankings achieved by three regional high schools according by the "right-wing think tank" (Anonymous, 2000). They were: Tumbler Ridge (ranked 123<sup>rd</sup>), South Peace Secondary (ranked 201<sup>st</sup>), and Chetwynd Secondary (ranked 250<sup>th</sup> of a possible 271 schools. *Trail Times's* journalist, Raymond Masleck, described in his front-page article how Castlegar's Stanley Humphries Secondary managed to achieve its 9.2 ranking—"one of only two schools outside of the Victoria and the Lower Mainland to crack the institute's top 10, along with Mount Sentinel and South Slokan" (Masleck, 2000, p. 1). *Daily Townsman's* staff writer, Gerry Warner, described how Cranbrook's Mount Baker Secondary and Kimberley's Selkirk Secondary "held their own" in the 2000 ranking (Warner, 2000, p. 1).

That regional newspapers throughout the province republished the rankings of their regional schools in articles written about their regional schools underscores the inroads the Fraser Institute made into the public's collective consciousness about why the school ranking mattered in just three years. For by the spring of 2000, school rankings clearly mattered in the province of British Columbia. They mattered in Vancouver. They mattered in Victoria. They mattered in Nelson. They mattered in Dawson Creek. They mattered in Cranbrook. They mattered in Kimberley. And they mattered in Trail. They mattered enough that Fraser Institute ranking data—originally published in the *The Province* newspaper some ten to fourteen days earlier—was republished in local (regional) papers with comments from local (regional) school authorities about what the rankings really meant. For example, an article published in *Cranbrook's Daily Townsman* underscored one of that region's school principals who downplayed the importance of

the ranking. Selkirk Secondary School Principal, Terry Oscarson, said about the report card, “it’s based on narrow criteria of examination data and little else” (Warner, 2000, p. 1). This sentiment was countered by a report appearing in another regional paper, the *Trail Times*. Kootney-Columbia superintendent, Pat Dooley, was reported to say, “[a]lthough major education groups in the province have issued a joint statement condemning the rankings as so simplistic as to be misleading, the Fraser Institute does provide some useful information” (Masleck, 2000, p. 1).

The voices represented in these public (regional) spaces not only highlight the response educational professionals have to a province-wide ranking of secondary schools in general, but they speak to an expanding sphere of influence the Fraser Institute has on local and regional school authorities in particular. It could be argued that evidence for the Fraser Institute’s expanding sphere of influence in the province of British Columbia was the extent to which local school authorities were called on by regional newspaper reporters to comment on the ranking itself. In this way local and regional media discourses had a representational effect because they served to create an impression in the public’s mind that the Fraser Institute ranking of schools was important news worth re-reporting. The more a message gets repeated in the public domain the more likely it is to take hold.

The call to respond to the Fraser Institute’s published school ranking extended well beyond local and regional boundaries. The then president of the British Columbia School Trustees Association, Carole James, was quoted as saying, “[r]elying only what can be examined in a single three-hour sitting in a paper and pen format does a huge disservice to what students know and can do” (Anonymous, 2000). This position stood in marked contrast to an article published in *The Vancouver Sun* about one of the city’s oldest independent schools. The headline read, “*The widely known secrets of success: St. George’s has a proven record of achievement with generations of boys: Dedicated teachers deserve a lot of credit*”. The article extolled the virtues of Saint George’s “proven track record of achievement with generations of boys” (Brook, 2000, p. A13).

Consider what Stephen Hutchinson, then Executive Director of St. George's, had to say about the school.

"Saints is right there. Witness the school's return to the top spot on the Fraser Institute's latest Report Card 2000, or Saints number-one ranking in the worldwide Cambridge Comparability Study, where the Vancouver boys beat out Ontario's Grade 13 students and Britain's A-level candidates in a wide-ranging academic exam" (Brook, 2000, p. A13).

What the article did not mention, however, was that Saint George's had never been a 'top' ranked school in British Columbia until that particular ranking had been published in 2000. In actual fact, Saints was beat out by two public high schools in the previous year's ranking: Argyle Secondary and Prince of Wales Secondary. It was therefore impossible for Saints to return to a 'top' position because Saints had never achieved a 'top' position in the Fraser Institute Secondary School Report Card from 1998-2000, but a reality effect was created in the public's mind that Saint George's has always been a top ranked school. This fact was omitted from published discourse that shaped the public's understanding of one, highly regarded, independent Vancouver school. The headline, however, did make special note of the '*dedicated teachers*' working at British Columbia's 'best' school. The discursive message sent to the public was that non-unionized, private school, teachers were not only dedicated to their profession, but were an integral part of establishing British Columbia's 'top' school. This is an important consideration because it highlights an essential difference between public and private school teachers the Fraser Institute tacitly promotes in publishing its annual secondary school ranking—that public and private school teachers operate according to two distinct ethics of work and that private school teachers help their schools achieve top ranked marks—not only in the Fraser Institute's ranking—but in other 'worldwide' school accountability rankings that compare Saint George's students to Grade 13 students attending Ontario's high schools *and* Britain's A-level students. The referencing of other provincial and international ranking systems to the one presented by the Fraser



Institute demonstrates how schools acquire social capital on the field of accountability, which they leverage in ways that promote the school itself.

The kind of discursive seed-planting that was sown on the accountability field of public opinion by the ranking's third iteration was one in which school improvement discourses became enmeshed with knowledge discourses. This was an important strategic next step for the Fraser Institute. With three years of published rankings to draw from, it was now in a position to shift the locus of attention away from recurring performance indicator debates toward school improvement debates. In this way improvement discourses became the foundation for the Fraser Institute's parental choice movement that was to follow. It didn't matter that vocal critics continued to attack the overall relevance of the five performance indicators used by the Fraser Institute to rank secondary schools anymore; that collective response was, if nothing else, predictable and the authors of the ranking had seemingly gained enough confidence in their work to dismiss the noise. Consider Peter Cowley's comment, "[I'm] losing patience with educators who offer the same criticisms every year" (Schroeder, 2000, p. 1). What mattered more to the Fraser Institute by the spring of 2000 was that parents could use their published school rankings to determine if their child's school was improving—or slipping—in the ranks, and that parents could read the Fraser Institute's school ranking report cards in newspapers. This point was made public in an Editorial published in *The Province* newspaper. Then editor-in-chief, Michael Cooke, had this to say about the Fraser Institute's work,

"Nothing is more important to our future than our children's education. Parents have a right to know how their schools are performing, and we're delighted to give them this information" (Editorial, 2000, p. A12).

Evidence that the Fraser Institute and *The Province* had established an alliance was confirmed by *The Province* newspaper itself in the spring of 2000. The Editorial acknowledged its relationship when it disclosed, "[i]n partnership with the Fraser

Institute, *The Province* each year publishes rankings for every<sup>71</sup> B.C. secondary school on an ever-increasing number of topics” (Editorial, 2000, p. A12). This disclosure is important for three principal reasons: (1) it highlights that a partnership existed between a provincial newspaper and the Fraser Institute from the beginning, (2) it establishes the increasing presence the Fraser Institute has on the educational landscape inasmuch as it feels authorized to speak on an ever increasing number of topics that (in turn) get published by *The Province*, and (3) it serves to effectively diminish any future claims the provincial newspaper can make regarding its journalistic objectivity surrounding the school accountability and privatization movements in British Columbia.

### **Economic Discourses**

In January of 2003, the Fraser Institute produced a report entitled, *‘The \$100,000,000 Giveaway: Who Says Education Doesn’t Get Enough Money?’*. The authors of the report concluded, “that the allocation system is seriously flawed [because] it presents school districts with incentives that are contrary to the best interests of students” (Cowley & Easton, 2003, p. 5). At issue was the seeming disproportionately high level of Ministry funding allocated to high schools in support of part-time students. The per-student operating grant provided to districts throughout the province for a student enrolled in a single Ministry-approved course was \$3,339 “even if the student rarely attends class and subsequently drops out or fails the course” (Cowley, Easton, & Li, 2003, p. 3). Especially irksome to the Fraser Institute was the per-student operating grant allotted to districts enrolling full-time students.<sup>72</sup> That amounted to \$5,343—an increase of just 60%. The Fraser Institute determined that per-student funding in this

---

<sup>71</sup> It is important to note that not every secondary school was included in the ranking. Excluded were schools at which fewer than 15 students were enrolled in Grade 12. These schools did not generate a sufficiently large set of student data to allow for a fair and reasonable analysis and presentation of the results. Also excluded from the rankings were: centres for adult education and continuing education; schools that catered largely to non-resident foreign students; and certain alternative schools that did not offer a full program of courses.

<sup>72</sup> A full-time student takes eight, Ministry-approved courses.

way cost taxpayers \$100,000,000. Cowley et al. (2003) suggested the Ministry adopt a “simple, transparent, and widely-used formula that funds students in direct proportion to the number of courses they take” (Cowley, et al., 2003). The logic behind this suggestion was grounded in the Fraser Institute’s belief that full-time students represented a “considerably higher cost burden to school districts than do part-time students” (Cowley, et al., 2003). The Fraser Institute was also concerned that Ministry funding directed toward part-time students was misspent because “[a]nalysis of grade 12-level provincial examination results and graduation rates suggests that student success is more likely when students take more courses each year rather than fewer” (Cowley, et al., 2003, p. 3).

The shift away from school performance discourses that focused the public’s attention on normalizing school report cards towards economic discourses that that focused the public’s attention on Ministry funding schemes is an important one. It signals the marshalling of evidence by the Fraser Institute to reconfigure and expand its sphere of influence on the field of education. Originally concerned with school- and teacher-performance-related issues, the Fraser Institute begins to concern itself with different issues that are anchored in the politics of funding. Here, then is an example of how the Fraser Institute continues to insert itself in a systematic way along the field of education by critiquing the state of public education while—at the same time—manages to build for itself a presence on the political landscape.

From an educator’s perspective the Fraser Institute’s revised, per-student funding, formula effectively penalizes schools that supported the educational needs of part-time students. This is especially true if the school at issue supports a higher-than-average number of part-time students. It is quite reasonable to expect that part-time students require additional educational supports because they can’t manage a full-time course load. As well, the underlying reasons for high school students reducing their workload can expectedly vary. They could be attributed to socio-economic factors that, in turn, are related to especially challenging and disruptive family situations part-time students face on a daily basis; they might involve financial factors if, for example, a high

school student is expected to work in order to help his/her family make ends meet; or part-time students may, quite simply, need additional emotional support in the form of counseling in order to keep them in school. There are a myriad of reasons that would cause students to enroll part-time in high schools throughout the province the Fraser Institute does not consider in proposing a revised funding formula. Instead, the institute characterizes the 'Basic Allocation' of \$3,339 to school districts enrolling part-time students (taking a single course) as being a "perverse incentive this bizarre system presents to school districts" (Cowley, et al., 2003, p. 3). In positioning the logic for restructuring per-student, funding formulas in school districts throughout the province the Fraser Institute casts aspersions on a public educational system that "may lead school districts to: (1) encourage students to take an extra year to graduate, (2) encourage students to take the minimum number of courses needed to graduate, and (3) encourage chronic school-aged dropouts to enroll in one or two courses even though there is very little likelihood that they will regularly attend class" (Cowley, et al., 2003, pp. 3-4). Students attending schools in which these types of practices were normative would receive considerably extra per-student funding while incurring virtually no extra cost.

Another suggestion made by the Fraser Institute is that low-ranked schools—not only take advantage of the educational system—but that the professionals working within them encourage students to make poor educational decisions. As importantly, the Fraser Institute completely disregards per-student funding loopholes that also serve to bolster top-ranked, elite, private schools. Having worked at one of Vancouver's top-ranked, elite, private schools for over a decade I knew that grade 12 students were enrolled as full-time students but were taking less than a full-course load.<sup>73</sup> In fact, it was not uncommon for some senior students to be taking as few as five courses because they had well surpassed the minimum 52-credit, graduation programme criteria. That is to say, all of British Columbia's top-ranked, elite, private schools were receiving full-time, per-student funding even though many graduating students within

---

<sup>73</sup> A full course load is eight.

those kinds of schools were enrolled in five, or less, courses. As such, many of the province's best and top-ranked (elite) schools were getting full-time funding for students taking part-time loads. The fiscal and moral implication of that per-student funding reality was never mentioned in the Fraser Institute's *\$100,000,00 Giveaway* report. Instead, public attention was directed toward some school districts milking the educational system in a coded discourse of competence. This proved to be an especially important and strategically astute move in 2003 because the Fraser Institute's coverage in national and international media had "reached a new high with nearly 5,000 stories in newspapers, magazines, radio and television in North America" (Fraser Institute, 2003, p. 6). Coincidentally, by the end of the calendar year the government's existing, per-student, funding, formula had changed. For as the Chairman of the Board, Mr. R. J. Addington, noted in the Fraser Institute's 2003 *'Annual Report'*, "the ministry announced changes to the reporting policy that will go some way toward reducing adverse incentives" that encourage school districts to enroll high numbers of part-time students (Fraser Institute, 2003, p. 13).

### **Coded Discourses**

Another prevailing discursive strategy used by the Fraser Institute to characterize low performing schools is—what Powell (1997) describes as being—"a coded discourse on competence" (Powell, 1997, p. 4). Embedded within the coded discourse on competence is the "discourse of potential", which is reserved for the best and the brightest, and the "discourse of deficit", which is reserved for students in need of remediation and support (Powell, 1997, p. 4). Although Powell's analysis of coded discourse is refracted through the lens of race, her insights help to explain how the Fraser Institute ranking promotes institutional rumors of inferiority through a coded discourse of competence (Powell, 1997).

In the coded discourse of competence, low-ranked schools are rumored to be inferior schools just as high-ranked (and most improved) schools are rumored to be better (or superior) by comparison. Powell's description, therefore, of race-based

struggles that characterize underachieving black students in American classrooms is not unlike class-based struggles that characterize underachieving students attending low-ranked secondary schools in British Columbia. The rumor of inferiority, therefore, is promoted through a coded discourse of competence because the discourse of deficit it is embedded within, and throughout, the school ranking itself. So when the Fraser Institute makes visible a whole population of students that would not otherwise be visible by including a composite dropout KPI in their ranking rubric, they are shaping and managing the public's perception of schools in strategic ways. Whereas before the Fraser Institute *made invisible* the impact foreign ESL students had on a school's overall ranking here we have an example of how the Fraser Institute *made visible* an entire population of students that dropped out of schools through a coded discourse of competence.<sup>74</sup>

### **Action Discourses and the Politics of Space**

In an article published in the September issue of the Fraser Forum entitled, '*An End to Catchment Area Feudalism*', Peter Cowley described a "recent amendment" to British Columbia's School Act (Cowley, 2003b, p. 10). At its core, the amendment empowered parents to enroll their children in any public school they chose. Cowley supported the amendment wholeheartedly because it marked a significant step by Premier Gordon Campbell's Liberal government toward reforming public education in ways the Fraser Institute had always promoted and supported; that is to say, the amendment helped create a market-driven educational system that allowed parents to choose between public schools, in part, because the Fraser Institute provided a ranking mechanism which made between school comparisons possible. Cowley's endorsement of the School Act amendment was obvious.

---

<sup>74</sup> British Columbian students under the age of 16 must attend school, but have the option of enrolling in public schools, independent schools, Distributed Learning or registering as a home-schooled learner.

“School boards may no longer enact policies that require students to enroll in a specific school based solely on their place of residence. Neither may the boards vest in their superintendents the authority to direct student placement based on their judgment of program suitability.... This amendment assures that parents, not school boards or superintendents, decide which school is best for their children.... British Columbia joins only two other provinces, Quebec and Alberta, in providing statutory support for parental choice within the public school system” (Cowley, 2003a, p. 10).

This statement is relevant because it highlights and supports a principal thesis presented in this chapter—namely, that the Fraser Institute shifted the school-wide accountability framework away from discursive practices anchored in a *parent’s right to know* toward discursive practices that were more concretely anchored in a *parent’s right to choose* and that these discursive practices corresponded to greater shifts in the field of political power; a shift characterized by policy initiatives generated by a newly elected, Liberal, government. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that the only three provinces in Canada to enact similar school-choice policy initiatives—British Columbia, Alberta, and Quebec—were the same three provinces in which the Fraser Institute had successfully grounded their school ranking reports by the spring of 2003.<sup>75</sup> Moreover, by the end of the 2004 calendar year, “over 300,000 copies of the Report Cards were downloaded from the institute’s web site, and the Report Cards generated nearly 800 media stories” (The Fraser Institute, 2004, p. 14). This data indicates that the Fraser Institute had managed to penetrate into the public debate about educational policy in just five years. It had also made important gains in swaying the public’s perception that private school education was preferable to public school education—for in an article that appeared in the December issue of *The Vancouver Sun*, it was noted that “despite a steady decline in the school-aged population independent school enrolments climbed by 8.8% during the past five years while public school numbers have fallen by 3.4%” (Steffenhagen, 2004b, p. B1). This claim is supported by data obtained from the Ministry

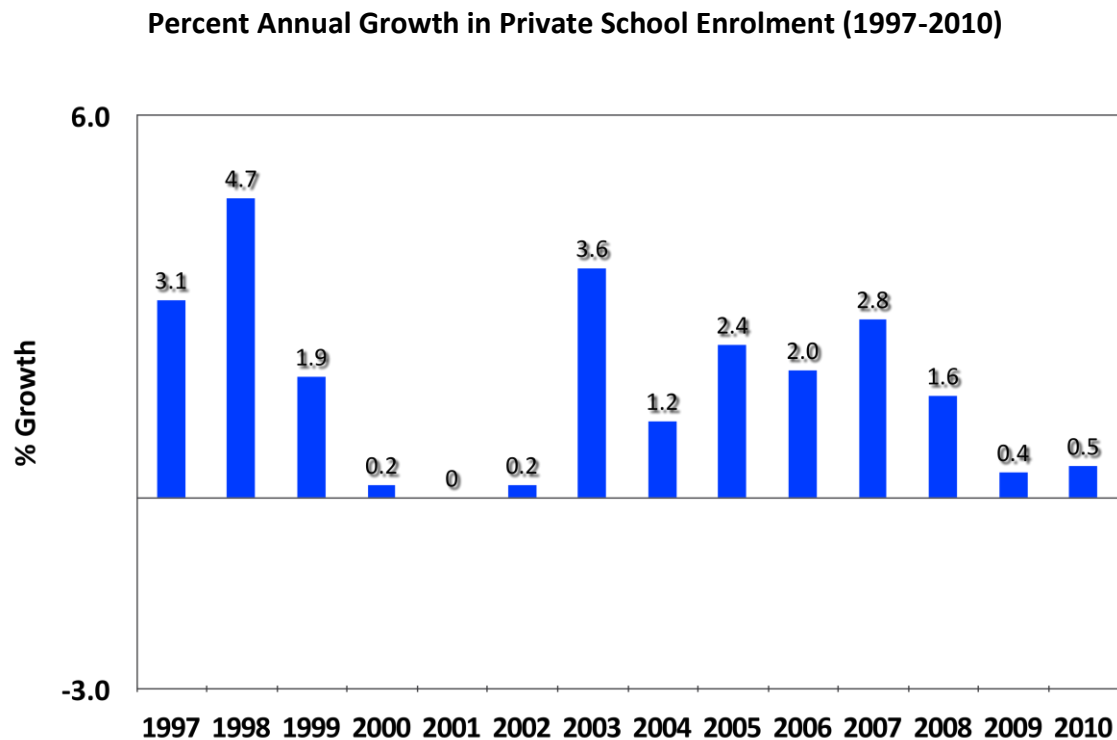
---

<sup>75</sup> The secondary school report card published in Ontario by the Fraser Institute was retracted in 2001, but the Fraser Institute did publish its first Ontario, elementary school report card in June of 2003—a report card that continues to be published ever since.

of Education of British Columbia Annual Reports as published on the Federation of Independent Schools Association (FISA) website.

Figure 8 depicts the percent annual growth in independent school student enrolment data from 1997-2010.

**Figure 8: Percent annual growth in student enrolment for private schools (1997-2010)**



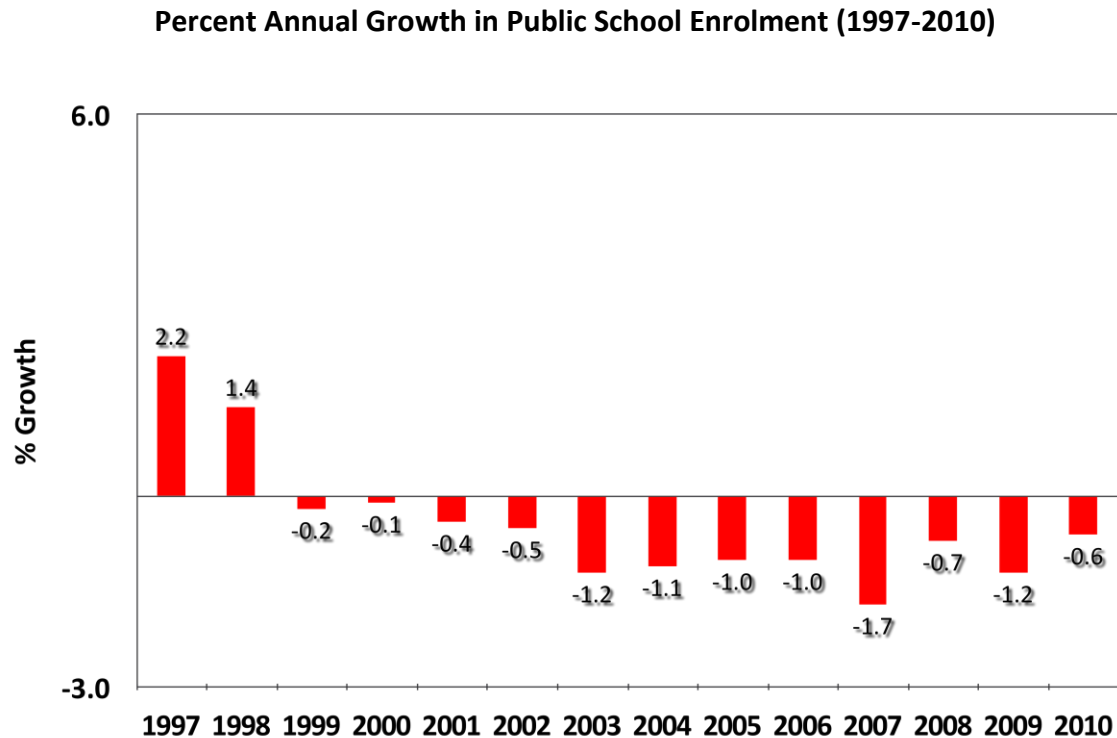
*Source: The Federation of Independent Schools (2010b)*

It shows positive growth in student populations attending independent/private schools in every year except 2000/01 where there was no change. Since 1997 student enrolment in private schools within British Columbia has increased by 24.6%. By comparison, Figure 9 shows the percent annual growth in public school student enrolment during the same period. It shows positive growth in student populations attending public schools for 1996/97 and 1997/98, but an overall negative growth in student enrolment of -6.1% in every year thereafter. Moreover, student enrolment



patterns in private and public schools have grown and decreased respectively at greater rates since the School Act was amended in 2003 to allow for cross-boundary enrolment.

