PROVINCIAL EXAMS AND SOCIAL LEARNING IN VANCOUVER HIGH SCHOOLS

by

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Abstract

This study explores the links between provincial exam testing in British Columbia and teachers’ instructional choices related to social learning activities in Vancouver high schools. This paper provides a definition of social learning (SL) based upon the literature in the field of social-emotional learning. The study examines the perspectives of secondary teachers in subjects with provincial exams and how they use social learning activities. The influence of provincial exams on teachers’ instructional practices was analyzed through a combination of online survey and interview data. A mixed-methods approach allowed us to both develop multiple perspectives on how provincial exams play a role in influencing what types and to what extent teachers use SL activities and gain a better understanding of the Vancouver high school setting and context. Our survey’s small sample size of 21 participants led to significant weight to individual responses and subsequent comparisons between grade levels within subject areas offer observations with reservations. An analysis of our collected interview and survey data suggested that teachers who often interpreted SL as activities that lead students to become participatory citizens valued SL. Second, many teachers value provincial exams but at the same time recognize they may limit their use of SL activities. Third these findings are valuable for the consideration for educational leaders and for future provincial exam policy in British Columbia. Fourth, a teacher’s use of SL is a complicated issue that requires the consideration of a number of factors and its use (or lack thereof) cannot often be attributed solely to the provincial exam.
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CHAPTER ONE  
INTRODUCTION

Definition of Social Learning

For the purpose of our research, social learning is defined as the process of learning to effectively participate in society. This learning includes the development of various forms of communication, conflict-management, collaborating to identify and work towards a shared goal, and maintaining positive relationships.

Educational Context:

The British Columbia (BC) Ministry of Education has indicated that the aim of school is to emphasize a wide range of skills and abilities beyond academic learning. BC’s Superintendent of Student Achievement, Mr. Rod Allen, has stated that, “the Ministry of Education is engaged in a massive overhaul of the school curriculum, in partnership with teachers and the B. C. Teachers’ Federation (BCTF), that will emphasize thinking, communication and personal and social skills right alongside the content-driven curriculum” (Shore, 2014). This view is supported by the BC Education Plan, which seeks to further develop students’ social learning opportunities through cross-cultural understanding, teamwork and collaboration (BC Ministry of Education, 2011). Furthermore, the B.C. Ministry of Education emphasizes the significance of social learning though its commitment to developing students’ social learning as a standard of education (B.C. Ministry of Education, 2012a), through instructional practices (B.C. Ministry of Education, 2010) and through curricular development (B.C. Ministry of Education, 2012b, 2013). Throughout the B.C. Performance Standards on Social Responsibility (BCPSSR), the B.C. Ministry of Education uses the term ‘social responsibility’ to provide a framework and
definition of what social learning looks like. The BCPSSR outlines the following categories of social responsibility: contributions to the classroom and school community through group participation, solving problems peacefully, showing a sense of ethics, and exercising democratic rights and responsibilities. The BCPSSR links the importance of the values of social responsibility to selected outcomes in several curricular areas (B.C. Ministry of Education, 2001).

Support for social learning is shown at a local level through a district or school’s mission statement. Currently many educational mission statements place an equal emphasis on academic achievement and social learning. The Vancouver School District mission statement reinforces the social and cooperative nature of school by seeking, “to enable students to reach their intellectual, social, aesthetic and physical potential in challenging and stimulating settings which reflect the worth of each individual and promote mutual respect, cooperation and social responsibility” (Vancouver Board of Education, 2013, page 3). Many school administrators develop mission statements reaffirming a commitment to students’ social growth. For example, the mission statement of David Thompson High School in Vancouver notes the importance of students developing, “the personal and social skills necessary for responsible citizenship in a diverse society” (Vancouver School Board, 2014). The aforementioned mission statements confirm the importance of social learning yet fail to provide a concrete definition of what social learning looks like in practice.

The Vancouver School Board (VSB) provides further details of what social learning looks like in practice. The VSB’s 2013/2014 District Plan for Student Learning reflects the principles of social responsibility contained within the BCPSSR. Though the Vancouver
School Board uses the term ‘social and emotional learning’ (SEL), its definition is based upon similar notions of social development as the BCPSSR. The VSB defines SEL as: (1) making ethical, constructive choices about personal and social behaviour, (2) forming positive relationships, working in teams, dealing effectively with conflict, (3) showing understanding and empathy for others, (4) managing emotions and behaviours to achieve one’s goals and (5) recognizing one’s emotions and values as well as one’s strengths and limitations (Vancouver School Board, 2012). These SEL concepts; understanding and relating to others from different cultures and backgrounds, problem solving in group situations, developing effective social relationships, and being principled, share many of the same aspects as the BCPSSR.