**Figure 9: Percent annual growth in student enrolment for public schools (1997-2010)**



*Source: (The Federation of Independent Schools, 2010b)*

The Fraser Institute, it seemed, was making strides in promoting a choice policy that increased the propensity of a privatization agenda by 2005—an agenda that paralleled Premier Campbell's. For when the then premier's Minister of Education, Tom Christensen, talked about "B.C.'s world-class education system" on CBC radio in the spring of 2005, he made clear how his ministry was realizing its vision that every student had the chance to succeed in school and in life—"by expanding school choice and increasing parental involvement and by giving school boards more autonomy while focusing on results" ("Provincial Affairs," 2005, March 15). This strategy resonated strongly with the Fraser Institute because it had always endorsed the notion that expanded school choice, coupled with increased institutional autonomy, would result in

an overall improvement in the quality of both elementary and secondary schools. In an article published in *The Vancouver Sun*—just four weeks after the Minister spoke on the radio—Peter Cowley had this to say about the difference between public and private schools:

“Private schools have an advantage over public schools because their administrators have more flexibility to improve student achievement than their public school counterparts... The majority of private schools are one-school organizations and when you have only one school to deal with, that gives the principal more flexibility than a principal with a large metropolitan public school system with 200 schools in it...[who] may not have the same flexibility to do the things that need to be done to improve that you might get in the private system” (Chu, 2005, p. B5).

Cowley’s acknowledgement that school administrators worked within *different* educational systems underscores the inherent tension embedded in a school-ranking rubric that was devised to apply to a single—secondary school—system. The Fraser Institute’s position that its school report card was not only objective, but uniformly discerning in the statistical judgments it rendered on the overall effectiveness of secondary schools, must be questioned at this juncture. For by the spring of 2005—eight years after the first secondary school report card was published in British Columbia—one of the report card’s principal authors recognized the advantages private schools had over public schools. What is important to note at this juncture is the language that Cowley uses to position private schools in relation to their public school counterparts. When Cowley indicates that private schools have the ‘*flexibility to do things that need to be done*’ he implies that private schools are not beholden to unions and collective agreements that protect ineffective teachers. As well, Cowley’s comments idealize the private school system without acknowledging those private and independent schools that don’t serve as exemplary beacon schools like, for example, Aldergrove’s Fraser Valley Adventist, which was ranked 3.2 by the Fraser Institute in its 2010 school report (Cowley, et al., 2010). The public affirmation by Cowley of there being *two different* school systems operating within a greater *singular* secondary school system is

nonetheless a significant one because it demonstrates the author's understanding that disparate (systemic) organizational capacities are at play between public and private schools. A vocal chorus of school ranking critics had voiced this objection since 1998, but it was clearly articulated by a British Columbia teacher in a letter published in *The Vancouver Sun*. Sixteen years of professional experience working within the public educational system prompted her to write this:

"Private schools can and do deny student applications. They do not have to accept children with learning disabilities, physical disabilities, genetic disorders, psychological disorders, behaviour problems, and ESL learners. These children are welcome in the public school system where all children are accepted all of the time" (Losee, 2005, p. A22).

Notwithstanding the very real organizational capacity differences that exist between public and private school systems outright, there was another relational student enrolment trend that was being felt within public schools by the fall of 2003—"[e]very morning, the city of Vancouver tilts from east to west as parents get into their cars and drive their children to a perceived 'better education' at a west-side school" (Steffenhagen, 2003a, p. B1). Kevan Moore, the then principal of John Oliver Secondary (ranked 259 out of 279 schools in the 2002 school report card) "acknowledged that hundreds of students from his catchment area are seeking an education elsewhere and he knows the Fraser Institute report card plays a role in that decision because parents at his school have told him so" (Steffenhagen, 2003a, p. B1). Other low-ranked, east-side, secondary schools were also losing students while their west-side school counterparts were "building expensive additions" to accommodate the influx of students (Steffenhagen, 2003a, p. B1). By 2010 the same newspaper reported on what journalist, Pete McMartin, called the "east-west disparity in school utilization" (McMartin, 2010b, p. A4). He cites statistical data that supports the same relational trends noted in Figure 9—that student enrolment in public schools is in an overall state of decline in Vancouver. McMartin cites the Vancouver School Board 's possible explanation for the enrolment trend:

“Changes to Section 74 of the School Act [in 2003] now permit students to enroll in the school of their choice. As families exercise choice, what were once firm boundaries are now considerably blurred. As a result of student choice and declining enrolment, we now have under-enrolment in some elementary schools and capacity pressures in others” (McMartin, 2010b, p. A4).

This statement is relevant because it highlights the impact school choice has on enrolment patterns in public and private schools. An analysis of the historical data in student enrolment patterns from 1997-2010 suggests: (1) that more parents are choosing to send their children to private/independent schools; or (2) that more parents are choosing to send their children to public schools located in affluent neighbourhoods. In either case the result has been a “growing disparity between “inner-city” eastside Vancouver schools and more privileged Westside schools” (McMartin, 2010a, p. A14). Because school budgets are directly tied to student enrolment data the financial implications of an eroding student population for any school over time is consequential. Not surprisingly the migration of students from low-ranked schools (located in poorer neighbourhoods) to higher-ranked schools (located in more affluent neighbourhoods) redistributes material capital and non-material social, cultural, intellectual, and political capital unequally. One Vancouver principal, Marilynne Waithman, characterized the effect student migration patterns had on her inner-city, elementary school.

“As more students left and services deteriorated, more parents felt their children were being left behind and that their children were going to a “loser school”. It reached a point where 45 per cent of the school-aged children in her school’s catchment area were going to other schools” (McMartin, 2010a, p. A14).

One *Vancouver Sun* journalist offered an explanation for why the educational landscape was being reshaped by a mounting parental choice movement in her article, ‘*When it comes to public schools, you get what you pay for*’ (Fralic, 2010). She noted,

“Because a private school teacher doesn’t wear a union contract like a cloak of armour against criticism, and if he or she isn’t doing the job, you can do something about it, unlike your parental options when dealing with that BCTF-backed kindergarten teacher who hates her job and the kid is a bully and has turned your neighbourhood’s grandchild into a quivering mass of fear and no one—not the teacher, not the principal, not the school board, not the union—will do a thing about it” (Fralic, 2010, p. A4).

Fralic’s characterization of public school teachers—and the public school system within which they worked—clearly casts them in a negative light. It is an important statement to consider because it speaks to the way discourses on school rankings and school choice has evolved over time to approximate something akin to a military campaign. Public teachers wear their *‘union contract like a cloak of armour against criticism’* is not only an emotionally laden and highly contestable statement, but it is also extremely judgmental. Here, then we see evidence for how one newspaper reporter attempts to reconfigure the political field in ways that elevates private school education while—at the same time—disparages public school education. The inflammatory language used by Fralic (2010) to characterize public school teachers that *‘hate’* their jobs is directed like a bullet at an educational system she believes is in crisis. Fralic (2010) does not mention, however, that York House School—one of the Fraser Institute’s consistently top-ranked schools in the province—is a ‘private’ school that has employed unionized teachers since 2001. The collective agreement between the British Columbia Government and Services Employee Union (BCGEU) and the York House School Society is negotiated every five years. Like the collective agreement that exists for public school teachers the document details working conditions, teaching salaries, paid-leaves, and the duties and responsibilities of teachers (B.C. Government and Service Employees’ Union (BCGEU), 2007). And like public school teachers the agreement provides job security for York House School teachers in ways that are mutually negotiated and understood between the employer and the employee.

## Local Capital Acquisition

Not all public school teachers and administrators were cast in a negative light. One of the ways the Fraser Institute used to expand its media presence and garner acceptance of its school ranking system from public and private school leaders was to devise an award ceremony that honored school principals from—what the Fraser Institute deemed as being—model secondary schools. Model school leaders were identified at the *Garfield Weston Outstanding Principals Awards* luncheon. Nominees<sup>76</sup> are identified in one of three categories: (1) Academic Achievement in Excess of Expectations (awarded to principals of schools achieving the highest overall academic performance relative to expectations); (2) Improvement in Academics (awarded to principals of schools who have experienced the most rapid performance over the past three years); and (3) Academic Excellence (awarded to principals of schools achieving the highest overall academic performance for the past three years). *The Garfield Weston Awards* luncheon honoured those “chief operating officers” who achieved a measurable degree of success according to the terms defined by the Fraser Institute’s secondary school ranking (Editorial, 2002a). By accepting the Fraser Institute’s nomination school principals acknowledged the role rankings played in making schools better. As well the awards luncheon demonstrates how individuals working within their local schools acquire social, cultural, and political capital by accepting the honour bestowed on them. Some of the nominees had been recognized by the Fraser Institute at previous *Garfield Weston Award* luncheons, and some had not. Without exception every nominee had something definitive to say about how, and why, his school came to be recognized by the Fraser Institute. Bawlf School Principal, Doug Bowie, had this to say:

“Motivate, stimulate and reward the influential members of your staff. These movers and shakers will, by their actions, draw the rest of the staff into the living vision you have set for the school” (Editorial, 2002b, p. A3).

---

<sup>76</sup> The Fraser Institute uses its school ranking results to identify the top ten contenders in each of the three categories. Principals are sent letters asking if they agree to participate. Willing nominees are then narrowed down to three finalists in each category. Winners in each category receive a \$3,000 cash prize. The two finalists in each category receive a \$1,000 cash prize.

What is striking about the strategy implemented by Mr. Bowie to achieve a level of success at his school is the seeming alignment it has with the strategy adopted by the Fraser Institute to achieve its own measure of success. At the awards luncheon, the school principal acts like the Fraser Institute inasmuch as model teachers—the movers and shakers—serve to draw the rest of the staff into the principal’s living vision. The same can be said of model schools serving the Fraser Institute’s living vision for an improved educational system—in order for schools to improve in the rankings they must improve on the performance variables measured by the Fraser Institute to begin with; that is, the schools must buy in to the vision of what the Fraser Institute considers a good school. Finally, it is important to note that school principals can decline the Fraser Institute’s nomination. This has tremendous implications for a study that has at its focus the ambiguity associated with the construction of knowledge in the production of truth because, as Brighenti (2007) suggests, “the exercise of power is always an exercise in activating selective in/visibilities” (Brighenti, 2007, p. 339). In this case the Fraser Institute makes invisible school principals that decline their nomination unless, of course, those same principals make public their rebuke of the Fraser Institute invitation in the first place. These kinds of snubs do not sit well with Cowley who,

“was miffed that no Vancouver public-school principals planned to attend the celebratory luncheon, which features a U.S. educator recognized for her work in ensuring that poor and immigrant children have the same success as advantaged children. “Shame on them,” he said, suggesting that educators in Vancouver, which face similar challenges, should be keen to hear about strategies that have worked in other jurisdictions” (Steffenhagen, 2002a, p. B3).

Two years later five principals made public their rebuke of what the *Garfield Weston Outstanding Principals Awards* promoted. In October of 2004, five Vancouver principals from Lord Byng, Kitsilano, Magee, Point Grey, and University Hill refused to be recognized by the Fraser Institute for their respective schools’ success in the ranking. The group “turned down award nominations that could have won their schools \$1,000 to \$3,000 in order to make a point about the validity of the right-wing-think-tank’s

annual school ranking (O'Connor, 2004, p. A6). What is interesting to note about the principals' rebuke of the Fraser Institute is the way the *Edmonton Journal* frames their position—"[i]n an era of school board budget deficits, five Vancouver principals are refusing potential Fraser Institute cash prizes on principle" (O'Connor, 2004, p. A6). The unfavorable light in which the group's decision is cast is positioned against the backdrop of shrinking school budgets and political activism. Here is an example of how school principals are publically disparaged by the media for not playing the Fraser Institute's school accountability game according to its imposed logic of practice. The field of power is consequentially redefined—at least temporarily.

### **International Capital Acquisition**

In just four years since the Fraser Institute published its first school report card in British Columbia it had successfully managed to accomplish three important goals: (1) it had developed a school ranking system for both elementary and secondary schools; (2) it had expanded the boundaries of its locally-developed (British Columbian) secondary school ranking system eastward; and (3) "the free enterprise think-tank helped bring about some considerable shifts in public opinion in recognition of the importance of market competition (Anonymous, 2002, p. A29). This disclosure was made in an article that appeared in *The Province* newspaper. The headline read, '*Institute has global reach*', and it noted "the institute's publications have been translated into dozens of languages and sold in 54 countries" (Anonymous, 2002, p. A29). The article also noted,

"the growing number of academics, policy analysts and economists from around the world...that included 350 authors in 22 countries (including six Nobel Prize winners)...[making] the institute's research consistently at the forefront of intellectual agreement on key public policy issues such as welfare reform, privatization, taxation, free trade, government debt, education, poverty, deregulation, healthcare, labour markets, economic restructuring and the role of government" (Anonymous, 2002, p. A29).



This statement is relevant because it serves to highlight the expansion of the Fraser Institute's sphere of influence in policy-related areas of concern taken up by democratically elected governments here, and abroad. It also underscores the cohort of academics, scholars, and Nobel Laureates that collectively work to advance the Fraser Institute's agenda in the aforementioned policy fields. In drawing the public's attention to the combined social, intellectual, political, and cultural capital amassed by the aggregate of elites that comprised the Fraser Institute's research base (some of which were Nobel Laureates) the Fraser Institute elevated its own institutional capital and corresponding status by association. The elites, therefore, served an important role in legitimizing the Fraser Institute's stance on a myriad of policy initiatives for three reasons: (1) they were the intellectual pool from which the Fraser Institute charted its course of action; (2) each member of the pool carried with him or her academic, business, and political credentials that, in turn, increased the cultural, intellectual, and political capital and status of the Fraser Institute as an entity; and (3) members of the intellectual pool wrote articles and position papers that served to focus the Fraser Institute's epistemology of seeing through a Fraser-Institute-mission-specific lens. This is an especially relevant consideration because it helps explain how the Fraser Institute managed to garner legitimacy for its school ranking system within the public's eye in a relatively short period of time.

Another way the Fraser Institute had to promote the relevance of its school report card was to marshal evidence from different countries that approached educational reform in the same way. Consider how the authors of the Fraser Institute's ranking reference similar work being done in the United Kingdom, Oregon, and California to improve the educational experience for students living there.

"The United Kingdom's Department for Education and Employment annually produces and widely distributes detailed tables of performance-related measures for primary schools, secondary schools, and colleges. Closer to home, the educational authorities in California and Oregon have moved beyond simply collecting and disseminating performance data.

Last year, California enacted the Public Schools Accountability Act of 1999, which requires that its State Board of Education develop an Academic Performance Index (a single statistic much like the Report Card's Overall rating out of 10) to measure the effectiveness of its elementary, middle, and secondary schools.

In Oregon, a new state law requires the Department of Education to issue Performance Reports for the state's schools that rate the school on a number of dimensions. Like the Report Card, these overall indices are intended to answer an important question, "How is your school doing?" (Cowley, et al., 1999, p. 3).<sup>77</sup>

By citing educational policies from the United States and the United Kingdom—two nations that also ranked schools based on performance data—the Fraser Institute sought to legitimize its own ranking initiative. The Public Schools Accountability Act (PSAA), for example, "authorized the creation of an educational accountability system for California public schools. Its primary goal is to help schools improve and to measure the academic achievement of all students" (California Department of Education). This was deemed as being a necessary first step for California to develop a comprehensive system of holding students, schools, and districts accountable for improving student performance. The program now includes a Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) system, testing students at the elementary levels (known as the California Achievement Test (CAT), and the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE). These achievement tests are aligned with academic content standards established by the state in the same way provincially examinable subjects in British Columbia are aligned with the Ministry's Prescribed Learning Outcomes (PLOs). An Academic Performance Index (API) is compiled to measure the progress of California's schools. Unlike the Fraser Institute's one through ten scale, however, the API ranges from 200 through 1000, but it serves the same purpose—to identify the best and worst performing schools. In this way California had "moved beyond simply collecting and disseminating performance data" (Cowley & Easton, 2000, p. 3).

---

<sup>77</sup>In California, the API is used to compare a school's overall ranking with other schools tested statewide. It is also used to compare a school's overall ranking to 100 other school's that have the similar opportunities and challenges.

League tables that were published by the government in the United Kingdom established a ranking-policy-precedence the Fraser Institute felt important to reference in its third report card because it demonstrated that an entire educational system could be reduced to performance indicators and ranked accordingly. By 1999 the educational system in the United Kingdom was ranking nursery schools, elementary schools, middle schools, high schools, and colleges. Citing the United Kingdom's league tables also served to underscore the school-wide-accountability-void the Fraser Institute filled in British Columbia that might otherwise be assumed by the Ministry of Education. Cowley noted the reluctance of politicians to produce Canadian-wide league tables in the same way their British counterparts had when he was quoted in *The Ottawa Citizen* as saying,

“The ministries of education are afraid to stir the pot by comparing one school with another. We think it is through comparison that schools can improve” (Adam, 2003, p. D12).

This is an important statement because it helps explain why the Fraser Institute authorized itself to fill a school-ranking void it perceived existed in the elementary and secondary school-market niches. This was possible because (according to Cowley) ministries of education did not want to face the political backlash that accompanied between-school comparisons made public by school rankings. And if the fallout from previous Fraser Institute published school rankings indicated anything, it was that teachers (and teacher unions) strongly opposed and resented the publication of school report cards in the press. It is important to note, however, that Canadian schools were already being ranked *before* the Fraser Institute published its first secondary school ranking in British Columbia. *Maclean's* magazine had been ranking Canadian universities and colleges since 1990—eight years before *The Province* newspaper published the first Fraser Institute school report card.<sup>78</sup> School rankings, therefore, had been a fixture on

---

<sup>78</sup> The “*University Rankings '08*” issue of *Maclean's* marked the 18<sup>th</sup> year the magazine has been ranking Canada's “best” post-secondary schools. Many of Canada's leading universities pulled out of the *Maclean's* post-secondary school ranking.

the Canadian educational landscape almost a decade before the Fraser Institute devised its secondary school ranking but only at the highest educational levels in the ranking of undergraduate and graduate degree-granting institutions.

What is also important to note here is that the Fraser Institute cited government-sponsored initiatives in the United States and the United Kingdom in an attempt to bolster support of their own report card and to demonstrate that elected government officials elsewhere—like the Fraser Institute—understood the value of publicizing value-added education implied by school rankings. It is also interesting to note that by 2003 the Fraser Institute acknowledged the extent to which it had made gains since publishing its first report card in 1998. For in the introduction of the 2003 (secondary) school report card edition Cowley and Easton noted, “the Fraser Institute’s report cards are now well established in Canada” (Cowley & Easton, 2003, p. 3). As well, the authors cited international studies that supported their school ranking initiative as being a key element to improving the student achievement.

“In the United States, the departments of education in 49 states publish annual report cards on schools—for all district levels—many of which are not dissimilar to the Institute’s series. In the United Kingdom, the national Department of Education and Skills publishes a wide variety of data on school performance. Report cards on schools are becoming commonplace. But are they effective? Certainly, anecdotal evidence provided to the authors and school administrators confirm their usefulness. Further, research suggests that real gains in school performance can result from their introduction. In an article published in 2001 by Caroline Huxby, a Harvard professor of Economics well known for her work related to education, showed that students in American states that published reports cards experienced faster improvement in their scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress than did students in states that did not” (Cowley & Easton, 2003, p. 3).

This quote is relevant because it shows how the Fraser Institute looks to a broader constellation of choice-based reforms operating in other countries that—like the Fraser Institute—“depend on the idea that schools will have to satisfy parents to keep their

customers” (Hoxby, 2000). Cowley and Easton cite Caroline Hoxby<sup>79</sup> as being an expert in the school choice and standardized testing movement in the introduction of their 2003 Fraser Institute Occasional Paper report. She is a highly accomplished and extremely well credentialed American scholar whose impressive biography is published on the Hoover Institution’s website. In a report Hoxby wrote for the Hoover Institution she recognized that school-choice initiatives are enmeshed in supply and demand markets.