In the context of British Columbia, the Ministry of Education recognizes the value of social learning activities by explicitly including their relevance in the Integrated Resource Package (IRP) of each subject. For example the provincially prescribed curriculum for Geography 12 initially acknowledges that learning is a group process. Later it gives educators detailed information about the use of debate as an instructional practice and provides prescribed learning outcomes in the assessment model section that include group work, conferring with partners, class discussions and developing a consensus within a group.

Students do not learn alone but rather in collaboration with their teachers, in the company of their peers and with the support of their families (Schonert-Reichl, 2007; Zins, 2004). Schools are a place where students are given the opportunity to interact with other students and acquire the knowledge that their teachers and governing educational bodies have deemed relevant to their future prosperity. Students are able to practice social skills
through teacher-structured activities and through unstructured activities over recess and lunch. Teachers can use activities that allow students to develop relationships with their peers and are often called upon to help students settle differences of opinion. Social learning activities have the potential to reinforce academic knowledge.

Social learning opportunities are valued by the BC Ministry of Education and supported by the VSB’s Educational Philosophy, yet in high schools these opportunities may be limited by greater emphasis on content knowledge. Academic achievement is increasingly important to students who hope to succeed in a global economy that requires post-secondary education.

In high schools throughout British Columbia the tools for assessing academic achievement are largely left to the discretion of the classroom teacher. However, at specified grade levels in the subject areas of math, social studies, science and English language arts students are required to write a provincial exam. Provincial exams occur in English 12, Communications 12, Socials 11, Apprenticeship and Workplace Mathematics 10, Foundations of Mathematics and Pre-Calculus 10, Science 10, and English 10.

Educational professionals have questioned the impact of provincial exams on the instructional practices of teachers in British Columbia. For example, British Columbia had been a provincial leader in science education through the use of laboratory-based, conceptual science courses (Shindell, 2001). Since the re-introduction of provincial exams in 1984, science education has been negatively impacted by the ways in which provincial exams assess knowledge. In a 2006 BCTF magazine, Gordon Gore, a retired BC science and physics teachers, argues that, “more chalk and talk, plenty of practice in doing word problems, lots of time writing old tests ‘for practice’” [create an environment where]
laboratory work is not tested, so leave it out.” This statement expresses a perception that provincial exams emphasize test writing above discovering how physics works through experiments. Years later a similar message was voiced by the B.C. Science Teachers’ Provincial Specialist Association (BCScTA, 2009) in a survey of members’ opinions about the effects of the Science 10 provincial exam on students and teachers. The survey revealed that in addition to the Science 10 provincial exam having caused a significant decrease, or entire deletion, of lab activities in Science 10 classrooms, Science 10 students now rarely have the opportunity to do group work, research projects, make classroom presentations, take field trips, or explore local topics or current events (BCScTA, 2009). As a high school teacher, one of the researchers conducting this study remembers spending classroom time practising old exams. The looming presence of an end of year exam translated into a more lecture style approach to classroom learning and teaching. These accounts are indicative of a perception that provincial exams are influencing the types of learning activities teachers choose to facilitate in their classrooms.

A commitment to provincial exams may be inhibiting the willingness of teachers to utilize social learning activities in their classrooms. While the BC Education Plan states that teachers will have greater freedom in deciding how and when students will be assessed, it also reaffirms a commitment to provincial exams (BC Ministry of Education, 2011). Does an emphasis on testing contradict or serve as a barrier to the promotion of social learning? How can the Ministry of Education increase social learning opportunities such as teamwork and collaboration and cross-cultural understanding while utilizing a method of assessment that emphasizes individualized application of skills and knowledge?
Provincial exams account for twenty percent of a student’s final grade during grades 10 and 11 or forty percent of a student’s grade during grade 12. Because the provincial exams account for a large percent of a student’s academic record in a course, the research team believes that these exams are influential in shaping the method in which curricular content is delivered. Provincial exams do not encourage the use of social learning activities such as teamwork, peer learning, or communication skills beyond writing. Therefore, it is our belief that provincial exams are influencing teachers to divert instructional practices away from activities that could develop both social learning and academic achievement in tandem. This study will provide a snapshot of Vancouver high school teachers’ perceptions about how provincial exams influence the inclusion of social learning activities in provincially examinable subjects. When teaching courses that are assessed, in part, by provincial exams do teachers in Vancouver incorporate social learning opportunities?

**Research Purpose:**

The purpose of our research is to examine how provincial exams influence teachers’ instructional choices related to social learning activities. Our goal is to become more aware of how teachers implement social learning activities in courses with provincial exams and in courses without provincial exams. There is limited research to address the influence of provincial exams on teaching practices in British Columbia’s high schools. As current teachers, and potential administrators, we want to understand how assessment practices in the form of provincial exams impact social learning.