“the wisdom of choice-based reforms depends on what parents want. If parents place a high priority on academics, then schools with strong academic programs will do well under school choice. If parents want their children to learn disciplined work habits, then schools that teach such habits will thrive under school choice. If parents choose schools based on their sports programs, then schools emphasizing sports will succeed. In short, the question “What would parents look for in schools?” is central to the debate on school choice” (Hoxby, 2000).

Hoxby’s question is an essential one to consider against the backdrop of the Fraser Institute ranking of schools debate because it speaks to the core issue—that is, the secondary school report card focuses the public’s attention *exclusively* on what the Fraser Institute is looking for in schools, and not what parents are necessarily looking for in schools. The other kinds of schools that Hoxby mentions by sort—schools, for example, that foster disciplined work habits; or schools that have thriving athletic, fine arts, and/or debate programs—don’t register on a Fraser Institute defined ranking rubric because the ranking focuses on academic achievement—*exclusively*. So, when Dr. Hoxby frames choice based reform initiatives in the United States she does so around the understanding that—in the free-market of American schools—there exists different kinds of schools that serve different kinds of student populations.

---

<sup>79</sup> Caroline Hoxby is a Professor of Economics at Stanford University, a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution, the director of the Economics of Education Program at the National Bureau of Economic Research, and a presidential appointee to the National Board of Education Sciences. A public and labor economist, she is a leading scholar in the economics of education.

### **The Beacon Schools Initiative**

Another international presence the authors of the Fraser Institute ranking of schools cited as being influential in their understanding of how best to promote choice based reform initiatives within British Columbia was the “United Kingdom’s “Beacon Schools” program” (Cowley & Easton, 2003, p. 4). The Beacon Schools initiative was established in the same year the Fraser Institute published its first secondary school ranking system—1998. Beacon Schools were deemed to be “high-performing nursery, primary, secondary, or special [schools] as judged by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) inspections and reports” (Bullock & Muschamp, 2004, p. 29). The beacon metaphor referred to the “New Labour-approved symbol for excellence” (Webster, 2001, p. 127). The explicit aim of the initiative was to raise educational standards throughout the United Kingdom. The Beacon School Initiative, therefore, became the national educational policy of the New Labour government from 1998 to 2004.<sup>80</sup>

Selected Beacon Schools received additional funding from the Department for Education and Skills (DfES)—normally for a three-year period—and in return, they were “required to work in partnership with other schools to establish an agreed program of activities that [identified, shared, and disseminated] effective practice” (Bullock & Muschamp, 2004, p. 29). The genesis behind the national policy lay in a belief that between-school variations could be attributed to factors intrinsic to individual schools. In this way, the characteristics that maximized performance standards in one high-ranked school could be imported into other low-ranked schools—irrespective of its social context. In an article that contextualized New Labour’s education policy in a “nutshell”, Webster (2001), noted, “[i]n a topography of excellence and good practice, then, Beacon Schools are to be lit on the high ground to illuminate the darkness of those below” (Webster, 2001, p. 127).

Unpacking the effects of the U.K.’s now abandoned Beacon Schools Initiative goes well beyond the scope of this project, however, the New Labour’s national educational policy is relevant to note at this juncture because—like the Fraser Institute’s

---

<sup>80</sup> The Leading Edge Partnership Programme replaced the Beacon School Initiative. It continues to exist to this day.

school ranking initiative—it promoted “competition for resources between schools in a given deregulation catchment area” (Webster, 2001, p. 129). The Fraser Institute, therefore, was looking to be guided by a beacon policy that introduced Margaret Thatcher-esque, “Conservative Party...market principles into state education” (Webster, 2001, p. 128). And while Beacon Schools achieved their beacon status through a highly evolved system of government inspections the cultural capital gained by schools achieving the beacon designation was like the cultural capital gained by high-ranked Fraser Institute schools because—in both instances—an elevated status brought with it a corresponding elevation in the school’s public perception. Finally, as Webster (2001) noted, U.K. schools refusing to play by the rules imposed by the school ranking game lost the game because “promotion depend[ed] in many cases on a willingness and ability to contribute to advancing [the] school’s market position” (Webster, 2001, p. 129). This is not unlike what happens with the Fraser Institute ranking of secondary schools in British Columbia—there is no opportunity for schools to opt out of the ranking (in the first place), and it promotes strategic game-playing by schools to win the school-ranking-game, in the second place. In the end, Webster (2001) is highly critical of his nation’s Beacon Schools Initiative because, “[t]he effect of market principles on raising standards in advantaged schools is celebrated whilst that on lowering standards in disadvantaged schools is denied” (Webster, 2001, p. 128).

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has focused on how competing agents acquire, consolidate, and leverage capital on the field of power to promote divergent visions about the role school rankings should play in holding teachers accountable for their work. It examined how language is used to naturalize controversial ideologies that are promoted by the Fraser Institute both within, and beyond, the borders of British Columbia. It also explored how régimes of truth are manufactured by the media to create a reality effect in the public’s mind about the secondary school system, and the teachers working

within that system. What follows is an overview of the insights I have made in response to these emphases.

The only place where over two hundred different kinds of public, private, and independent high schools could possibly co-exist at the same time on the broader field of judgment is in the '*non-place*' of language, discourse, and ideology. In devising a school-ranking rubric that made possible the annual comparison of schools on the pages of provincial newspapers the Fraser Institute effectively created a marketplace for school choice where there had not been one previously. This achievement occurred gradually over time and it was made possible—in part—because the Fraser Institute used language in strategic and deliberate ways to mediate relationships of power.

From the beginning published school rankings garnered a degree of legitimacy because the data used to manufacture the rankings were taken from ministerial data sources. Although it was the government that initially recognized differences between schools in this way it was the Fraser Institute that recognized that differences between schools could be significant, relevant, and commoditized; and it was the Fraser Institute that developed a school ranking mechanism for highlighting and amplifying between-school visibility asymmetries that were of genuine interest to the public. And while ranking matrices themselves represent an aggregate of statistical formulae that are used to say something 'objective' about schools the Fraser Institute effectively repackaged the complex language of statistics into readable and comprehensible school ranking tables for the general public to be consumed en mass.

The success of the Fraser Institute in this regard cannot be overstated. The Fraser Institute understood that if the general public could not interpret published school rankings from the beginning the general public could not make judgments about schools from the beginning. By assigning scores to schools the Fraser Institute provided readers—not only with an index—but, as importantly, with a method by which school comparisons could be easily made. Reducing complex social institutions to a single measure in this way had a tremendous impact on how parents, teachers, school leaders, and politicians—not only viewed schools—but how they talked about them. I have



characterized the kinds of discourses generated by the first ranking iteration as *knowledge discourses*—parents were learning about the Fraser Institute’s school report card, and educators were learning how their professional practice was being impacted as a result. Knowledge discourses were political at their core because they served to manufacture a crisis about the state of secondary schools in British Columbia. Embedded within each school ranking score was a narrative that told the story of a school’s relative success or failure—according to key performance indicators imposed on the general public by the Fraser Institute. Nine-point-two schools were ‘better’ than eight-point-six schools because the ranking rubric—as an instrument of disciplinary power—positioned the reader within a statistical régime of truth that was manufactured by the Fraser Institute to shape how people viewed (and talked about) schools. For many readers there was no other conclusion to be drawn based on the information contained within published school ranking tables: The data spoke for itself. Nine-point-two was greater than eight-point six and—in the absence of additional information—the reader quite naturally accepted that higher-ranked schools that outperform lower-ranked schools on key performance indicators are (overall) better schools. That conclusion was born out of the reader’s understanding of how ranking systems worked in general. Consumers understand, for example, that a five-star hotel is ‘better’ than a three-star hotel, or that a ‘triple A’ credit rating is better than a ‘double A plus’ credit rating; in the same way that parents understand that nine-point-two is better than eight-point six. Ranking instruments—of any sort—are similar in this way because they are designed to contain the reader within a well-defined, imposed, finite spectrum of possibility. Through media depictions that consistently portrayed independent and private schools as being ‘top’ ranked schools a reality effect was created in the public’s mind over time that that private schools were better than their public school counterparts. This impression was formed against a backdrop of discord from parents, teachers, and school administrators that objected to the way public schools were characterized and stood in marked contrast to how the Fraser Institute focused the public’s attention on what mattered to the Fraser Institute—the important

role school choice initiatives had to play in improving the educational experience of students attending British Columbia's high schools. It also focused the public's gaze on low-ranked schools, most of which were public schools.

In addition to publishing stand-alone school ranking tables that could be easily read by the public as discrete stories of relative success and failure, the Fraser Institute used discourse in other ways to promote its ideological position that market-driven reform initiatives are key to improving schools everywhere. In publishing the school report card annually in first the *Province* (and later) *The Vancouver Sun* newspapers, the Fraser Institute used language that focused readers' attention away from student performance-related issues towards teacher performance-related issues—specifically, toward public-school-teacher-performance-related issues. This was evident when articles appearing in the mainstream press began to highlight and embellish perceived work ethic differences between unionized public school teachers and non-unionized private/independent school teachers. When Peter Cowley noted in an interview that “private schools have an advantage over public schools because their administrators have more flexibility...to do the things that need to be done” (Chu, 2005, p. B5) he is pointing out a fundamental difference between public and private school systems—at their core—that relate to governance *and* personnel. Most teachers that work in the independent/private school system do not work within the confines of a collective agreement, and all independent/private schools have a board of directors that operates independently from school boards and their respective district mandates. We see, therefore, in Cowley's comment another example of how language is used to mediate relationships of power because his remarks suggest that public school leaders are disempowered to make the kinds of programmatic and personnel changes that their independent/private school counterparts can. By pathologizing public schools in this way the Fraser Institute established commonalities between them that emphasized the role unions played in protecting the jobs of ineffectual teachers.

To be considered a legitimate agent on the playing field of school accountability, however, the Fraser Institute established relationships with other political agents that

shared a similar *habitus*. This kind of political networking was important because it allowed for ideological alliances to be established between the Fraser Institute and other like-minded organizations. By citing school accountability policies developed by other countries and other governments the Fraser Institute leveraged political capital in support of its privatization agenda because they attributed these ranking policies as being the catalyst for educational reform elsewhere. It also allowed the Fraser Institute to import educational reform policies into British Columbia from Oregon, California, the United Kingdom, and France that—like the Fraser Institute—were anchored in school ranking initiatives. This kind of geo-political networking demonstrates how vectors of political power can be leveraged by the Fraser Institute to promote its own ideological position on its own terms. It also shows that there is no singular strategy that agents use to promote competing ideological positions on how best to improve secondary schools in British Columbia.

## CHAPTER 6: Manufacturing Dissent

### Dissertation Synopsis

The Fraser Institute ranking of schools is a case in point that illustrates how public, private, and independent schools are made to compare to each other on the field of accountability. In this study I suggested that the Fraser Institute proposes to the public a particular vision on how to improve education by promoting its ideological stance that market-driven reform initiatives in the field of schooling work best. By manufacturing a school ranking system that compared public, private, and independent schools the Fraser Institute constructed a market for school choice in the *non-place* of language and discourse. It did so by publishing school rankings in provincial newspapers, which had the effect of bringing hundreds of schools together in one place—a feat that was otherwise physically impossible to accomplish. The market for consumerism and parental choice, therefore, was a manufactured market that took the form of school report cards that were published on multiple pages of provincial newspapers. In this way entire schools (and the communities they served) could be reduced to columns of tables and text by which comparisons could be made between schools. It was within this *non-place* of language that a *marketplace* for schools emerged. When the kinds of stories about schools (and the students attending them) become narrated through discursive practices that negate material and symbolic capital disparities between schools, then disciplinary power is exercised. School report cards published in provincial newspapers and online identified low-, mid-, and high-ranked schools. The reports changed—not only how individual high schools were perceived by the general public in British Columbia over time, but as importantly—how an entire educational system is being perceived as well. This is a remarkable achievement given the demonstrated ability of the Fraser Institute to also publish school rankings in Canadian provinces and territories such as Alberta,<sup>81</sup> Quebec,<sup>82</sup> Ontario,<sup>83</sup> New Brunswick,<sup>84</sup> the Yukon,<sup>85</sup> and

---

<sup>81</sup> The Report Card on Alberta's High Schools has been published since 1999. The Report Card on Alberta's Elementary Schools has been published since 2002.

Washington State,<sup>86</sup> in the United States of America. The regional creeping of school ranking reports eastward, northward, and southward in this way reflects—not only the rising popularity of school report cards for parents interested in distinguishing ‘good’ schools from ‘bad’ ones—but an expansion of the Fraser Institute’s potential influence to shape the public’s perception about education in general. The Fraser Institute also broadened its scope of influence by broadening the scope of vision the rankings applied to. By ranking elementary and secondary schools within, and beyond British Columbia’s borders over time, the Fraser Institute’s ranking appealed to a greater population of parents with school-aged children who were interested in knowing how their neighbourhood school compared to others. Expanding the field of visibility in this way marked (what was previously) an unmarked social category.

The Fraser Institute’s school ranking, therefore, is an example of how special interest groups can promote self-serving political agendas and ideologies. The case under study thus provides important insights about how think tanks—who have become increasingly active in the field of educational policy setting—leverage their position in the field of politics by reconfiguring the epistemic bases that underpin how schools are perceived.

---

<sup>82</sup> The Report Card on Quebec Secondary Schools has been published since 2000.

<sup>83</sup> The Report Card on Ontario’s Elementary Schools has been published since 2003. The Report Card on Ontario’s Secondary Schools was first introduced in 2001, but it was withdrawn by the Fraser Institute in response to the threat of a lawsuit from a cohort of private schools that challenged the data on which schools had been ranked. Today this report excludes most private and independent schools because they are not required by the provincial government to administer the Grade 9, Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) tests in numeracy and the Ontario Secondary School Literacy (OSSL) test. These assessments are compulsory for public schools the results of which serve as KPIs in compiling the ranking.

<sup>84</sup> The Fraser Institute no longer publishes a Report Card in New Brunswick.

<sup>85</sup> The Yukon has been included in the Report Card on Secondary Schools in British Columbia since 2006.

<sup>86</sup> School report cards were introduced in 2009, but they have not been published since. At that time the ranking was based on the now defunct Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) test results. Like British Columbia’s secondary school ranking report, the Fraser Institute assigned Washington schools an overall rating out of 10. The Washington State report card was sponsored by the Evergreen Freedom Foundation, which is now called the Freedom Foundation. The Freedom Foundation’s mission is to advance individual liberty, free enterprise, and limited accountable government.

At stake is the deployment of power through the deployment of language and its mediatization within various contexts of practice. This understanding served as the entry point into my investigation—the goal of which was to problematize the assumptions made by the Fraser Institute’s school rankings. In relation to that I advanced five principal propositions: (1) school report cards have become a national fixture in Canada and have effectively reconfigured the way educational debates are conducted; (2) the data-driven educational reforms supported by the Fraser Institute are steeped in standardization and accountability régimes that are limiting and potentially harmful to students and schools; (3) the Fraser Institute’s influence on public educational policy is informed by the promotion of capitalistic principles that may serve to devalue and undermine otherwise ‘good’ schools and the teachers working within them; (4) leadership practices and parental decision-making are increasingly shaped by the logic imposed by a changing school ranking rubric thereby marginalizing alternative conceptions of educational practice; and (5) school rankings derived from a statistical language privileges an instrumental rationality that is highly contestable on the epistemic and ontological assumptions it makes about schools and the students attending them. These propositions were examined through a case study approach to the Fraser Institute ranking of secondary schools in British Columbia by undertaking a discursive analysis. I have referred to the discursive practices used by the Fraser Institute (and competing political agents) to define and demarcate the boundaries of exemplary educational practice throughout this project as régimes of truth—a concept that references the work of Foucault. I have also shown how agents compete for, acquire, and mobilize symbolic forms of capital across a myriad of intersecting and interdependent fields in ways that seek to force a particular vision on schools—a concept that references the work of Bourdieu. By proposing an approach that integrates the work of both scholars I have shown how language deployment, context, and capital mobilization stand at the core of the school ranking debate and shape how schools are not only seen—but also talked about—on the interdependent fields of social visibility, accountability, and judgment. It is through this integrative approach that five research

questions were proposed on page 61 as they pertained to: (1) the changes made to the ranking rubric over time; (2) the implications associated with those changes; (3) how agents use and deploy language to mediate relationships of power with the goal of promoting and naturalizing political ideologies through school rankings; (4) how a “reality effect” is created in the public’s mind that market-driven reform initiatives are key to improving schools; and (5) how different forms of capital are mobilized by competing agents to promote divergent visions of schools and school systems. What follows is an overview of the major findings that have emerged for me in response to the emphases described above. My goal here is to review how each finding resonates with the literature on discourse, surveillance, accountability, the acquisition of symbolic capital, and policy theory. These points are contextualized in relation to British Columbia and have been framed in this study as empirical assertions that are anchored in ‘*analytical* generalization’ (Yin, 2003). Analytical generalization is born out of case study research in which the “investigator is striving to generalize a particular set of results to some broader theory” (Yin, 2003, p. 37). The findings presented in the next section, therefore, are ones that stand in relation to the theoretical testimony of Foucault and Bourdieu respectively.

The rest of the chapter has been organized into three key parts. The first part on devolution and choice considers educational reform movements in England, New Zealand, and the United States. This is relevant because those countries have also emphasized the benefits gained when market-based reform initiatives are paired with standardization movements. The second part of the chapter focuses on the extent to which this methodological case study approach could be deemed successful in this case. Finally, the chapter concludes with my personal reflections on how the Fraser Institute ranking of schools has shaped my thinking about teaching, leadership, and accountability.

## A Critical Overview of Major Findings

### Disciplinary Power is Exercised Through Published School Report Cards

School rankings exercise disciplinary power when they operate within a ranking discourse that has been manufactured to produce ‘*winning*’ and ‘*loosing*’ schools. It is critical to underscore at this juncture that the Fraser Institute ranking of schools changed significantly over time in ways that reflected shifting priorities in what the Fraser Institute emphasized, and de-emphasized, about schools. It also changed in ways that reflected shifting political landscapes in British Columbia (see Appendix B); as well as in ways that reflected policy changes made by agents external to the Fraser Institute itself. Five different iterations of the ‘*School Report Card*’ were developed during the period from 1998 to 2010. They all had in common the inclusion of key performance indicators (KPIs) that were derived from data collected by the British Columbia Ministry of Education on public, private, and independent schools alike. This garnered a degree of legitimacy for published school report cards from the beginning because the data was considered to be reliable and valid. As well, school rankings derived from government-generated data sources effectively distanced the Fraser Institute from the schools it reported on in ways the Fraser Institute could not lay claim to if it had collected the data itself. However, in devising an accountability tool that establishes what is relevant and what is not within the field of secondary education the Fraser Institute promotes a statistical régime of truth and performativity that exerts disciplinary power on schools. In this case a statistical régime of truth exercises disciplinary power through semiotics—a ‘*values-neutral*’ language that has as its epistemic grounding—the collection and interpretation of data. When the Fraser Institute establishes which KPIs are to be included in its school ranking rubric (and which are not) the ‘*values-neutral*’ language of statistical discourse must be called into question. The first major finding presented in this study is that statistical régimes of truth and performativity exercise disciplinary power on the field of accountability precisely because they have been manufactured in ways that highlight, amplify, and hide visibility asymmetries between schools. Manufacturing a school ranking rubric in this way brings with it the possibility of



manufacturing dissent for the public secondary school system within British Columbia when private and independent schools consistently outperform public schools.

When the Fraser Institute began to treat single sex schools differently from co-educational schools in 2001 its statistical régime of truth operationalized power in ways that reconfigured the field of politics for co-educational schools. This finding highlights an inherent limitation embedded within the Fraser Institute's school ranking rubric—namely that different kinds of schools are treated in different kinds of ways by an imposed statistical régime that is promoted as being objective and fair. In this case the logic of the ranking is bifurcated by gender. Co-educational schools are '*rewarded*' when boys and girls achieve similar school- and exam-based results, but they are '*penalized*' if this statistical expectation is not achieved. Single sex schools could not be '*rewarded*' or '*penalized*' in the same way because gender-related KPIs were not applicable to those kinds of schools. Treating single sex and co-educational schools differently in this way had a profound effect on the distribution of '*top*' ranked public and private schools in British Columbia. Before gender gap KPIs were included in the ranking rubric approximately 50% of '*top*' ranked schools were public schools. After gender gap KPIs were introduced, the percentage of '*top*' ranked public schools dropped to 10% (see Figure 5, page 110). This finding has received very little attention in public debates or in the mainstream press, but it is an important one because it illustrates how school rankings fragment the field of education on which schools are now '*seen*' as competing. This fragmentation disrupts—what could have been previously been called—a level playing field because (for the first time) gender differences begin to account for some of the statistical variation that exists between schools. Without exception every single sex school in British Columbia is a de facto independent/private school. With the introduction of iteration #2 on the field of accountability came with it a perception that private and independent schools were better than their public school counterparts because there were more of them occupying '*top*' ranked spots in the Fraser Institute's school report card.

Foucault (1977) describes how disciplinary power is exercised through a normalization process that is not only anchored in judgment, but that compares individual actions to a whole. In this case the actions of boys are compared to the actions of girls on the field of accountability. When the examination results of each gender can be introduced to the broader field of visibility for comparison the “constraint of conformity” has been achieved (Foucault, 1977, p. 183). In this case the Fraser Institute intends for co-educational schools to provide experiences for boys and girls in ways that result in school- and exam-based assessment results being statistically inconsequential. This expectation has implications for teachers working in co-educational schools because their success as a classroom teacher is measured in part by the logic of an imposed school ranking metric that may, or may not be, pedagogically relevant. It would be important, for example, to know if boys (attending all-boys schools) outperformed girls (attending all-girls schools) on the same standardized provincial examinations in ways that mirrored boys and girls’ achievement patterns attending co-educational schools. The Fraser Institute was not interested in marshalling Ministry-generated data that drew the public’s attention to these kinds of potential relational trends between co-educational and single sex schools because it focused on making “more precise the distinction between schools” (Proctor, 1998d, p. A37). Highlighting between-school differences on KPIs within the population of co-educational schools was important to the Fraser Institute because this group of public, independent, and private schools represented the largest secondary school market in British Columbia. The population of private and independent single sex secondary schools was small by comparison. By increasing the number of KPIs that parents could use to make comparisons between public, independent, and private co-educational schools the Fraser Institute effectively expanded the choice-making opportunities for parents of students attending them because two new criteria for judging co-educational schools had been introduced on the field of accountability. These kinds of judgments could only be made about co-educational secondary schools—a target market that represented the majority of the secondary school market. This strategy increased the potential number

of parents that took notice of the Fraser Institute's school ranking report because more parents were called to care in ways they had not been in previous ranking iterations.

The report card was also designed to hide the impact some groups of students had on a school's overall ranking. When ranking results began to slip for some public British Columbian schools because they had recruited fee-paying, foreign ESL students into their populations the Fraser Institute recast its statistical net by "refining the student cohort" on which school rankings themselves were based (Cowley & Easton, 2003, p. 4). The attraction of foreign ESL students to public schools brought with it additional revenue streams to a public educational system the Fraser Institute critiqued. The off-shore interest of foreign students choosing to be educated in British Columbian schools can be seen through a business lens as a lucrative niche market to be developed by the government. However, an unintended consequence of attracting the same population of foreign ESL students to British Columbian secondary schools is that their collective school-wide presence adversely affects a school's overall ranking. The Fraser Institute managed the situation by negating the statistical impact foreign students had on a school's ranking position. The Fraser Institute's school report card policy of including the English 12 provincial examination results of *all Grade 12* students changed to accommodate a foreign student recruitment policy initiated by the Ministry. Including KPIs that *statistically* accounts for the impact of gender gap differences and government-initiated foreign student recruitment policies while—at the same time—choosing *not* to include KPIs that statistically account for *contextual* influences in students like, socioeconomic disparities, is problematic. This is especially true given the Fraser Institute's demonstrated ability to quantitatively account for the impact parents' average educational experience has on student achievement in all schools (Cowley & Easton, 2001). In casting, and recasting, the school ranking rubric that makes visible (and hides) entire groups of students within secondary schools the Fraser Institute focuses the public's gaze on what *it* wants the public to see. In so doing, the Fraser Institute exercises a kind of disciplinary power that may be viewed by some as being discretionary and discriminatory at its core. This is understandably a highly contestable

statement to make but when aspects that define key aspects of the human condition (like gender, class, race, and culture) are highlighted and hidden from an ‘objective’ school ranking rubric that shapes the public’s perception about schools and teachers it is important to know why.

### **Technologies of Representation Have Surveillance and Visibility at its Core**

Another major finding is that school ranking rubrics exert disciplinary power on the field of accountability by relying on a whole technology of representation that have surveillance and visibility at its functional core. I have argued that school rankings function like ‘modern’ prisons developed by Jeremy Bentham in the 17<sup>th</sup> century through the “macropolitical monitoring of performance data” (Webb, 2007, p. 283). The omnipresent functionality of the panoptic prison tower to ‘see *all*’ was achieved through a structural apparatus designed to elicit compliant behaviour in prisoners. Prisoners became compliant because prisoners were “caught up in a power situation of which they [we]re themselves the bearers” (Foucault, 1977, p. 201).

The same principle is at play for teachers and principals working within Fraser Institute ranked schools. They too are mindful they are being surveilled by a school ranking instrument that *sees* beyond the limits imposed by the ranking matrix. Principals know that parents make judgments about teachers and schools based on the results of published school report cards in provincial newspapers. And like prisoners incarcerated in Bentham’s ‘modern’ prison, principals get ‘*caught up*’ in the power dynamic when, for example, they begin to accept leadership awards at the ‘*Garfield Weston Awards for Excellence in Education*’ luncheon that is hosted by the Fraser Institute every spring. Here ‘*deserving*’ principals are recognized (not only for their achievement in elevating their school’s ranking) but as importantly, for their demonstrated ability to comply with the logic imposed by a statistical régime that has as its principal focus—performativity. When school leaders become complicit in their own subjugation because they subscribe to policy technologies that promote régimes of performativity in this way it could be said that the *régime* has taken root in the educational field—at least metaphorically.

However, when five Vancouver secondary school leaders made public their rebuke of the *Garfield Weston Outstanding Principals Awards* luncheon in October of 2004 by refusing to be acknowledged by the Fraser Institute for their respective schools' success it suggests that the panoptic tower metaphor posited earlier has limits. It also signals a form of political resistance that can emerge from school leaders in response to Panoptic-like surveillance mechanisms that are imposed on the field of schooling. And while it was impossible for those secondary schools captured by the logic of the Fraser Institute's ranking rubric to escape the omnipresent gaze of its accountability mechanism, it was possible for at least five principals to resist what the Garfield Weston awards stood for. This shows that the Fraser Institute's school ranking rubric can be contested by some parts of the teaching profession in ways that transcend polemical debates. It also shows that the kind of disciplinary power that is exercised by the Fraser Institute's school report card is not a totalizing power. (Of course it could be said about the principals who accepted the Fraser Institute's nominations that they were also making a different kind of political statement about the role school rankings played in improving their schools.)

Although this project has principally focused on how accountability régimes impact the way the general public perceives schools and school systems it is important to note at this juncture that other studies have focused on how accountability régimes impact the work of teachers in classrooms. This is an important consideration because it demonstrates how system-wide accountability régimes of performativity that operate at the macro-political level can diffuse throughout schools to impact the professional practice of teachers and administrators at the micro-political level. In a case study of one public elementary school Webb (2005) identified "how a model of educational accountability threatened to punish educators through a sophisticated network of surveillance" (Webb, 2005, p. 189). Three essential points can be drawn from Webb's school-based investigation that relate directly to this project: (1) standardized test results can be used to monitor (and coerce) teachers into possibly accepting "normalizing judgments of their practice" (Webb, 2005, p. 189); (2) teachers who

internalized the monitoring of their professional practice, “*reproduced the form...and...function of surveillance*” (Webb, 2005, p. 204); and (3) teachers who did not internalize the monitoring of their professional practice refused to play the accountability game when the terms of the game were defined for them. Webb (2006) locates teachers’ pedagogical fabrications in the field of political action because he believes that fabrications are “an attempt [by teachers] to (re)control, or (re)claim, the discourse of what a good teacher does/is” (Webb, 2006, p. 201). He believes that educators are experiencing a knowledge crisis born out of *exterritorializing*—“the concerted effort to reveal or expose a teacher’s thinking” (Webb, 2007, p. 283). Exterritorializing has micro- and macro-political dimensions that position the educator within a web of power relations that “mutates teacher knowledge from knowledge *in situ* to knowledge *in politicus*” (Webb, 2007, p. 284). “[E]ducators commit epistemic suicide when surveillance technologies [panoptic mechanisms], masked as performance-based accountability systems, demand evidence for their knowing” (Webb, 2007, p. 279). The end result is that teachers disqualify their situated and context-dependent understanding of students and schools “within the “new” discourse of performance” (Webb, 2007, p. 284). This is an important insight because it helps explain how the Fraser Institute has effectively managed how students, principals, parents, unions, and think tanks engage with each other on the whole field of education. This is a remarkable achievement because in devising a system-wide accountability scheme that is predicated on standardized examination results and performance data the Fraser Institute has exterritorialized the knowledge that committed, experienced, and hard-working teachers bring to their practice. “The goal of exterritorializing is not simply to subjugate the teacher...”but rather to retool her [sic]” into a more effective instrument of education production” (Fraser, 1989, p. 24 as cited in Webb, 2007, p. 284). Exterritorializing disqualifies the contextual elements that situate teachers (and their knowledge) firmly in the lives of students. As such, *in situ* (teacher) knowledge becomes eclipsed by spoken and unspoken expectations associated with school cultures that promote régimes of performativity. It is the output that counts, and with that

expectation comes the potential erosion of authentic educational encounters between teachers and their students, as well as between teachers and their colleagues. The discounting of KPIs that serve to contextualize the experience of secondary students within the Fraser Institute's school ranking rubric is evidence of systematic (macro) political exterritorializing because it attempts to (re)control and (re)claim the discourse of what a good school is/does. Régimes of performativity, therefore, are not just about surveillance mechanisms that operate within schools and school ranking rubrics—they can shape, promote, change, undermine, and erode entire epistemologies and bodies of knowledge within the field of education. Régimes of performativity can also spark acts of political resistance within and beyond schools. The kind of political resistance demonstrated by the teachers in Webb's (2005) study is not unlike the kind of political resistance demonstrated by the five Vancouver principals described earlier. They are similar because both are grounded in issues associated with accountability, visibility, networks of power relations, bodies of knowledge, and régimes of truth. Underpinning these interdependent issues in the broadest sense are conceptual understandings that relate to political resistance and agency. This point signals another major finding of my project—that visibility mechanisms can be transformed into sites of political resistance and agency because as Brighenti (2007) notes, "visibility lies at the intersection of the two domains of aesthetics (relations of perception) and politics (relations of power)" (Brighenti, 2007, p. 324). Although an awards reception constitutes a decidedly different space than a classroom or a hallway they are similar inasmuch as principals and teachers both attempt to shape and manage how they are seen (or not seen) within the broader fields of accountability and visibility. Shaping and managing the perception of others in this way has political overtones that are enmeshed within a broader network of interdependent power relations. This idea is discussed in more detail below.

## **Agents Deploy Language in Ways that Mediate and Reposition Relationships of Power**

A principal reason the Fraser Institute's school report card generated such controversy from the beginning was because it was published in *The Province* newspaper. It didn't appear gradually in stages, or discretely over time. There was no preamble, press release, or forewarning. School rankings appeared to the public on March 4, 1998, in a multi-paged section that identified the province's 'best' and 'worst' performing schools. The broad sweeping reaction to the first (and successive) school rankings encompassed a wide spectrum of agents because *The Province* newspaper was already enmeshed within a broader network of micro-, meso-, and macro-political forces that operated at individual, school, organizational, corporate<sup>87</sup>, institutional, and state levels. It was within this network of connectivity that the Fraser Institute ranking of schools was launched, which explains why there was such an immediate and visceral response to the first published school report card. Multiple agents already enmeshed within networks of power relations positioned, and repositioned, themselves on the greater field of school wide accountability in response to the published school report card. They did so in relation to the logic of an imposed school-ranking rubric. Parents, teachers, principals, newspaper editors, union leaders, politicians, the British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF), university professors, tax payers, and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) can be considered agents positioned on the field of education in relation to an imposed logic—a logic that was communicated through a statistical language of school ranking rubrics that had been manufactured by the Fraser Institute. Such position taking by agents creates alliances and adversaries and further underscores that ranking rubrics derived from the semiotic language of statistics cannot

---

<sup>87</sup> *The Province* was owned at the time by Canwest—a corporation that also owned the *Calgary Herald*, the *Edmonton Journal*, *The [Montreal] Gazette*, *Regina's Leader-Post*, the *Ottawa Citizen*, *Saskatoon's The Star Phoenix*, *Victoria's the Times Colonist*, *The Windsor Star*, *The National Post*, and the *Vancouver Sun*. This is important to note because it shows how the Fraser Institute had access to a well established network of visibility through media publications that could publish its school report cards from coast-to-coast. If Canwest saw fit to publish the Fraser Institute's ranking in *The Province* (British Columbia) it also had the power to publish school rankings in *The Gazette* (Quebec). Canwest was purchased by Postmedia in July 2010.



be considered a neutral language because it is caught up in broader political, social, economic, and cultural formations (Rogers, et al., 2005).

The Fraser Institute depicted market-driven reform initiatives as the best way to improve schools. Initially, the school-wide accountability framework was positioned within a broader knowledge discourse that: (1) provided information to consumers of education, (2) made uniform comparisons between public, private, and independent high schools, and (3) informed educators, administrators, and school trustees about how well they seemed to be doing their jobs. With one broad-sweeping accountability stroke the published report card on secondary schools rendered judgment on public, private, and independent schools alike. In creating a report whereby schools were pitted against schools under the guise of a parent's right to know, neighbourhood, district, regional, and socio-economic boundaries were obliterated in a ranking that focused on provincial exam results. The Fraser Institute positioned the school ranking system it had developed within a discursive context of a normalized school reporting system that naturalized rankings. This served to make school 'report cards' discursively palatable to parents because they were discursively familiar—most parents had, themselves, been the product of a school system that (like the Fraser Institute's ranking) was predicated on some kind of a grading system. Schools had a long-standing historical practice of issuing report cards on a regular basis throughout the academic year so it was not a stretch for parents to accept an accounting system that reported on schools in the same way schools reported on students. They had in common criteria- and norm-referenced-based assessment practices. Whereas the Fraser Institute used KPIs to assess the performance of schools, teachers used tests to assess the performance of students.

In time the Fraser Institute very strategically shifted the locus of attention away from recurring KPI debates toward school improvement debates. The public's eye was focused on reading newspaper accounts of schools that had significantly improved their overall ranking. As such, school improvement discourses became enmeshed within a coded discourse of institutional competence. Coded discourses help explain how the Fraser Institute came to be involved in the debates over school choice within the

secondary school market. In the coded discourse of competence, low-ranked schools are rumored to be inferior just as high-ranked (and most improved) schools are rumored to be better (or superior) by comparison. Powell (1997) suggests that the rumor of inferiority is promoted through a coded discourse of competence because the discourse of deficit is reserved for under achieving students of remediation. I have argued that a similar ‘coded discourse of competence’ is embedded within the school ranking rubric. Coded discourses of institutional competence played an important role in changing the contours of the educational landscape when the School Act was amended in 2003. With the amendment came the possibility that—for the first time in British Columbia—students could apply for admission to public schools beyond the limits imposed by state-designated catchment areas called school districts. The state-sanctioned deregulation of school catchment areas in this way changed school enrolment patterns. This finding is supported by historical data provided by the Ministry of Education and the Federation of Independent Schools Association (FISA), as well as from anecdotal evidence provided by principals who recognize, acknowledge, and attribute declining student enrolment patterns in their low-ranked schools to the impact the Fraser Institute ranking has on parental choice-making (McMartin, 2010b). At issue is the perception that higher-ranked schools are overall ‘better’ schools and parents want their children attending them. School rankings, however, do not account for conditions that exist for students outside the classroom that positively, and negatively, impact individual student performance and achievement patterns. This essential point has been raised—repeatedly—by a chorus of agents that are personally invested in developing a quality educational experience for different kinds of students attending different kinds of schools at every grade. But with the alignment of state-sanctioned educational policy reforms that paralleled the Fraser Institute’s long-standing position that parental choice and market-based reform initiatives work best to improve schools the perceived relevance of published school rankings to parents increased. While speculating on the circumstantial set of political factors and events that ultimately led to this kind of policy alignment between the government and the Fraser Institute goes well beyond the scope

of this project it is important to highlight how multiple political forces emerge (and converge) on the field of power in ways that seemed to imbue the Fraser Institute's school ranking report card with elevated forms of symbolic capital. Although many British Columbian parents looked to the report to see how their neighbourhood school compared to others since it was first published in the spring of 1998 they were—by 2003—in a position to act on whatever conclusions they gleaned from the Fraser Institute's school report card.

### **Capital is Acquired Through Storytelling, Coalition Building, and Policy Borrowing**

What is required of competing agents intent on promoting divergent visions about schools and school systems is their ability to accumulate, mobilize, leverage, and sustain symbolic forms of capital on the field of power in ways that promote their respective ideologies. Capital imbalances between competing agents lead to power imbalances between competing agents where political struggles play themselves out on the broader fields of education, accountability, visibility, politics, judgment, and power. Different agents use different strategies—in what Bourdieu (1990) called '*reflexive logics of practice*'—to promote their respective political agendas. But for those agents involved in the school wide accountability struggle capital is accumulated, mobilized, and leveraged through storytelling, coalition building, and policy borrowing. What follows is an analysis of how different agents tell stories, establish and build networks of power relations, and import reflexive logics of practice onto the field visibility with the goal of transforming the spatial foundations of education.

Storytelling lies at the heart of the accountability debate because it is within stories that the intended (and unintended) effects of policy reside. And while I have shown how ranking discourses can highlight, amplify, and even hide visibility asymmetries that exist between schools it is critical to note at this juncture the purpose storytelling assumes to initiate, nourish, and sustain controversy on the field of education. This is an important consideration because in developing a highly contested school ranking rubric the Fraser Institute also developed a broad sweeping narrative about the state of secondary school

education in British Columbia that—like any good story—has structural and contextual elements. In this story schools become characters that compete for limited resources to achieve a degree of success that can be measured. The kinds of stories that can be told about schools are limited by the kinds of KPIs that are selected in the first place, but the stories that emerge are controversial because some schools are cast favourably while others are found wanting. Underpinning the Fraser Institute’s grand narrative about the state of education is a moral. “The moral of the story in a policy narrative is often portrayed to prompt action” (Jones & McBeth, 2010, p. 341). The prevailing moral emphasized in the story narrated by school report cards is that education is improved through a marketplace that promotes competition and choice. This story was told and re-told within, and beyond, British Columbia’s borders.

The introduction of the Fraser Institute’s elementary and secondary school report cards in other provinces initiated and nourished public debates about the role school rankings should play in holding teachers accountable for their work in the same way it had in British Columbia, and for the same reasons. This finding highlights how the statistical language embedded in ranking rubrics (and the stories narrated by them) could be packaged, and repackaged, in ways that crossed—not only geographical boundaries—but in ways that crossed political boundaries as well. It didn’t matter if elected governments in provinces and territories east and north of British Columbia were left-leaning, centrist, or right-leaning in their approach to setting (and implementing) educational policy agendas for their respective electorate. The sustained public debates around school rankings in Alberta, the Yukon, Ontario, Quebec, and New Brunswick was evidence that school report cards could be exported from British Columbia into other provinces with different political landscapes like a franchise. And while there is some media-generated evidence to suggest that the kind of data-sharing between elected officials and the Fraser Institute was predicated on ideological alignments (and tensions) that existed between them, it was (and still is) the case that school report cards are published in regions where the Fraser Institute’s ideological position may be at odds with the elected party in power. However, when legislation is

changed in ways that more directly align with the Fraser Institute's ideological stance in the ways I described previously then school ranking reports assume more totalizing power on the field of education. They do so, because parents choose to withdraw their children from low-ranked schools and seek to enroll them in higher-ranked schools based on an imposed statistical logic developed by the Fraser Institute. And as students moved from school to school, so too did all the social, cultural, intellectual, political, and symbolic capital they embodied move with them. The redistribution of human capital in this way has profound pedagogical, sociological, economic, and political implications because not only are entire school populations affected by the ebb and flow of a changing student demographic, but so too are entire neighbourhoods. And while it could be argued that public schools in British Columbia have characteristically experienced a degree of social and cultural segregation to the extent that residential segregation is predicated on the ups and downs of the real estate market Gewirtz, Ball, & Bowe (1995) suggest that school choice may well exacerbate this kind of segregation by extending it into previously integrated schools serving mixed localities. Their research indicates that working-class children (and children with special learning needs in particular) are likely to be increasingly 'ghettoised' in poorly resourced schools as a result of market-based school reform initiatives (Gewirtz, Ball, & Bowe, 1995 as cited in Whitty & Power, p. 55). Although this research was conducted in the UK some fifteen years ago it is relevant to note at this juncture because it demonstrates how the deregulation of school catchment policies (combined with parental choice initiatives) can result in what Whitty & Power (2002) called "social polarization" (Whitty & Power, 2002a, p. 57). The literature is replete with studies that indicate how social polarization advances the interests of some groups at the expense of others, but at its core what divides students into 'winners' and 'losers' caught up in playing the accountability game on the educational fields of accountability and opportunity hinges primarily—but not exclusively—on socioeconomic and other symbolic capital disparities that exist between them (Apple, 2000, 2004a; Ball, Bowe, & Gewirtz, 1995; Boyd, 1999; Delpit, 1988, 1995; Gewirtz, et al., 1995; Gillborn, 2001; Kozol, 2005; Lucey & Reay, 2002; Rist, 2000; Waber,

2006; Wells & Serna, 1996; Whitty, 2002; Whitty & Edwards, 1998; Whitty & Power, 2002b). I will take this up in more detail later to the extent the research attributes social polarization in other countries to the effects of market-based reform initiatives that are like the ones proposed by the Fraser Institute in British Columbia, but it is sufficient to note here there is substantial research-based evidence to suggest that the “differences between schools result from factors largely beyond the control of parents and schools, except the power of advantaged parents and advantaged schools to further enhance their advantage and thus increase educational inequalities and social polarization” (Whitty & Power, 2000, p. 102). This is an important consideration that has implications to the deregulation of school catchment areas in British Columbia because it indicates that not all parents and schools are equally served by the 2003 amendment to the School Act.

Another important finding is that coalitions between multiple agents aligned in their respective ideological visions are established over time. These kinds of relationships represent how subject-positions are constituted within enmeshed networks of power relations that operate at micro-, meso-, and macro-levels. For example, in describing the genesis of the Fraser Institute’s school report card at the Arbutus Club dinner, Peter Cowley initially constituted himself as a subject—he was a ‘concerned’ parent looking for answers to questions he had about provincial examination marks achieved by students attending his daughter’s high school. When Cowley became associated with the Fraser Institute his subject-position changed within the field of education. No longer a single parent operating within a micro-political network of power defined by the limits imposed by a father asking questions of his daughter’s high school principal, Cowley’s connection with the Fraser Institute changed his relationship with all high school principals—including those he had never met. This change stemmed from the political, cultural, and symbolic capital that Cowley acquired in becoming associated with a well-established, well-networked, and well-funded think tank with political clout. As a concerned parent Peter Cowley’s relationship with his daughter’s teachers and principal was informed by his interest in knowing more about provincial examination results. As

the Director of School Performance Studies working at the Fraser Institute, Peter Cowley's subject-position within the field of education is informed by a prevailing institutional ideology that operates within a macro-political network of power relations—an ideology that promotes the privatization of education. This position stands in direct opposition to the one espoused by the British Columbia Teachers Federation (BCTF), which believes that privatizing schemes undermine and erode collective agreements that exist to establish and protect the hard-fought rights of teachers working within public schools—rights that are fundamentally anchored in social justice related issues. The Fraser Institute wants to develop a consumers group for parents by commoditizing education in the quasi-marketplace they have developed from scratch on the pages of provincial newspapers, while the BCTF wants to develop an understanding in parents that markets have no place in public education.

While it goes well beyond the focus and scope of this project to engage in an in-depth analysis about policy borrowing and its effects it is important to note at this juncture that I have come to think about the Fraser Institute ranking of secondary schools as being a policy initiative that has been exported by the Fraser Institute onto the field of education. Phillips (2006) conducted a fairly extensive review of the recent literature published about this issue. In a paper entitled, *'Investigating Policy Attraction in Education'*, Phillips takes the position that “there are very few cases indeed where the direct borrowing of policy by one country from another can be demonstrated through actual implementation...[because] the policy agenda is largely driven by larger internal forces” (Phillips, 2006, p. 556). This is an important insight because it suggests that educational policy measures from different countries cannot be directly imported by elected governments or the Fraser Institute into British Columbia without first accounting for the fluid micro-, meso-, and macro-political forces that contextualize, shape, and impede policy borrowing. What follows is an analysis of how these forces have shaped the British Columbian context in general, and secondary school rankings in particular.

The Fraser Institute occupies an important place in a broader constellation of networked think tanks and institutes because it has active research ties with like-minded organizations all over the world. It is associated with at least nine different think tanks located on three different continents (The Fraser Institute, 2010b). What these institutes have in common is an underlying libertarian belief that private enterprise plays an essential role in preventing the state from becoming overly involved in the lives of its citizens; an ideological position that is grounded in what Godwin & Kermerer (2002) called political liberalism. Becoming part of a world coalition of advocacy think tanks in this way substantially increases the Fraser Institute's overall political and symbolic capital because the extensive network of power relations can be mobilized and leveraged in strategic ways to promote Fraser Institute-generated policy documents and position papers here, and abroad. It also makes possible the sharing of policy initiatives from other countries with the Fraser Institute—initiatives that drive educational reforms in Oregon, California, France, New Zealand, and England. If league tables, for example, could be used to improve schools in the United Kingdom something approximating them must be able to do the same in British Columbia. In marshaling evidence from democratically elected governments abroad that support the Fraser Institute's school ranking initiative at home the Fraser Institute seeks to legitimize its education reform policy in the public's mind. This kind of policy borrowing can be problematic because the policy is imported into a uniquely British Columbian socio-political context that is different from its place of origin. Published league tables in the United Kingdom are government-sanctioned and the government produces the league table reports. Fraser Institute-generated school report cards are not government-sanctioned or government-produced. They are stand-alone publications that have been imposed on the field of education by the Fraser Institute with the goal of shaping public policy initiatives against the backdrop of a changing political landscape. While it can be said about educational policy that it may be borrowed from other regions in the ways I have described it nonetheless falls on the Fraser Institute to develop contextual strategies and techniques that result in the policy being introduced, managed, and adopted as commonsense



approaches to solving complex societal issues—like educational reform. Neo-liberals claim “that the invisible hand of the market will inexorably lead to better schools” (Apple, 2004a, p. 18). Indeed this claim is echoed and promoted by the Fraser Institute, but does research support it? What follows is an account of the “effects of recent policies to encourage parental choice and school self-management in [England, New Zealand, and the United States]” (Whitty & Power, 2002a, p. 52). These effects are important to consider at this juncture because they are the product of state-sanctioned régimes of performativity combined with the state-sanctioned deregulation of designated school catchment areas. This pairing of policy initiatives has taken place in British Columbia since the Fraser Institute published its first school report card in the spring of 1998.

### **Devolution and Choice in England, New Zealand, and the United States**

Ideally, devolution and choice refers to the kind of educational reform initiatives that seek to “dismantle centralised bureaucracies and create in their place devolved systems of schooling with increased diversity in the types of schools available, together with an increased emphasis on parental choice and competition between schools” (Whitty & Power, 2002a, p. 46). A devolved school system, therefore, is one that emphasizes the benefits gained in education when market-based reform initiatives are paired with varying degrees of school based management initiatives as those initiatives are placed against a greater backdrop of accountability and standardization. As such, devolution and choice can be thought of as being both a policy reform strategy and a policy reform outcome. It serves to establish the linkage between how the (non-elected) Fraser Institute approaches educational reform in British Columbia with how democratically elected governments pursue educational reform in other countries. Before sharing some of the initial research on the overall effectiveness of free market-based reform approaches it is important to describe the political contexts in which devolution and school choice policies emerged from within England, New Zealand, and the United States respectively.

In England the vast majority of children were educated in (non-fee-paying) public state schools that were maintained by democratically elected local educational authorities (LEAs) prior to the 1980s. LEAs exercised political and bureaucratic control over their respective district schools. "After the [right-leaning] Conservative [party] victory at the 1979 election, the Thatcher and Major governments respectively set about trying to break the LEA monopoly of state schooling through the provisions of a series of Education Acts passed in the 1980s and early 1990s" (Whitty & Power, 2002a, p. 47). The Education Reform Act of 1988 is arguably one of the most important pieces of legislation passed under Thatcher's eleven year tenure as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom for six principal reasons: (1) it effectively weakened the influence of LEAs by creating grant-maintained-status-schools that could be owned and operated by their own boards of school governors; (2) the local management of schools (LMS) was introduced which gave schools more autonomy in directing their own financial affairs; (3) state-sanctioned catchment areas were deregulated and made possible an element of parental choice; (4) the grant-maintained-schools policy enabled schools to "change their character by varying their [student] enrolment schemes" (Whitty & Power, 2002a, p. 48); (5) a National Curriculum was introduced in England (and Wales) together with the Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education) inspection régime that carries out hundreds of regulatory school visits every year; and (6) a system of school ranking league tables was devised whereby standardized examination results were published. And like the Fraser Institute's school report cards produced for British Columbians, "widely publicized league tables [in the United Kingdom] determine[d] one's relative value in the educational marketplace" (Apple, 2000, p. 236) by indentifying the 'best' and worst' schools in that country.

By way of comparison there was "no widespread disquiet [in New Zealand] about educational standards in the state school system nor were there vast discrepancies in school performance that contributed to a 'moral panic' about education" in the 1980s (Whitty & Power, 2002a, p. 49). The initial education reforms were introduced by a

Labour government in response to the Picot Report of 1988.<sup>88</sup> The Picot Report paved the way for education reforms to be introduced in October of the following year, which changed how schools were governed and financed. “Schools were given boards of trustees that had effective control over their enrolment schemes, with even lighter regulation than in England” (Whitty & Power, 2002a, p. 49). Alongside these reforms a national curriculum was introduced, as was an “ambitious national assessment system...and a new approach to inspection by the Education Review Office” (Whitty & Power, 2002a, p. 49). As well, New Zealand reforms “ushered in a more thorough-going experiment in free parental choice in the state sector than had been tried in England (Whitty & Power, 2002a, p. 51).

Unlike England and New Zealand, education reform initiatives in the United States are principally the responsibility of individual states until Congress passed the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act under George W. Bush’s administration in 2001. At its core the NCLB Act is a standards-based educational reform initiative that ties student performance (on compulsory, high-stakes, state-developed, standardized tests) to federal government funding formulae. Although the NCLB Act received overwhelming bipartisan support when it was first passed in Congress it is now highly contested for a myriad of reasons that go beyond the focus and scope of this project. What is relevant to note, however, is that while Americans approach education reform in ways that empower elected (right-, centrist-, and left-leaning) governments at the individual state level all three countries use a combination of highly regulated (neoconservative) standardized assessment practices that are anchored in régimes of performativity in combination with varying degrees of deregulated (neoliberal) reform initiatives that are anchored in economic (and business) principles that typically operate within ‘free’ markets to ‘fix’ a broken educational system. (Apple, 2004a) calls this seeming paradoxical ideological pairing “conservative modernization”—an approach [that integrates] education into a wider set of ideological commitments. The “‘new’ alliance [speaks to] the dramatic expansion of that eloquent fiction, the free market: the drastic

---

<sup>88</sup> Brian Picot was a supermarket magnet. His report generated and promoted neoliberal ideologies and education reform initiatives.

reduction of government responsibility for social needs; the reinforcement of intensely competitive structures of mobility both within and outside the school; the lowering of people's expectations for economic security; the "disciplining" of culture and the body; and the popularization of what is clearly a form of social-Darwinist thinking" (Apple, 2000, p. 15). This kind of thinking has very real consequences for marginalized groups of students and parents when it is enacted on the field of education as a '*reflexive logic of practice*'.

On the whole, research conducted by Birmingham University and the federal government in England/Wales and New Zealand respectively to determine the effects conservative modernization had on the educational field in those countries suggest that devolution and choice may actually serve to reproduce—not subvert—traditional hierarchies of race, class, and perceived academic ability (Apple, 2000; Whitty, 1997). For example, "schools most affected by budgetary difficulties, and therefore were least likely to report a positive impact on students' learning, were often found to be those with students from disadvantaged backgrounds" (Whitty & Power, 2002a, p. 53). Conservative modernization reforms were also shown to promote a 'cream skimming effect' whereby public schools became increasingly selective by attracting (and selecting) students "who were 'able', 'gifted', 'motivated', 'committed', and 'middle class', with girls and children with South Asian backgrounds [living within the UK] being seen as particular assets in terms of their potential to enhance test scores" (Whitty & Power, 2002a, p. 53). This is an important consideration because it points to the potential for discriminatory student selection policies to cut through race, gender, class, perceived academic ability, and socioeconomic boundaries when choice is introduced on the field of public school education. Ironically, these kinds of discriminatory policies are hidden from public view in a quasi-market of educational reform that has—as one of its principal features—accountability. Selective student admission practices in the ways that I have described can therefore have the statistical effect of improving a school's overall ranking that do not necessarily correlate with 'good' or 'effective' teaching practices. As such, schools with the highest test scores appear best even if other lower-

ranked schools were shown to enhance student achievement more. The “unidimensional scale of academic excellence” (Whitty & Power, 2002a, p. 54) that seems to underpin the vast majority of published school rankings and league tables do very little to promote a diversity of product within the quasi-marketplace of schools because “those parents who are in a position to choose are choosing schools that are closest to the traditional academic model of education” (Whitty & Power, 2002b, p. 56). Moreover, “there seems to be little [evidence] to suggest that market mechanisms are the key, either to the improvement of failing schools or to enhanced achievement for disadvantage students” (Whitty & Power, 2002a, p. 56). In the United States, (Goldhaber, 1999) argues in a review of the American research that existing empirical evidence on “who chooses” generally shows choice (in any of its forms) to be highly correlated with socioeconomic condition (Goldhaber, 1999, p. 21). Taken together these research findings are relevant because they show how—rather than leading to curriculum responsiveness and school diversification that meet the diverse educational needs of consumers (students)—the conservative modernization model has not created much diversification from the traditional models of education that are so passionately critiqued by the ‘new’ alliance. Taken in this light the story of how best to improve schools (as that story is told by conservative modernization proponents like the Fraser Institute) might well be considered—as Michael Apple (2004) suggests—a work of elegant fiction.

### **Reflections on Case Study Research**

In the very broadest sense the central guiding question underpinning this investigation has been: *What is the Fraser Institute’s school ranking phenomenon a case of?* Posing this broad-sweeping question that frames the five specific research questions underpinning it (as those questions are presented on page 61) very clearly has methodological implications. But as I have shown in the preceding chapters and pages the same question also has philosophical, sociological, pedagogical, and even ethical implications that I think are important to address within this section as well.

Case study research is appropriate for investigations that focus on a contemporary phenomenon over which the researcher has no control (Yin, 2003, pp. 9-13). Initially, I wanted to problematize the secondary school ranking issue in British Columbia (and the public debates that characterized it) through a single case study approach that had as its principle focus a critical discourse analysis (CDA) for two reasons: (1) I believed that it would shed some light on the multi-layered politics of power relations associated with competing agents intent on promoting different visions of education within secondary schools; and (2) I believed it would allow me to show how the general public made sense of school rankings based on what Smith (2001) termed (private) text-reader and (public) face-to-face conversations that people had with themselves (and each other) as a result of published school report cards in newspapers. This was an important consideration given that “educational policy is accomplished in the everyday activities (talk and action) of parents and principals as they participate in schooling and, thus, in the textually-mediated relations of governance” (Nichols & Griffith, 2009, p. 242).

In some respects, I was successful in understanding and explaining how interdependent and competing networks of power relations operate within and throughout school rankings to promote intersecting and contradictory ideologies on the field of education through the textually-mediated discourse of school rankings. In this regard I agree with Nichols and Griffith (2009) who note that “texts determine what features of school life are relevant to educational accountability” (Nichols & Griffith, 2009, p. 246). But I was surprised to learn how agents playing the accountability game managed public perceptions in the construction (and promotion) of ‘commonsense’ ideologies. For example, what appeals to many parents about the Fraser Institute’s educational reform initiative is that it is predicated—in part—on the ability of parents to choose an appropriate public school for their children. This sense of empowerment is misleading for two reasons: (1) not every parent is equally served by the potential to choose the best public school for their children in the ways that have been described earlier, and (2) the supply and demand forces that operate within ‘free’ markets do not apply in the same way within the quasi-market established by school choice initiatives.

“The lack of a conventional cash nexus and the strength of government intervention distinguish quasi-markets from the idealized view of a ‘free’ market” (Whitty & Power, 2002a, p. 47). While the distinction is an important one it is still the case that the Fraser Institute defines education as a “private good” (Whitty & Power, 2002a, p. 47). This perspective has ethical implications that have not been addressed in this study. Apple (2004) notes that “[i]n the calculus of values now in place in the regulatory state, efficiency, speed, and cost control replace more substantive concerns about social and educational justice” (Apple, 2004a, p. 34). Moreover, he argues that the “conditions for ‘thin morality’—in which the competitive individual of the market dominates and social justice will somehow take care of itself are reproduced here” (Apple, 2004a, p. 34), a Bourdieuan point that I will address in more detail shortly. But what is especially relevant is the questioning of Apple about what constitutes an ‘ethical’ or ‘just’ approach to educational reform—a question that calls on advocates and opponents of any educational reform located in any country to orient themselves in relation to something other than the forces underpinning markets or quasi-markets. This important (ethical) aspect of the school ranking phenomenon has not been specifically raised in this project and the findings presented here could be contested on this ground alone. However, what is not contestable is how ‘free’ markets (and quasi-markets) are subject to the natural laws of micro- and macroeconomic theory within which ubiquitous supply and demand principles operate—albeit in different ways. In the quasi-market place of secondary schools that has been created by the Fraser Institute there will **always** be ‘winning’ and ‘loosing’ schools. Indeed, there *must be* ‘winning’ and ‘loosing’ schools within the marketplace of schools because that is how schools are valued by parents who consume the school-ranking-product.

I was also interested in developing an epistemic framework on which to build my own interpretation that explained how the discursive, contextual, and statistical elements of the school ranking phenomenon interacted on the broader field of power. This was presented as an integrative approach in a two-dimensional schematic in Figure 4, page 60. Integrating the works of Foucault and Bourdieu helped me to bring together

“critical social theory and discourse analysis to describe, interpret, and explain the ways in which discourse constructs, becomes constructed by, represents, and becomes represented by the social world” (Rogers, et al., 2005, p. 366). This was an important dimension of my project and I found the case study approach allowed me to isolate, describe, and analyze school rankings in ways that were contextually rich and relevant. I also found Foucault’s theoretical testimony especially compelling and accessible in the beginning because he helped me understand that power is embedded within, and throughout, language and discourse in ways that may not be immediately recognizable. His thinking about disciplining bodies of knowledge (knowledge that disciplines) was pivotal to my conceptualizing the school report card as being like a disciplinary instrument that exercised power in very strategic and deliberate ways to produce docile bodies. If the Fraser Institute’s school reports ‘coordinate multiple sites of people’s everyday activities’ as Smith (2001) suggests, then it must be possible to demonstrate why, when, and how people’s activity is coordinated by a school ranking instrument that exerts some degree of control. I felt I was able to address this successfully by applying some of Foucault’s theoretical testimony to the logic imposed by the Fraser Institute’s school report cards. Foucault’s assertion that régimes of truth were manufactured to promote political agendas, and not every person was equally served in the process implied that power was not a matter of consent. Moreover, it implied that power was exercised in relation to existing power dynamics. By focusing my investigation on the phenomenon of school rankings I was able to show in very concrete and specific ways how a non-state agent exercises disciplinary power through a school report card that has surveillance at its functional core.

I am conflicted, however, about how well Bourdieu’s theoretical testimony helped me to understand the dynamics of the polemical debates about school rankings that first captured my attention. On the one hand, I believe that his work was extremely helpful in explaining how multiple networks of power relations could be established and mobilized on the field of education—“a social field...is never free of interests and never occurs naturally” (Reiger-Ladich, 2010, p. 107). But on the other hand, I was—perhaps



naively—optimistic about the possibility that his sociological theory offered marginalized groups the emancipatory potential of redress. And while I still believe that understanding the *practical and reflexive logics of practice* that constitute, locate, and position agents on the interdependent fields of education, accountability, visibility, and power are important to understand, I believe now that political change (redress) occurs in two ways: (1) “when a new discourse and its constituent stories become dominant” (Jones & McBeth, 2010, p. 334), and/or (2) through legal channels that include the court and/or legislature. This insight is made all the more palatable in reflecting on how amendments to the School Act in 2003 reconfigured the educational landscape in British Columbia in ways that concentrated human capital in high-ranked schools. This is an important consideration because crucial dollars (in the form of per student funding) is also redistributed in ways that reward those public schools that attract students from lower-ranked schools.

“These [kinds of] experiences are turned into feelings of being treated unfairly, of teachers and schools being organized in ways that privilege the already privileged in terms of class and race. If this is the case, some of the most powerful messages [conservative modernization] reforms of this type may send is that not only is the world deeply unfair but also that schools themselves are prime examples of institutions that simply respond to those who already possess economic and cultural capital” (Apple, 2004a, p. 38).

This insight serves as the import to the last section of my study—personal reflections.

### **Personal Reflections**

I have indicated throughout this paper that the vast majority of school ranking critics object to the way the Fraser Institute’s school report card defines and limits the kinds of stories that can be told about secondary schools—stories that emerge when a particular performance-based logic for holding schools accountable is imposed by an outside source. Firestone (2008) calls this particular kind of ends-mean model of accountability “bureaucratic accountability” (Firestone, 2008, p. 138). Bureaucratic accountability

occurs “when people in a role are held accountable for meeting specific rules and regulations, or when testing policies hold schools accountable for outcomes” (Firestone, 2008, p. 138). And while the Fraser Institute’s school ranking report card is not born out of a traditional bureaucratic outcome-based model whereby elected officials establish high-stakes assessment and accountability policies that “are inherently insensitive to instruction” (Popham, 2008, p. 21), they are similar because school report cards reflect key performance indicators that have been derived from student achievement results—results obtained from government-sanctioned, government-developed, standardized, compulsory examinations that every Grade 10-12 student is required to take in British Columbia in order to graduate. So, while Linn (2000) notes that American-centric, bureaucratic, outcome-based models of school accountability have three “salient characteristics [that include]: (1) an emphasis on the development and use of content standards; (b) the dual emphasis on setting demanding performance standards and on the inclusion of all students; and (c) the attachment of high-stakes accountability mechanisms for schools, teachers, and, sometimes, students”, so too can it be said about the locally developed system of school wide accountability developed in British Columbia by the Fraser Institute that it has the same three ‘salient characteristics’ noted above.

Another way to think about bureaucratic outcome-based models of accountability is in the way Popham (2008) describes. “Standards-based education (SBE) movements lays out a three-step strategy to improve the caliber of schooling” (Popham, 2008, p. 17).

“Step one calls for the isolation of appropriate curricular aims. Step two requires teachers to provide instruction in order for students to achieve the skills and knowledge set forth in the aforementioned curricular aims (content standards). Step three involves the assessment of students to see if they have, in fact, mastered the curriculum aims that their teachers were seeking to accomplish (performance standards)” (Popham, 2008, p. 17).

Interestingly, Popham (2008) is not as much critical of the process described above as he is critical of the way the process is commonly implemented. For Popham (2008),

there are two issues with the SBE approach to improving the caliber of schooling: (1) he believes there are too many subject-specific content standards that teachers are responsible to teach in the available instructional time allotted them; and (2) he believes that “instructionally insensitive tests are incapable of detecting improved learning on the part of students even if such improved learning has taken place” (Popham, 2008, p. 20). Popham (2008) proposes “two quick fixes” (Popham, 2008, p. 24). The first is to rethink *and* reduce state-imposed content standards with a less-is-more approach. The second, calls for the “installation of instructionally sensitive tests to measure students’ mastery ... of content standards sought in an SBE program” (Popham, 2008, p. 24). This approach puts teachers and other educational professionals at the centre of resolving what Popham (2008) cites as being problematic with an ends-mean (bureaucratic) outcomes-based model because it shifts the responsibility for school accountability away from politicians (who are removed from the life-world of students and schools) towards educators (who are immersed within that same world). Popham’s quick fix has the potential to make real—what Mabry (2008)—calls the “impossible standards dream” (Mabry, 2008, p. 51).

Especially critical of America’s ‘No Child Left Behind’ (NCLB) policy, Mabry (2008) argues that the standards-based dream embedded with NCLB serves as a compelling rhetorical device that “sustains policy based on the dream of all students achieving universal standards” (Mabry, 2008, p. 51). She argues that,

“[u]niform expectations directly contradict not only our romantic collective self-concept as a nation of rugged individualists but also the best current learning theory. That theory is constructivism, the idea that each person constructs an individual knowledge base from his or her experiences and values. Uniformity of standards is also at odds with the notion of multiple intelligences. Teacher concerns about test-driven curricula compound into concerns about test developers controlling the content of education” (Mabry, 2008, pp. 51-52).

While it goes well beyond the scope and direction of this dissertation to critically examine the unintended consequences associated with a national educational policy imposed by Americans on Americans, Mabry’s observation that “a clear implication of

test-driven accountability is inequitable educational consequences [because] high test scores are known to correlate with high socioeconomic status [and] impoverished students and the schools that serve them [are] allocated the fewest resources and fac[e] low scores and the most severe penalties” (Mabry, 2008, p. 53) is a sentiment that resonates in British Columbia because the Fraser Institute’s school ranking report card negates, amplifies, and highlights differences between schools and school systems—differences that can be attributed to conditions over which teachers have no control or influence. And just as ‘No Child Left Behind’ (NCLB) can be seen as a compelling rhetorical device that is used by politicians to say something definitive about the aims and goals of public education operating within a pluralistic and democratic society, it may be disingenuous at its core because it does not account (or seek to account) for the diverse learning needs of students. Mabry (2008) makes clear her position when she says,

“[w]hile universal education may be beneficial, universal standards may not be. While compulsory education may be beneficial, compulsory achievement targets may not be” (Mabry, 2008, p. 55).

So what is the alternative to bureaucratic outcomes-based models of school accountability?

One alternative is proposed by Ken Jones—an Associate Professor at the University of Southern Maine. In a chapter published in ‘The Nature and Limits of Standards-Based Reform and Assessment’, Jones (2008) proposes a “new [accountability] model, [that is] based on a different set of assumptions and understandings about school realities and approaches to power ... [one that is] centered on the needs of learners and on the intentions of having high expectations for all” (Jones, 2008, p. 58). He describes an authentic (school) accountability model that—paradoxically—is based on a “framework for accountability currently employed in the business world called the Balanced Scorecard” (Jones, 2008, p. 60).

“This framework describes a four-part measurement system designed to give a comprehensive view of the health of an organization. The premise is that both outcomes and operations must be measured in order to have a feedback system that serves to improve the organization, not just monitor it” (Jones, 2008, p. 60).

In Jones’ derivative (educational) model “inputs matter as much as results” (K. Jones, 2008, p. 60). He suggests that “four aspects of school performance can provide the components of a balanced school accountability model that attends to quality throughout the process of school, not just the end: (1) student learning; (2) opportunity to learn; (3) responsiveness to students, parents, and community; and (4) organizational capacity for improvement” (Jones, 2008, p. 60).

Like many practicing educators Jones (2008) is highly critical of myopic assessment practices that “labor under the popular conception that they are a precise measurement system, similar to physical measurement systems in the hard sciences” (Jones, 2008, p. 61). Jones (2008) notes that what is missing in most accountability systems is not just the “human adjudication system but also a local component that addresses local curricula, contexts, and cultures” (Jones, 2008, p. 61). For Jones (2008) assessment practices span the spectrum and limits of conventional pen-and-paper testing mechanisms to include “the principles of multiple measures” (Jones, 2008, p. 61). For Jones (2008), such measures include a variety of testing formats; such as writing answers to open-response questions and completing performance-based tasks that “accommodate students with diverse learning styles, intelligence profiles, exceptionalities, and cultural backgrounds” (Jones, 2008, p. 61). According to Jones (2008), “a reasonable process for determining the measure of student learning could involve local panels of teachers, parents, and community members who review data about student performance and make decisions about promotion, graduation, placement, and so on” (Jones, 2008, p. 61). This kind of approach to assessment stands in the face of standardized (bureaucratic outcomes-based) models that apply a one-size-fits-all approach because it contextualizes assessment in ways that are meaningful to both the teacher, student, and members of the school’s community.

The second part of Jones' (2008) authentic accountability model concerns itself with learning opportunities for teachers. Here, Jones brings to light an important dimension embedded within school accountability systems by highlighting the essential role of the teacher. Jones (2008) is refreshingly candid when he acknowledges the need for school accountability systems to consider "the quality of individual teachers and the quality of the school as a whole" (Jones, 2008, p. 61). Jones (2008) very clearly establishes the conditions that support the professional growth of educators without ever bashing teachers and the unions to which most belong. He suggests how formative teacher evaluation could work: "classroom observations by peers and supervisors structured by a narrative instrument based on professional standards, information from previous evaluations and feedback, such as structured references from colleagues and supervisors, and portfolios that might include teaching syllabi, assignments given to students and samples of student work, feedback received from parents and colleagues, videotaped teaching samples, and structured self-evaluation" (Jones, 2008, p. 64). The findings would "not be stated or used in a bureaucratic and judgmental way but, rather, should be given as descriptions to local councils charged with evaluating school accountability" (Jones, 2008, p. 64).

A third strand to Jones' (2008) school accountability model relates to the responsibility respective schools have to respond to the needs of its students, parents, and the community it serves. "One of the premises in the present definition of standards-based reform is that it is appropriate for states to set learning goals and outcomes, monitor student achievement of these outcomes with a testing system, and then apply consequences based on the success or failure of the students in the test" (Jones, 2008, p. 64). This kind of approach disconnects entire school communities (the primary stakeholders) with their respective schools because the state is charged with holding schools accountable. Jones (2008) believes that we must look "directly to parents and communities for holding schools accountable" (Jones, 2008, p. 64). A learner-centered accountability system requires that decisions on curriculum and instruction be made locally, but it also implies that parents, teachers, and school

administrators are aligned in their vision for what a successful school looks like. Here we have embedded in Jones' (2008) model for a renewed vision of school accountability an expectation that good lines of communication exist between the members defining any school community, and—moreover—that positive, trusting, relationships between adults and students are the cultural norm and not the exception.

The last strand in Jones' (2008) four-point school accountability approach relates to organizational capacity. What is interesting to note here is the emphasis that Jones (2008) places—not so much on the material dimensions associated with organizational capacity—but the emphasis he places on developing the human dimensions of organizational capacity; that is the non-material aspects associated with the ongoing professional development of teachers. “More and more, teachers are asked to use allotted professional development time to do the work mandated by new accountability systems, rather than to develop their own professional knowledge and skills (Jones, 2008, p. 64). Jones (2008) notes that in the climate of educational reform the nature of professional development must itself be reformed.

“[T]he most promising forms of professional development engage teachers in the pursuit of genuine questions, problems and curiosities, over time, in ways that leave a mark on perspectives, policy, and practice. They communicate a view of teachers not only as classroom experts, but also as productive and responsible members of a broader professional community and as persons embarked on a career that may span 30 years or more” (Jones, 2008, p. 64).

In Jones' (2008) new model for authentic (school) accountability, we see a different approach—one that expands the limits and boundaries imposed by a means-end, bureaucratic outcomes-based model that typically “measures what students bring to school not what they are taught in school” (Popham, 2008, p. 21).

Firestone (2008) contributes to a renewed vision for school accountability by refracting it through the prism of leadership practices in schools, and school districts. In so doing Firestone (2008) considers a third accountability category thereby expanding the bureaucratic (outcomes-based) and authentic categories explained above. Firestone

(2008) focuses on professional accountability as that is articulated through effective school, and school district leadership practices. Firestone (2008) argues that “the challenge for leaders is not that they are overwhelmed by testing but that testing is just one of many problems they face” (Firestone, 2008, p. 138). He also considers how leadership is configured in schools and school districts. Here the problem is that leadership is fragmented, coming from different offices (at the district level) as well as from principals (at the school level). He argues,

“[that] for too many observers, accountability and testing are interchangeable; testing is, after all, the way accountability is enforced. A broader view based on policy analysis suggests that accountability is present any time one person must render an account to another, especially where the latter has some authority or control over the former” (Firestone, 2008, p. 138).

Firestone’s (2008) view expands the accountability lens from bureaucratic and authentic accountability approaches to include a professional accountability approach.

“Professional accountability may be especially important when the knowledge in question makes it difficult for the layperson to monitor and assess the work of the professional. It includes entrance requirements to the field and various forms of oversight” (Firestone, 2008, p. 139).

What is important to note here is the overlap that seems to exist in Jones’ (2008) view of authentic accountability and Firestone’s (2008) view of professional accountability. They are similar because both scholars emphasize the need to develop a coherent approach that accounts for multiple sources of accountability that—at their core—can be considered internal and external sources.

“Internal accountability requires a shared culture with strong professional norms governing expectations for students. It also suggests a well-developed capacity for teachers to collaborate around shared values. If teachers do not have the knowledge or capacity to work together to develop new instructional approaches, they may not develop the internal accountability aligned with external expectations” (Firestone, 2008, p. 144).



External accountability spans professional and political boundaries. It can be considered through a bureaucratic outcomes-based approach (that many critics believe rewards and punishes certain kinds of schools) or external accountability can be considered through an authentic accountability approach that calls on schools (and the communities they serve) to become more directly responsive to the diverse educational needs of students. I think this is what Firestone (2008) is getting at when he says, “[s]tandards and assessment provide weak guidance for local practice because they must compete with so many other issues” (Firestone, 2008, p. 138). This comment is especially poignant given the polemical debates that emerge around the secondary school ranking issue in British Columbia. Hard-working teachers are bound by a ministry-imposed curriculum that defines for them subject-specific prescribed learning outcomes (PLOs) their students must learn. And students are subjected to ministry-imposed subject exams that are developed by the state to assess the extent to which students have successfully achieved PLOs. These accountability pressures do not occur in a vacuum. They are impacted by a whole series of interdependent and related external and internal accountability forces that have been described in the previous chapters.

Over this backdrop, for me what is truly remarkable about the school ranking debate is how it continues to unfold in very predictable ways. The Fraser Institute publishes its school report based on data it mines from the Ministry. It always sparks a reaction, and the competing agents involved on both sides of the school ranking issue engage each other with a series of well-honed, well-articulated talking points; the goal of which is to shape the public’s opinion about the role school rankings should play to improve the state of education. There is a part of me that thinks the Fraser Institute needs to be challenged on the assumptions it makes about schools in ways that transcend polemical debates. For as long as school rankings are produced by a single organization that imposes its view of schools in the absence of alternative ranking systems the public will eventually ‘see’ schools in the way the Fraser Institute ‘sees’ schools. This is understandably problematic. Perhaps there needs to be developed in the marketplace of schools a marketplace of school ranking systems that reflect different

epistemic visions about what 'good' schools 'look like'. These alternative views of schools would reflect and capture some of the contested foundations that have been described in this project and I envision they would engender a more pluralistic and diverse perspective on educational outcomes, and how to measure them. This approach demands that communities of educators working together would have to decide on what it means to rethink accountability from within thereby governing their own actions and shaping their own professional and institutional destinies. Or if a single school ranking system is to exist on the field of accountability let it be one that takes into account the expressed concerns of teachers and principals in meaningful ways (Simmonds, 2000). School rankings, for example, could be adjusted to reflect discrepant socio-economic indicators that consistently stand at the heart of the school ranking debate; or they could be published in ways that highlight and emphasize value added metrics instead of ranking schools from highest to lowest.

However, Apple (2004) cautions that the kind of reactionary approach I propose here is a dangerous one, because it brings the school ranking debate onto the terrain established by neo-liberals and neo-conservatives. By this logic I would become complicit in the very issue I seek to critique because "[s]chool ranking debates then become centered on an analysis of "what is" as opposed to "what might be"" (Apple, 2004a, p. 40). But my frustration is real—one that is born out of my experience as an educator and leader in two very different kinds of independent schools: one resource-rich, and the other resource-poor by comparison. As well it is important to note at this juncture that not only does the Fraser Institute's secondary school ranking report get published annually, but that it continues to shape the public's impressions about an entire (K-12) system of education in British Columbia and elsewhere. If the Fraser Institute ranking of schools has taught us anything, it is this: (1) school report cards will always be a source of controversy, and (2) school report cards are not going away. This appears to be the Fraser Institute's legacy on education in British Columbia.

In his book, *Measuring Up: What Educational Testing Really Tells Us*, Daniel Koretz (2009) notes that “[r]egardless of the arguments for and against test-based accountability, I believe that it is with us for the foreseeable future” (Koretz, 2008, p. 73). Koretz is not anti-measurement but he reminds us throughout his book by using very concrete (contextual) examples that test scores need always be qualified by other relevant and complimentary information.

“What we should be concerned about is the proficiency, the knowledge, and skills, that the test score is intended to represent. Gains that are specific to a particular test and that do not generalize to other measures and to performance in the real world are worthless” (Koretz, 2008, pp. 258-259).

In the end, Koretz (2009) provides three principal reasons why test scores shouldn’t be used as sole indicators of school quality: (1) many important aspects of a quality school are not measured by achievement tests; (2) different kinds of schools respond to test scores in different kinds of ways; and (3) test scores are influenced by many factors unrelated to schools. He offers a sound piece of advice at the book’s conclusion.

“We need to be more realistic about using tests as a part of educational accountability systems. Systems that simply pressure teachers to raise scores on one test (or on a set of tests in a few subjects) are not likely to work as advertised.... They are likely instead to produce substantial inflation of scores and a variety of undesirable changes in instruction, such as an excessive focus on old tests, an inappropriate narrowing of instruction, and a reliance on teaching test-taking tricks” (Koretz, 2008, pp. 258-259).

So where does that leave me?

I am a person who believes strongly in accountability. Good teachers fundamentally care that they are making a positive difference in the lives of students. When I teach a class of any grade and (always) of mixed ability level, I am mindful of what students understand the concepts I am teaching, and what students may struggle by comparison. And I adjust my teaching to accommodate the learning needs of my students accordingly. This kind of contextual and differentiated instruction requires an

assessment on my part of students and their perceived understandings. In essence I am 'accounting' for their knowledge and I do what I can to help my students learn. What is troublesome, of course, is that in the process of conservative modernization and the bureaucratic outcome-based accountability systems they promote that the educational encounter becomes fabricated, banal, and/or discriminatory. But this does not mean that we should give up on gauging our effectiveness to teach students well and to develop in them a love of learning that transcends the limits imposed by prescribed curriculum and learning outcomes.

Perhaps the most honest and reasonable explanation that accounts for why school ranking critics object to the Fraser Institute's report card so viscerally can be found in Garret Keizer's essay, *'Getting Schooled'*. In it he notes, that "like a war veteran unable to give his full trust to anyone who has never experienced the traumas of combat, I find it hard to respect the opinions of anyone who has never taught school—not only in matters of education, which is reasonable enough, but also in matters of philosophy and politics" (Keizer, 2011, p. 34). Not only am I sympathetic to the sentiment expressed by Mr. Keizer, but I think it is absolutely essential for professional communities of educators at every level to begin to have these kinds of philosophical and political conversations with each other or risk the possibility that "ideas that were once deemed fanciful, unworkable—or just plain extreme are [now] being seen as common sense [in the] radical transformation" of education through modern conservatism (Gillborn, 1997, p. 357 as cited in Apple, 2004a, p. 17).

## Bibliography

- Abelson, D. E. (2002). *Do think tanks matter?* Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Adam, M. (2003, June 17). Testing debate heats up. *The Ottawa Citizen*, p. D16&12.
- Alvesson, M., & Skoldberg, K. (2003). *Reflexive methodology: new vistas for qualitative research* (4th ed.). London, UK: SAGE Publications Inc.
- Anonymous. (1999a, March 26). Does your school make the grade? *The Province*, p. A23.
- Anonymous. (1999b, March 26). How is your high school performing? *The Province*, p. A19.
- Anonymous. (2000, March 17). School ranking means little, district says. *Peace River Block Daily News*, p. 1.
- Anonymous. (2002, March 6). Institute has global reach. *The Province*.
- Anonymous. (2004, October 23). Fraser Institute releases the first edition of the report card on New Brunswick's Anglophone high schools. *Canada NewsWire*, p. 1.
- Apple, M. (1998). How conservative restoration is justified: leadership and subordination in educational policy. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 1(1), 4-17.
- Apple, M. (2000). Can critical pedagogies interrupt rightest policies? *Educational Theory*, 50(2), 229-254.
- Apple, M. (2004a). Creating difference: neo-liberalism, neo-conservatism and the politics of educational reform. *Educational Policy*, 18(1), 12-44.
- Apple, M. (2004b). *Ideology and curriculum* (Third ed.). New York and London: RoutledgeFalmer.

- Austin, I. (2000, March 6). School thrives on stability: Once a revolving door for principals, Chatelech now boasts of great programs, staff and academic success. *The Province*, p. A9.
- B.C. Government and Service Employees' Union (BCGEU). (2007). COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT between the YORK HOUSE SCHOOL SOCIETY and the B.C. GOVERNMENT AND SERVICE EMPLOYEES' UNION (BCGEU) from <http://www.bcgeu.ca/node/4688>
- Ball, S. (1997). Good school/bad school: paradox and fabrication. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 18(3).
- Ball, S. (2003). The teacher's soul and the terrors of performativity. *Journal of Education Policy*, 18(2), 215-228.
- Ball, S., Bowe, R., & Gewirtz, S. (1995). Circuits of schooling: a sociological exploration of parental choice of school in social class contexts. *Sociological Review*, 43(1), 52-78.
- BCTF responds. (2006, April 14). *The Province*, p. A21.
- Beyer, H. (2000, March 28). School rankings: left vs. right. *Alaska Highway News*, p. 4.
- Bierman, B. (2007, February 23). Teachers should embrace Fraser report on schools. *The (Kitchener/Cambridge/Waterloo) Record*, p. A10. Retrieved from <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail?vid=4&hid=103&sid=40a8465c-92fa-4a88-9315-9df2a8bee81b%40sessionmgr9>
- Bond, S. (2007). 2005/06 Annual service plan report. Retrieved March 8, 2007, from [http://www.bcbudget.gov.bc.ca/Annual\\_Reports/2005\\_2006/educ/educ.pdf](http://www.bcbudget.gov.bc.ca/Annual_Reports/2005_2006/educ/educ.pdf)
- Bond, S. (October 10, 2007). *Message from Minister Shirley Bond* (No. 32). Victoria: British Columbia Ministry of Education.
- Boozer, M., & Rouse, C. (2001). Intraschool variation in class size: Patterns and implications. *Journal of Urban Economics*, 50(1), 163-189.
- Bourdieu, P. (1985). The social space and the genesis of groups. *Theory and Society*, 14(6), 723-744.
- Bourdieu, P. (1990). *The logic of practice*. Cambridge: Polity.

- Bourdieu, P. (1992). *Les règles de l'art*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil.
- Bourdieu, P. (1998). *On television and journalism* (P. P. Ferguson, Trans.). London: Pluto Press.
- Boyd, W. (1999). Paradoxes of educational policy. *Educational Policy*, 13(2), 227-250.
- Brighenti, A. (2007). Visibility - a category for the Social Sciences. *Current Sociology*, 55(3), 323-342.
- British Columbia Ministry of Education. (1997). Section 1: 1995 Graduation Program. from [http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/policy/policies/graduation\\_req\\_sec\\_1.htm](http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/policy/policies/graduation_req_sec_1.htm)
- British Columbia Ministry of Education. (2004). *Graduation Program Order*. Retrieved from <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/legislation/schoollaw/e/m302-04.pdf>.
- British Columbia Ministry of Education. (2010). For the record: facts about education. Retrieved May 26, 2010, from [http://www2.news.gov.bc.ca/news\\_releases\\_2005-2009/2005EDU0087-000911.htm](http://www2.news.gov.bc.ca/news_releases_2005-2009/2005EDU0087-000911.htm)
- British Columbia Ministry of Education. (2011). Provincial Reports. Retrieved December, 2010, from <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/reporting/>
- British Columbia Ministry of Education of Independent Schools. (2010). Group Classifications and Requirements. Retrieved July 15, 2010, from [http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/independentschools/bc\\_guide/group\\_rqrmnts.htm](http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/independentschools/bc_guide/group_rqrmnts.htm)
- Brook, P. (2000, March 8). The widely known secrets of success: St. George's has a proven record of achievement with generations of boys: Dedicated teachers deserve a lot of credit. *The Vancouver Sun*, p. A13.
- Brown, N., & Szeman, I. (Eds.). (2000). *Pierre Bourdieu: fieldwork in culture*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc.
- Bullock, K., & Muschamp, Y. (2004). Reflecting on pedagogy: outcomes from a Beacon School network. *Teacher Development*, 8(1), 29-44.
- Burke, H. (2003, June 11). Headmaster declines Fraser report 'honours'. *The Vancouver Sun*, p. A19.

- California Department of Education. Public Schools Accountability Act (PSAA). Retrieved January 1, 2009, from <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/ac/pa/>
- Callewaert, S. (2006). Bourdieu, critic of Foucault: the case of empirical social science against double-game-philosophy. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 23(6), 73-98.
- Canada NewsWire. (2000, March 6). Fraser Institute grades B.C.'s schools: Third annual report card released, p. 1.
- Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. (2010). About the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. from <http://www.policyalternatives.ca/offices>
- Chu, R. (2005, April 11). Private schools get highest marks from Fraser Institute. *The Vancouver Sun*, p. B5.
- Chung, E. (2006, April 10). Private schools rank tops in report: non-academic excellence ignored, critics contends. *The Vancouver Sun*, p. B1.
- Clarke, P. (2004). Co-operation, not ranking improves learning. *Teacher: Newsmagazine of the BCTF*, 16(4).
- Cohen, P., Kulik, J., & Kulik, C.-L. (1982). Educational outcomes of tutoring: a meta-analysis of findings. *American Educational Research Journal*, 19(2), 237-248.
- Cowley, P. (2003). An end to catchment area feudalism? *Fraser Forum*, 10-11.
- Cowley, P. (2005a, November 10). Celebrating success is good for schools and students, too. *The Vancouver Sun*, p. A19.
- Cowley, P. (2005b, June 10). Parents need a report card; [National Edition]. *National Post*, p. A20.
- Cowley, P. (2007, April 16). Report cards help both parents and educators. *The Vancouver Sun*, p. A.11.
- Cowley, P., & Easton, S. (1999a). The 1999 Report Card on Alberta's High Schools. *Studies in Education Policy*.
- Cowley, P., & Easton, S. (1999). *Boys, Girls, and Grades: Academic Gender Balance in British Columbia's Secondary Schools*. Vancouver.



Cowley, P., & Easton, S. (1999b, March 26). How Peter Cowley and Steve Easton did the study. *The Province*, p. A21.

Cowley, P., & Easton, S. (2000). *Third Annual Report Card on British Columbia's Secondary Schools*. Vancouver.

Cowley, P., & Easton, S. (2001). *Report Card on British Columbia's Secondary Schools: 2001 Edition*. Vancouver.

Cowley, P., & Easton, S. (2002). *Report Card on British Columbia's Secondary Schools: 2002 Edition*. Vancouver.

Cowley, P., & Easton, S. (2003). *Report Card on British Columbia's Secondary Schools: 2003 Edition*. Vancouver.

Cowley, P., & Easton, S. (2004a). *Report card on Aboriginal education in British Columbia: 2004 Edition*. Vancouver

Cowley, P., & Easton, S. (2004b). *Report Card on British Columbia's Secondary Schools: 2004 Edition*. Vancouver.

Cowley, P., & Easton, S. (2005). *Report Card on British Columbia's Secondary Schools: 2005 Edition*. Vancouver.

Cowley, P., & Easton, S. (2007). *Report Card on Secondary Schools in British Columbia and Yukon: 2007 Edition*. Vancouver.

Cowley, P., & Easton, S. (2008). *Report Card on Secondary Schools in British Columbia and Yukon: 2008 Edition*. Vancouver.

Cowley, P., & Easton, S. (2009). *Report Card on Secondary Schools in British Columbia and Yukon: 2009 Edition*. Vancouver.

Cowley, P., Easton, S., & Li, D. (2003). *The \$100,000,000 giveaway: Who says education doesn't get enough money?* Vancouver.

Cowley, P., Easton, S., & Thomas, M. (2010). *Report Card on Secondary Schools in British Columbia and Yukon: 2010 Edition*. Vancouver.

Cowley, P., Easton, S., & Walker, M. (1998). *A Secondary Schools Report Card for British Columbia*. Vancouver.

- Cowley, P., Easton, S., & Walker, M. (1999). *The 1999 Report Card on British Columbia's Secondary Schools*. Vancouver.
- Cowley, P., & Easton, S. T. (1999). *Boys, Girls, and Grades Academic Gender Balance in British Columbia's Secondary Schools*. Vancouver.
- Cowley, P., & Easton, S. T. (2000). *Third Annual Report Card on British Columbia's Secondary Schools*. Vancouver.
- Cowley, P., & Easton, S. T. (2001). Report Card on British Columbia's Secondary Schools: 2001 Edition. *Studies in Education Policy*. Retrieved from [http://www.fraserinstitute.org/Commerce.Web/product\\_files/1BCSR2001txt.pdf](http://www.fraserinstitute.org/Commerce.Web/product_files/1BCSR2001txt.pdf)
- Cowley, P., & Easton, S. T. (2006). *Report Card on Secondary Schools in British Columbia and Yukon: 2006 Edition*. Vancouver.
- Darke, P., & Shanks, G. (2002). Case study research. In P. Whitten & R. Salmond (Eds.), *Research methods for students, academics, and professionals* (2nd ed., Vol. 20, pp. 111-123). Wagga Wagga: Quick Print.
- Delpit, L. D. (1988). The silenced dialogue: power and pedagogy in educating other people's children. *Harvard Educational Review*, 58(3), 280-298.
- Delpit, L. D. (1995). *Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom*. New York: The New Press.
- Derworiz, C. (2002, June 7). Critics dismiss report's validity: Fraser Institute defends rationale of school ratings. *Calgary Herald*, p. B1.
- Dwyer, M. (2006). Our 16th annual rankings. *Maclean's*, 119(45), 74-79.
- Earl, L. (1999). Assessment and accountability in education: improvement or surveillance? *Education Canada*, 39(3), 4-9.
- Editorial. (1999, March 24). High schools under the microscope: how B.C.'s high schools stack up. An exclusive report every parent will want to read. *The Province*, p. A1.
- Editorial. (2000, March 5). What it's about; [Final Edition]. *The Province*, p. A12.
- Editorial. (2001, April 14). The case for grading schools. *The Vancouver Sun*, p. A18.

- Editorial. (2002, October 22). The honour roll. *Calgary Herald*, p. A3.
- Editorial. (2002c, March 5). 'Report cards' useful if taken in context: School system needs deeper analysis than raw numbers offer. *The Vancouver Sun*, p. A10.
- Editorial. (2003, June 11). Despite failings, report ranking schools an important tool. *The Vancouver Sun*, p. A18.
- Fairclough, N. (1985). Critical and descriptive goals in discourse analysis. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 9(6), 739-763.
- Fillion, K. (2006, November 13-20). David Naylor, President of The University of Toronto, talks to Kate Fillion about rankings, money, class, size, and Meryl Streep. *Maclean's*, 119, 39-40.
- Fine, S. (2001, April 12). Report card on schools withdrawn. *The Globe and Mail*, p. A1.
- Firestone, W. (2008). Educational leaders and assessment-based reform. In S. Mathison & W. Ross (Eds.), *Defending public schools: The nature and limits of standards-based reform and assessment*. New York: Teachers College Press, Columbia University.
- Foot, R., & Benzie, R. (2001, April 19). Parents hail, teachers jeer report card: extreme reactions to school rankings. *National Post*, p. A1.
- Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and punish: the birth of the prison* (A. Sheridan, Trans.). New York: Vintage Books.
- Foucault, M. (1980). Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977. In C. Gordon (Ed.). Toronto: Random House of Canada Ltd.
- Foucault, M. (1984). Language and politics. In M. Shapiro (Ed.). Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publisher Ltd.
- Foucault, M. (1994). *Power* (R. Hurley, Trans.). New York: The New Press.
- Foucault, M. (1997). *Ethics: subjectivity and truth* (R. Hurley, Trans.). New York: The New Press.
- Foucault, M. (2006). *The order of things* (7th ed.). New York: Routledge Classics.

Fralic, S. (2010, November 26). When it comes to public schools, you get what you pay for. *The Vancouver Sun*, p. A4.

The Federation of Independent Schools. (2010a). About FISA. Retrieved August 24, 2010, from <http://www.fisabc.ca/About-FISA/>

The Federation of Independent Schools. (2010b). Resources: Statistics. Retrieved August 24, from <http://www.fisabc.ca/Resource-Library/>

The Fraser Institute. (2002). *Annual Report*.

The Fraser Institute. (2003). *Annual Report*.

The Fraser Institute. (2004). *Annual Report*.

The Fraser Institute. (2006). *Annual Report*.

The Fraser Institute. (2007). *Annual Report*.

The Fraser Institute. (2008a). *Annual Report*.

The Fraser Institute. (2008b). Who we are. *Competitive market solutions for public policy problems* Retrieved January 13, 2008, from <http://www.fraserinstitute.org/aboutus/whoweare/mission.htm>

The Fraser Institute. (2009). *Annual Report*.

The Fraser Institute. (2010a). Retrieved July 20, 2010, from <http://www.fraserinstitute.org/about-us/who-we-are/mission.aspx>

The Fraser Institute. (2010b). *Annual Report*.

The Fraser Institute. (2010c). Institutes around the world with a similar focus to The Fraser Institute. Retrieved June 2, 2010, from <http://www.fraserinstitute.org/about-us/other-information-sources.aspx>

Fraser, N. (1989). *Unruly practices: Power, discourse, and gender in contemporary social theory*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

- Gaskell, J., & Vogel, D. (2000). Fraser Institute ranking fails as a measure of school quality. *Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives*. Retrieved January 10, 2009, from <http://www.policyalternatives.ca/editorials/2000/03/editorial756/?pa=A5671525>
- Gewirtz, S., Ball, S., & Bowe, R. (1995). *Markets, Choice and Equity*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Gillborn, D. (1997). Racism and reform: new ethnicities/old inequalities. *British Educational Research Journal*, 23(3), 345-360.
- Gillborn, D. (2001). 'Raising standards' or rationing education? racism and social justice in policy and practice. *Support for Learning*, 16(3), 105-111.
- Godwin, K., & Kermerer, F. (2002). *School choice tradeoffs: liberty, equity, and diversity*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Goldhaber, D. (1999). School choice: an examination of the empirical evidence on achievement, parental decision-making, and equity. *Educational Researcher*, 28(9), 16-25.
- Goldstein, H., & Spiegelhalter, D. J. (1996). League tables and their limitations: statistical issues in comparisons of institutional performance. *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society. Series A (Statistics in Society)*, 159(3).
- Grenfell, M. (2004). *Pierre Bourdieu agent provocateur*. New York: Continuum.
- Gutting, G. (2005). *Foucault: a very short introduction*. New York City: Oxford University Press Inc.
- Haggerty, K. D., & Ericson, R. V. (Eds.). (2006). *The new politics of surveillance and visibility*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press Inc.
- Haveman, R., Wolfe, B., & Spaulding, J. (1991). Childhood events and circumstances influencing high school completion. *Demography*, 28(1), 133-157.
- Heyman, D. (1999, June 18). Calgary high schools outscore Edmonton series: high schools under the microscope. *Calgary Herald*, p. A.1.

- Hoxby, C. (2000). What parents choose when given choice. *Hoover Daily Report*  
Retrieved August 2, 2009, from  
<http://www.hoover.org/pubaffairs/dailyreport/archive/2865601.html>
- Hughes, G. (2005, June 10). The controversy continues. *The Ottawa Citizen*, p. G12.
- Hunter, J. (1999). Fall of a scrapper. *Maclean's*, 112(35), 5.
- Ireson, J. (2004). Private tutoring: how prevalent and effective is it? *London Review of Education*, 2(2), 109-122.
- Jenkins, R. (2002). *Pierre Bourdieu*. New York: Routledge.
- Johal, H. (2001a, March 4). Elite schools at top: once again, private schools go to head of class in Lower Mainland. *The Province*, p. A39.
- Johal, H. (2001b, March 4). A tale of two schools. *The Province*, p. A40.
- Jones, K. (2008). Authentic accountability: An alternative to high-stakes testing. In S. Mathison & W. Ross (Eds.), *Defending public schools: The nature and limits of standards-based reform and assessment*. New York: Teachers College Press, Columbia University.
- Jones, M., & McBeth, M. (2010). A narrative policy framework: clear enough to be wrong? *Policy Studies Journal*, 38(2), 329-353.
- Keizer, G. (2011). Getting schooled: the re-education of an American teacher. [Essay]. *Harper's*, 323(1936), 33-40.
- Knox, J. (2005, April 15). What Fraser Institute rankings really mean. *Times - Colonist*, p. A3.
- Kong, Q., & Veall, M. R. (2005). Does the Maclean's ranking matter? *Canadian Public Policy - Analyse de Politiques*, 31(3), 231-242.
- Koretz, D. (2008). *Measuring up: What educational testing really tells us*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Kozol, J. (2005). Still separate, still unequal: America's educational apartheid. *Harper's Magazine*, 311(1864), 41-54.

- Kuchapski, R. (2001). *Reconceptualizing accountability for education*. University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon.
- Kuehn, L. (2002, Nov./Dec.). B.C. Liberals push boards to market education. *Teacher: Newsmagazine of the BCTF*, 15.
- Levant, E. (2005, October 24). 'If it matters, measure it': beautiful minds series. *National Post*, p. A19.
- Losee, C. (2005). Think-tanks can't measure what makes a school special. In *The Vancouver Sun* (Ed.) (Final Edition ed., pp. A22).
- Lucey, H., & Reay, D. (2002). A market in waste: psychic and structural dimensions of school-choice policy in the UK and children's narratives on 'demonized' schools. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 23(3), 253-266.
- Mabry, L. (2008). Assessment, accountability, and the impossible dream. In S. Mathison & W. Ross (Eds.), *Defending public schools: The nature and limits of standards-based reform and assessment*. New York: Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Masleck, R. (2000, March 13). Rankings useful but miss the whole picture: school superintendent. *Trail Times*, p. 1.
- McDonnell, M. (2005, May 4). Think-tanks can't measure what makes a school special. *The Vancouver Sun*, p. A22.
- McGill University. (2010). Applicants from Canadian High Schools Outside Quebec and Ontario. Retrieved April 21, from <http://www.mcgill.ca/applying/undergrad2011-12/canada/>
- McHoul, A., & Grace, W. (1993). *A Foucault primer: discourse, power, and the subject*. New York City: New York University Press.
- McMartin, P. (2010a, November 11). Open school boundaries fuel unequal opportunity; suburban principal witnessed depletion of school's population, leading to the erosion of funding and services. *Vancouver Sun*, p. A.14. Retrieved from <http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=2187912801&sid=17&Fmt=3&clientId=6993&RQT=309&VName=PQD>
- McMartin, P. (2010b, November 9). A public school system going private; A choice of venue leads to decreasing enrolment east of Main Street. *Vancouver Sun*, p. A.4.

Retrieved from

<http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=2186520941&sid=17&Fmt=3&clientId=6993&RQT=309&VName=PQD>

- Mills, C., & Gale, T. (2007). Researching social inequalities in education: towards a Bourdieuan methodology. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 20(4), 433-447.
- Mischo, C. (2002). Expansion and effectiveness of private tutoring. *European Journal of Psychology of Education*, 17(3), 263-273.
- Nichols, N., & Griffith, A. (2009). Talk, text, and educational action: an institutional ethnography of policy in practice. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 39(2), 241-255.
- Nichols, S., & Berliner, D. (2007). *Collateral damage: How high-stakes testing corrupts America's schools*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Educational Press.
- Norris, T. (2011). *Consuming schools: commercialism and the end of politics*. Toronto Buffalo London: University of Toronto Press.
- O'Connell, B. (2002, March 8). 'Good' schools don't complain. *The Province*, p. A17.
- O'Connor, E. (2004, October 13). Vancouver schools reject think-tank's cash prizes. *Edmonton Journal*, p. A6.
- Odden, A. (1990). Class size and student achievement: research-based policy alternatives. *Education Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 12(2), 213-223.
- Olsen, W. (2002). *Dialectic triangulation and emperical research*. Paper presented at the International Association for Critical Realism.
- Ozga, J. (2000). Reading policy texts *Policy research in educational settings: contested terrain* (pp. 18-42). Philadelphia: Open University Press.
- Phillips, D. (2006). Investigating policy attraction in education. *Oxford Review of Education*, 35(5), 551-559.
- Phillips, N., & Hardy, C. (2002). *Discourse analysis: investigating processes of social construction* (Vol. 50). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.



- Pignatelli, F. (2002). Mapping the terrain of a Foucauldian ethics: A response to the surveillance of schooling. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 21, 157-180.
- Popham, J. (2008). Standards-based education: Two wrongs don't make a right. In S. Mathison & W. Ross (Eds.), *Defending public schools: The nature and limits of standards-based reform and assessment*. New York: Teachers College Press, Columbia University.
- Powell, L. (1997). The achievement (k)not: whiteness and "black underachievement". In M. Fine, L. Weis, L. C. Powell & L. M. Wong (Eds.), *Off white: Readings on race, power and society* (pp. 3-12). New York: Routledge.
- Proctor, J. (1998a, March 8). Figures don't account for ESL, poverty. *The Province*, p. A22.
- Proctor, J. (1998b, March 8). God comes first at school. *The Province*, p. A23.
- Proctor, J. (1998c, March 8). School is more than marks at Point Grey. *The Province*, p. A22.
- Proctor, J. (1998d, March 8). Should we grade schools? *The Province*, p. A37.
- Proctor, J. (1998e, March 8). Top schools centered around exams. *The Province*, p. A23.
- . Provincial Affairs. (2005, March 15) [Radio]: Canadian Broadcasting Company.
- Rabinow, P. (Ed.). (1984). *The Foucault reader*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Rabinow, P., & Rose, N. (Eds.). (2003). *The essential Foucault: Selections from the essential works of Foucault, 1954-1984*. New York, London: The New Press.
- Raham, H. (1999, March 26). School rankings offer useful lessons to teachers and planners. *The Province*, p. A46.
- Ratcliff, J. (2011). Ecological Fallacy. Retrieved April 22, 2011, from <http://jratcliffe.net/research/ecolfallacy.htm>
- Rawolle, S., & Lingard, B. (2008). The sociology of Pierre Bourdieu and researching education policy. *Journal of Education Policy*, 23(6), 729-741.

- Reiger-Ladich, M. (2010). Governmentality revisited: Bourdieu meets Foucault. *International Educational Governance (International Perspectives on Education and Society)*, 12, 105-120.
- Rist, R. C. (2000). Student social class and teacher expectations: the self-fulfilling prophecy in ghetto education. *Harvard Educational Review*, 70(3), 257-265.
- Rocky, S. (2003). Fraser Institute's school rankings are useful, but they don't tell the whole story; [Final Edition]. In *The Vancouver Sun* (Ed.) (pp. A21).
- Rogers, R., Malancharuvil-Berkes, E., Mosley, M., Hui, D., & O'Garro Joseph, G. (2005). Critical discourse analysis in education: a review of the literature. *Review of Educational Research*, 75(3), 365-416.
- Rowe, K. J. (2000). Assessment, league tables, and school effectiveness: consider the issues and 'Let's get real!' *Journal of Educational Enquiry*, 1(1), 73-98.
- Royce, P. (2010). School enrollment dropping in Vancouver's East side. Retrieved March 5, from <http://rabble.ca/podcasts/shows/redeye/school-enrollment-dropping-vancouvers-east-side>
- Schirato, T., & Webb, J. (2002). Bourdieu's notion of reflexive knowledge. *Social Semiotics*, 12(3), 255-268.
- Schmidt, S. (2005, June 10). What parents want to know; [Toronto Edition]. *National Post*, p. RC1.
- Schroeder, L. (2000, March 8). Local school rankings improve: Mount Sentinel in top 10 and Salmo out of the basement. *Nelson Daily News*, p. 1.
- Sedgwick, P., & Edgar, A. (Eds.). (2003). *Cultural Theory the Key Concepts* (2nd ed.). London and New York: Routledge.
- Shaker, P. (2007, April 16). Looking past the hype of the quick and easy way. *The Vancouver Sun*, p. A.11. Retrieved from <http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?index=89&did=1256761491&SrchMode=3&sid=1&Fmt=3&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=PQD&TS=1179371881&clientId=6993&aid=1>
- Simmonds, M. (2000, March 21). Through the Fraser Institute's looking glass. *The Vancouver Sun*, p. A15.

- Smith, D. (2001). Texts and the ontology of organizations and institutions. *Culture and Organization*, 7(2), 159-198.
- Sokoloff, H. (2005, March 31). Wealthy schools outdone by poor. *National Post*, p. p. A8.
- Steel, K. (1999). *Dare to compare*.
- Steffenhagen, J. (2000, April 28). Release of students' assessments attacked: B.C. teachers say the decision to release the results is a political move that undermines their autonomy. *The Vancouver Sun*, p. A4.
- Steffenhagen, J. (2002a, October 24). Fraser Institute awards receive mixed reaction: Problem is honouring some at expense of others. *The Vancouver Sun*, p. B3.
- Steffenhagen, J. (2002b, March 4). Report card on schools 'predictable': The Fraser Institute's annual assessment of B.C. schools places rich at top, poor at the bottom, say critics. *The Vancouver Sun*, p. B3.
- Steffenhagen, J. (2003a, June 2). East pupils meet west schools: more students are making the trip across town to study. *The Vancouver Sun*, p. B1.
- Steffenhagen, J. (2003b, June 9). Elementary schools get their grades. *The Vancouver Sun*, p. B1.
- Steffenhagen, J. (2003c, March 10). Fraser Institute report on schools sure to stir debate. *The Vancouver Sun*, p. B1.
- Steffenhagen, J. (2004a, December 16). Educator blasts B.C. schools as 'work camps'. *The Vancouver Sun*, p. A1.
- Steffenhagen, J. (2004b, December 15). Private schools gaining students. *The Vancouver Sun*, p. B1.
- Steffenhagen, J. (2008, March 17). BCTF vows to fight standardized tests with job action. *The Vancouver Sun*. Retrieved from <http://www.canada.com/vancouversun/news/story.html?id=7ac85575-2564-4a0f-9bdd-8833abd94cbb&k=82646>
- Stevenson, M., & Kopvillem, P. (2006, November 13). And now--our biggest rankings issue ever. *Maclean's*, 119.

- Taylor, S., Rizvi, F., Lingard, B., & Henry, M. (1997). Difference, social justice and educational policy *Educational policy and the politics of change* (pp. 126-151). London: Routledge.
- School Act - Revised statutes of British Columbia (1996).
- Tight, M. (2000). Do league tables contribute to the development of a quality culture? football and higher education compared. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 54(1), 22-42.
- van Dijk, T. (1993). Principles of critical discourse analysis. *Discourse & Society*, 4(2), 249-293.
- Waber, D. (2006). Examining the examiners: reflections on non-partisanship, The Fraser Institute and the Report Card on Schools. *Education Canada*, 46(3), 4-8.
- Warner, G. (2000, March 20). Principal not impressed with Fraser schools ranking. *Daily Townsman*, p. 1.
- Webb, T. (2005). The anatomy of accountability. *Journal of Education Policy*, 20(2), 189-208.
- Webb, T. (2006). The choreography of accountability. *Journal of Education Policy*, 21(2), 201-214.
- Webb, T. (2007). Accounting for teacher knowledge: reterritorializations as epistemic suicide. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 28(2), 279-295.
- Webster, D. (2001). Beacon schools: New Labour education policy in a nutshell. *FORUM*, 43(3), 127-130.
- Wells, A. S., & Serna, I. (1996). The politics of culture: understanding local political resistance to detracking in racially mixed schools. *Harvard Educational Review*, 66(1), 93-118.
- West, A., & Pennell, H. (2000). Publishing school examination results in England: incentives and consequences. *Educational Studies*, 26(4), 423-436.
- Whitty, G. (1997). Creating quasi-markets in education: a review of recent research on parental choice and school autonomy in three countries. *Review of Research in Education*, 22(3), 3-47.

- Whitty, G. (2002). School improvement and social inclusion: limits and possibilities *Making sense of education policy: studies in the sociology and politics of education* (pp. 107-125). London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: SAGE Publications.
- Whitty, G., & Edwards, T. (1998). School choice policies in England and the United States: an exploration of their origins and significance. *Comparative Education*, 34(2), 211-227.
- Whitty, G., & Power, S. (2000). Marketization and privatization in mass education systems. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 20, 93-107.
- Whitty, G., & Power, S. (2002a). Devolution and choice in three countries *Making sense of education policy: studies in the sociology and politics of education* (First ed., pp. 46-63). London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: SAGE Publications.
- Whitty, G., & Power, S. (2002b). The overt and hidden curricula of quasi-markets *Making sense of education policy: studies in the sociology and politics of education* (First ed., pp. 94-106). London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: SAGE Publications.
- Wilson, D. (2004). Which ranking? The impact of a 'value-added' measure of secondary school performance. *Public Money and Management*, 37-45.
- Yin, R. (2003). *Case study research* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE publications.

## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Decile Range Table

Base Year (1992-1993) Decile Floor Values					
Decile Range	KPI #1	KPI# 2	KPI #3	KPI #4	KPI #5
10	71.02	6.20	3.37	98.86	3.49
9	69.00	8.01	4.18	91.82	3.00
8	67.89	9.73	4.82	89.10	2.79
7	66.76	11.11	5.19	87.32	2.62
6	65.74	12.61	5.77	85.25	2.48
5	64.42	14.96	6.38	83.13	2.35
4	63.48	16.41	7.09	81.00	2.22
3	62.42	19.03	8.37	78.60	2.08
2	60.19	23.53	10.31	74.10	1.86
1	44.99	65.61	16.64	25.00	0.64

*Source: '1999 Report Card on British Columbia's Secondary Schools' (Cowley & Easton, 1999. p. 81).*

#### **KPI = Key Performance Indicator**

KPI#1: Average provincial exam mark

KPI #2: Percentage of provincial exams failed

KPI #3: Difference between exam mark and school mark

KPI #4: Graduation rate

KPI #5: Provincial examinable courses taken per student

## Appendix B: Timeline of Fraser Institute publications and changing political landscape in British Columbia (Spring 1998-Summer 2009)

### 1998

March: Ranking #1<sup>89</sup> Premier Glen Clark (NDP)

### 1999

March: Ranking #2 Premier Glen Clark (NDP)

Peter Cowley is an **independent** education researcher.<sup>90</sup>

May Fraser Institute publishes '*Boys, Girls, and Grades: Academic Gender Balance in British Columbia's Secondary Schools*'

June Fraser Institute publishes first secondary school report card in Alberta.<sup>91</sup>

August Glen Clark resigns. Deputy Minister, Dan Miller, becomes Interim Premier on August 21, 1999

### 2000

February: Ranking #3 Interim Premier Dan Miller (NDP)

Peter Cowley is an **education policy researcher** at The Fraser Institute.<sup>92</sup>

February Ujjal Dosanjh becomes premier on February 24<sup>th</sup>.

March Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) enters the school ranking debate.

---

<sup>89</sup> The first time the Fraser Institute publishes its Occasional Paper about school rankings in British Columbia. The occasional paper has been published every year since as a de facto policy paper and is published on the Fraser Institute's website.

<sup>90</sup> As noted in the first ever published Fraser Institute Occasional Paper, "About the Authors", page 82.

<sup>91</sup> This marks the first trans-provincial expansion of the Fraser Institute's secondary school report card from British Columbia to Alberta.

<sup>92</sup> As noted in the Fraser Institute Occasional Paper, "About the Authors", page 120.

April Ministry decides to release school-level FSA data beginning with the May 2000 FSA test series; a necessary precursor to ranking elementary schools.<sup>93</sup>

October Fraser Institute publishes first secondary school report card in Quebec.<sup>94</sup>

## 2001

March: Ranking #4<sup>95</sup> Premier Ujjal Dosanjh (NDP)

Peter Cowley is the **Director of School Performance Studies** at The Fraser Institute.<sup>96</sup>

April 19 Fraser Institute publishes its first secondary school report card in Ontario<sup>97</sup>.

April 25 Fraser Institute retracts the report in Ontario.

May Gordon Campbell elected premier

June Premier Gordon Campbell<sup>98</sup>

## 2002

March: Ranking #5<sup>99</sup> Premier Gordon Campbell (Liberal)

---

<sup>93</sup> Fraser Institute has access to FSA data making possible the ranking of elementary schools for the first time in British Columbia in March of 2003.

<sup>94</sup> The Fraser Institute's school report card expands into Quebec. The Montreal Gazette publishes results for English-language schools in, and near, Montreal Island and all English-language private schools.

<sup>95</sup> The big statistical shake-up puts independent schools on top. The Fraser Institute introduces the gender gap performance indicator, which can't be uniformly applied to all schools because some independent schools are single-sex institutions. The school vs. exam mark (10%) for co-ed schools was increased to 20% for single sex schools.

<sup>96</sup> As noted in the Fraser Institute Occasional Paper, "About the Authors", page 98.

<sup>97</sup> The Ontario Debacle has private schools threatening the Fraser Institute with legal action for publishing data that is misleading and/or incorrect. The Fraser Institute withdraws its ranking.

<sup>98</sup> Gordon Campbell was sworn in as British Columbia's 34<sup>th</sup> Premier on June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2001.

<sup>99</sup> Fraser Institute announces plan to develop three new performance indicators: Composite Dropout Rate Indicator, Value Added FSA Indicator, and Attendance Statistics.



## 2003

<u>March: Ranking #6</u>	<u>Premier Gordon Campbell (Liberal)</u>
<i>April: Ranking #1 (E)</i>	<i>1<sup>st</sup> Elementary School Ranking in British Columbia</i>

## 2004

<u>March: Ranking #7</u>	<u>Premier Gordon Campbell (Liberal)</u>
October:	Fraser Institute publishes its first secondary report card in New Brunswick. <sup>100</sup>

## 2005

<u>March: Ranking #8</u>	<u>Premier Gordon Campbell (Liberal)</u>
<i>January: Ranking #1 (A)</i>	<i>1<sup>st</sup> Report Card on Aboriginal Education in British Columbia: 2006 Edition</i>

## 2006

<u>March: Ranking #8<sup>101</sup></u>	<u>Premier Gordon Campbell (Liberal)</u>
--	--

## 2007

<u>March: Ranking #9<sup>102</sup></u>	<u>Premier Gordon Campbell (Liberal)</u>
	<i>(Ranking re-introduced in Ontario)</i>

## 2008

<u>March: Ranking #10<sup>103</sup></u>	<u>Premier Gordon Campbell (Liberal)</u>
---	--

## 2009

<u>June: Ranking #11</u>	<u>Premier Gordon Campbell (Liberal)</u>
--------------------------	--

---

<sup>100</sup> The Fraser Institute's secondary school ranking is published from coast to coast.

<sup>101</sup> The Fraser Institute's ranking includes British Columbia and the Yukon—a northern expansion.

<sup>102</sup> First time Grade 10 exam data is included under the Revised Graduation Program: ENGLISH 10, SCIENCE 10, and MATH 10.

<sup>103</sup> First time Grade 10 and 11 exam data is included under the Revised Graduation Program: ENGLISH 10, SCIENCE 10, MATH 10, SOCIALS 11, and ENGLISH 12.

### Appendix C: Percentile rankings for British Columbia schools (Iterations #1 & 2)

	1998 <sup>104</sup>				1999				2000				2001 <sup>105</sup>			
Percentile	PUB	IND	PRIV	TOT	PUB	IND	PRIV	TOT	PUB	IND	PRIV	TOT	PUB	IND	PRIV	TOT
(9.0-10.0)	14	7	4	25	10	8	3	21	10	7	4	21	1	8	1	10
(8.0-8.9)	37	2	2	41	34	2	8	44	33	3	10	46	6	3	4	13
(7.0-7.9)	37	0	12	49	45	0	4	49	50	1	4	55	36	0	7	43
(6.0-6.9)	46	0	2	48	45	0	5	50	49	1	6	56	83	2	8	93
(5.0-5.9)	40	0	2	42	41	0	2	43	31	0	1	32	65	0	5	70
(4.0-4.9)	21	0	1	22	22	0	3	25	27	0	3	30	30	0	4	34
(3.0-3.9)	18	0	0	18	22	0	0	22	21	0	0	21	5	0	0	5
(2.0-2.9)	6	1	0	7	5	0	0	5	7	0	0	7	4	0	1	5
(1.0-1.9)	3	0	0	3	3	0	0	3	3	0	0	3	3	0	0	3
(0-0.9)	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	5
Total	223	10	23	256	227	10	25	262	231	12	28	271	238	13	30	281

Table compiled from the following sources: (Cowley & Easton, 2000, 2001; Cowley, et al., 1999; The Fraser Institute, 1998)

Iteration #1: 1998-2000

Iteration #2: 2001-2000

<sup>104</sup> Five KPIs each weighted at 20%.

<sup>105</sup> Introduction of gender gap differences in MATH 12 and ENGLISH 12; Different relative KPI weightings; Recalculation of historical data.

## Appendix D: Percentile rankings for British Columbia schools (Iterations #3-5)

	2002				2003 <sup>106</sup>				2007 <sup>107</sup>				2008 <sup>108</sup>			
Percentile	PUB	IND	PRIV	TOT	PUB	IND	PRIV	TOT	PUB	IND	PRIV	TOT	PUB	IND	PRIV	TOT
(9.0-10.0)	1	7	1	9	1	10	2	13	3	13	4	20	1	11	2	14
(8.0-8.9)	4	5	2	11	12	1	4	17	13	0	5	18	12	3	9	24
(7.0-7.9)	32	2	10	44	48	0	12	60	49	1	12	62	56	0	15	71
(6.0-6.9)	89	0	8	97	77	1	2	80	57	0	6	63	72	0	8	80
(5.0-5.9)	65	1	1	67	63	0	4	67	65	0	4	69	51	0	0	51
(4.0-4.9)	24	0	1	25	25	0	0	25	34	0	0	34	35	0	0	35
(3.0-3.9)	11	0	2	13	5	0	1	6	10	0	1	11	12	0	1	13
(2.0-2.9)	6	0	0	6	4	0	0	4	7	0	1	8	4	0	0	4
(1.0-1.9)	2	0	0	2	1	0	0	1	2	0	0	2	3	0	0	3
(0-0.9)	4	0	0	4	5	0	0	5	4	0	0	4	3	0	0	3
Total	238	15	25	278	240	13	25	278	244	14	33	291	249	14	35	298

*Table compiled from the following sources: (Cowley & Easton, 2002; Cowley & Easton, 2003; Cowley & Easton, 2007, 2008)*

Iteration #3: 2003-2006

Iteration #4: 2007

Iteration #5: 2008-2010

<sup>106</sup> Introduction of Drop Out Rate (later called Delayed Advancement Rate) & discounting of registered ESL students in calculating ENGLISH 12 marks

<sup>107</sup> Introduction of Grade 10 exam data (5%) & Grade 12 exam data (15%)

<sup>108</sup> Revised Graduation Program makes possible the inclusion of Grade 10, 11, & 12 exam data; Average Number of Exams KPI dropped; MATH 12 & ENGLISH 12 gender gap indicators dropped (replaced by MATH 10 & ENGLISH 10 gender gap indicators)

## Appendix E: Alphabetized list of school acronyms identified in Appendix F

School Name	Acronym
1. Agassiz Elementary/Secondary School	AGE/S
2. Archbishop Carney Secondary	ABC
3. Argyle Secondary School	AG
4. Brentwood College School	B
5. Burnaby North Secondary School	BNS
6. Collingwood School	C
7. Crofton House School	CHS
8. Earl Marriott Secondary	EMS
9. Glenlyon Norfolk School	GLN
10. Handsworth Secondary School	HS
11. Kamloops Secondary School	K
12. Kelowna Christian	KC
13. Kitsilano Secondary School	KS
14. Little Flower Academy	LFA
15. Lord Byng Secondary School	LBS
16. Magee Secondary School	MGS
17. Meadowridge School	MR
18. Mennonite Educational Institute	MEI
19. Mulgrave Secondary School	MU
20. Pacific Academy	PA
21. Point Grey Secondary School	PGS
22. Prince of Wales Secondary School	PWS
23. Richmond Christian School	RC
24. Semiahoo Secondary School	SSS
25. Sentinel Secondary School	SS
26. Seycove Secondary School	SCS
27. Shawnigan Lake School	SL
28. Southpointe Academy	SP
29. Southridge School	SR
30. Sparwood Secondary School	S
31. St. George's School	SG
32. St. Margaret's School	SM
33. St. Michael's University School	SMU
34. St. Patrick's Secondary School	SPS
35. St. Thomas Aquinas School	STA
36. Stanley Humphries Secondary	SHS
37. University Hill Secondary School	UH
38. Vancouver College	VC
39. W. J. Mouat Secondary	WJM
40. West Point Grey Academy	WPGA
41. Windsor Secondary School	WS
42. Yale Secondary	YS
43. York House School	YHS

# Appendix F: Top BC schools ranked by Fraser Institute (1998-2010)

Rank	1998	1999 <sup>109</sup>	2000 <sup>110</sup>	2001	2002	2003 <sup>111</sup>	2004	2005 <sup>112</sup>	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010 <sup>113</sup>
10.0	<b>SM*</b>	<u>STA</u> PWS	<b>SG</b> <u>LFA</u>	<b>SG</b> <u>LFA</u> <b>YHS</b> <b>CHS</b>	<b>SG</b> <u>LFA</u> <b>CHS</b> SR	<b>SG</b> <u>LFA</u> <b>YHS</b> <b>CHS</b>  <b>SM*</b>  <b>SMU*</b> <b>GLN*</b> <b>B*</b>  UH	<b>SG</b> <u>LFA</u> <b>YHS</b> <b>CHS</b>	<b>SG</b> <u>LFA</u> <b>YHS</b> <b>CHS</b> SR WPGA  <u>VC</u>  UH	<b>SG</b> <u>LFA</u> <b>YHS</b> <b>CHS</b> SR WPGA	<b>SG</b> <u>LFA</u> <b>YHS</b> <b>CHS</b> SR WPGA  <u>VC</u>	<b>SG</b> <u>LFA</u> <b>YHS</b>  SR	<b>SG</b>  <b>YHS</b>  SR WPGA	<b>YHS</b>
9.9				<b>SM*</b> <b>B*</b>	<b>YHS</b>	SR	<b>B*</b>					<b>CHS</b>	<b>SG</b>
9.8	<b>SL*</b> UH PGS KS	<b>SMU*</b> <b>SL*</b>  <u>LFA</u> AG	UH   <b>SM*</b>					UH	<b>GLN*</b>	<b>SMU*</b>			<b>SR</b> <b>WPGA</b>

<sup>109</sup> York House School (YHS) was ranked 26<sup>th</sup> in the province at 8.6. This was my import into the Fraser Institute's school ranking. YHS is a member of ISABC.

<sup>110</sup> First time Southridge (SR) is ranked. SR was established in 1995 and is a member of ISABC.

<sup>111</sup> First time West Point Grey Academy (WPGA) is ranked. WPGA was established in 1996 and is a member of ISABC.

<sup>112</sup> First time Meadowridge (MR) is ranked. MR was founded in 1985 and is a member of ISABC.

<sup>113</sup> First time Southpoint (SP) is ranked. SP was founded in 2004 and is a member of ISABC.

Rank	1998	1999 <sup>109</sup>	2000 <sup>110</sup>	2001	2002	2003 <sup>111</sup>	2004	2005 <sup>112</sup>	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010 <sup>113</sup>
9.7							SMU*	B*		MU <u>VC</u> MR		MU <u>LFA</u>	CHS SP C
9.6	SG CHS B* PWS AGE/S	SG PA MGS PGS UH K	SMU*				SR	SMU*	<u>VC</u>	SL*	SMU* CHS MR	SM*	
9.5					B*		SMUS* WPGA GLN	MR	SMUS*  SL*	B*  WPGA	MR	MR	SMUS*  MR <u>LFA</u>
9.4	BNS  EHS MS SS	CHS SM* B* KS	SSS  PGS			C WPGA	C <u>VC</u>	SL*					SM*
9.3									B*		B* SL*	B* SL* SMUS* GLN*	
9.2	SMU*  <u>LFA</u>  SPS	EHS	SR  CHS	SL* UH	SMU*	PA		GLN*	SMU*	GLN*  UH LBS			

Rank	1998	1999 <sup>109</sup>	2000 <sup>110</sup>	2001	2002	2003 <sup>111</sup>	2004	2005 <sup>112</sup>	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010 <sup>113</sup>
9.2	<b>AC</b> <b>HS</b> <b>SCS</b> <b>WS</b>		<b><u>SPS</u></b> <b><u>MEI</u></b>  MSS SHS KS PWS								<b>MU</b>	<b><u>PA</u></b> <b><u>TC</u></b>	<b><u>VC</u></b>
9.1				<b>SMU*</b> <b>SR</b>	UH					SS		<b><u>VC</u></b>	
9.0	<b><u>STA</u></b> <b><u>PA</u></b> <b><i>YHS</i></b> <b>GLN</b>  S  EMS	WJM HSS	<b><i>YHS</i></b>  <b>SL*</b> YS K  EMS ABC	<b>GLN</b>	<b>SL*</b>		<b><u>PA</u></b>  <b>SL*</b>	<b><u>KC*</u></b>		<b><u>STA</u></b>  <b><u>RC</u></b>	UH	<b><u>STA</u></b>	

Table compiled from the following sources: (Cowley, et al., 1998, 1999; Cowley & Easton, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009; (Cowley, et al., 2010)

**LEGEND:**     **BOLD** = Independent School  
**BOLD UNDERLINED** = Private School  
***BOLD ITALICS*** = Single-Sex School  
PLAIN TEXT = Public School  
ASTERIKS (\*) = Boarding School

## Appendix G: Member schools of ISABC

School	Grades Offered	Type
1. Aberdeen Hall	K-Senior Grades	Co-Ed, Day
2. Aspengrove	K-12	Co-Ed, Day
3. Brentwood College	9-12	Co-Ed, Day, Boarding
4. Brockton Preparatory School	K-10	Co-Ed, Day
5. Choice School for Gifted Children	K-8	Co-Ed, Day
6. Collingwood School	JK-12	Co-Ed, Day
7. Crofton House School	1-12	Girl's, Day
8. Fraser Academy	1-12	Co-Ed, Day
9. Glenlyon Norfolk School	JK-12	Co-Ed, Day, Homestay
10. Island Pacific School	6-9	Co-Ed, Day
11. Meadowridge School	JK-12	Co-Ed, Day
12. Mulgrave School	PK-12	Co-Ed, Day
13. Queen Margaret's School	ECE-12	Girl's, Boarding (6-12)
14. Shawnigan Lake School	8-12	Co-Ed, Day, Boarding
15. Southpointe Academy	JK-12	Co-Ed, Day
16. Southridge School	K-12	Co-Ed, Day
17. St. George's	1-12	Boy's, Day
18. St. John's School	K-12	Co-Ed, Day
19. St. Margaret's School	ECE-12	Girl's, Day, Boarding
20. St. Michaels University School	K-12	Co-Ed, Day, Boarding
21. Stratford Hall	K-12	Co-Ed, Day
22. West Point Grey Academy	PK-12	Co-Ed, Day
23. York House School	JK-12	Girl's, Day

*Table compiled from the following source: The Independent Schools Association of British Columbia (ISABC) website; Retrieved November 19, 2011.*

### LEGEND

ECE: Early Childhood Education

JK: Junior Kindergarten

K: Kindergarten

PK: Pre-Kindergarten