**Research Questions:**
1. What are the perspectives of secondary teachers about the kinds of social learning (communication, conflict management, collaboration, maintaining healthy relationships) that should be addressed in their respective courses?

2. What social learning activities do teachers implement when teaching a provincially examinable course?

3. What social learning activities do teachers implement when teaching a non-provincially examinable course?

4. What social learning opportunities and challenges do teachers encounter when implementing social learning activities in their courses?

5. What are the implications of the findings for provincial assessment policy?

CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

Our research team set out to conduct a study on the relationship between provincial exams and social learning opportunities in Vancouver schools. Literature on social learning pertaining to the secondary school level was particularly limited in comparison to that at the elementary school level. This discrepancy in research was highlighted in Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor and Schellinger's (2011) social-emotional learning (SEL) meta-analysis. Their study found only thirteen percent of research on SEL was conducted at the secondary level (Durlak et al., 2011). Through our research we have come to recognize the limited availability of academic literature concerning provincial exams and social learning in British Columbia.

The following review examines literature related to social learning, standardized testing, and the interconnections between them. Much of the literature found is based upon
studies in the United States with a narrow selection of research originating from the United Kingdom and Canada. There are limitations to the transferability of these findings to the context of British Columbia because of the different political systems, demographics, and resources spending structures. Our systematic review of literature is organized into the following sections: Test Culture, Importance of Social Learning, Social Learning beyond the Classroom, Impact of Provincial Exams on Teaching Practices, and Barriers to Implementation of Social Learning Activities.

**Test Culture**

In this section we review literature that speaks to the concept of testing as an accountability measure and how this practice has evolved.

**Accountability and the testing movement**

Accountability within the context of education is not new. However, accountability objectives (McEwen, 2005) and the ways in which they are measured have changed over time (Després, Kuhn, Ngitumpatse & Parent, 2013). Lindle and Cibulka (2006) suggest that development of accountability policies in the 1960's and 1970's in the United States was primarily concerned with equality. The expansion of civil rights and citizen participation were two significant platforms that influenced educational accountability movements.

The more recent accountability movement focuses on measuring performance through student achievement (English, 2006). According to Lindle & Cibulka (2006) it was the 1980's that saw accountability reform result in an increase in statewide testing programs in response to a perceived shortcoming in education. The 1983 publication of *A Nation at Risk* in the United States, which asserted that the American economy was failing behind that of other nations and the achievement gap between white students and
minority students was widening, escalated the debate over student achievement and triggered waves of local, state and federal reforms. The assumption was that students should be held accountable for performance and educators be held accountable for effective use of resources (English, 2006). This time period was characterized by a neo-liberal approach that emphasized efficiency, cost containment and the balancing of budgets in the public sector (Sattler, 2012). Although Canada had not placed as much emphasis on testing and accountability as the United States during this same time period, it did have provincial and national testing at various times (Sackney, 2007). For example, British Columbia has had grade 12 provincial exit examinations since the 1920’s with the exception of the years between 1974 to 1983 (Klinger, DeLuca & Miller, 2008; Hodgkinson, 1995). According to these authors, these examinations were used to fairly award scholarships and support provincial standards by attaching results to students’ academic grades in specific grades and courses. In 1974, an elected New Democratic government replaced the established examination systems with Provincial Learning Assessment Programs (PLAP) which assessed students in grades 4, 8 and 12. Unlike the results of present day provincial exams in B.C., the results of PLAP were not published but used internally to review curriculum content, teaching methodologies, pre-service and in-service training and to manage the school system (Fleming & Glegg, 2004).

The United States educational standards movement of the 1990’s emerged as an antidote to align a fragmented education system in terms of curriculum, standards, testing and professional development. Amidst finance pressures, and tough international competition, the U.S. systemic restructuring aimed to coordinate state and federal educational policies, specify learning goals and assessment measures and update an
outmoded form of school organizations (Floden, Goertz & O’Day, 1995). Standardized testing results revealed inconsistencies and offered alternative perceptions on how the U.S. education system was performing. Reform represented an attempt to bring more accountability to a perceived disjointed education system while embedding student assessment within a larger system of governance (English, 2006). The idea was that a new cohesive system centered on student assessment would result in higher student achievement. Similar to the United States, McEwen (1995) revealed discrepancies between student assessments and evaluation programs in Canada. In a 1994 survey reported in “Accountability in Education in Canada“, she noted that assessments done in Canadian provinces tended to vary in terms of subject matter tested, grades tested, how much of the final grade the test was worth, which provinces used exit exams for graduating students and which provinces implemented provincial assessment programs. Studies by McEwen (2005) and Després et al. (2013) indicate that by the 1993/94 school year Prince Edward Island and Northwest Territories were two jurisdictions without a provincial assessment program (McEwen, 2005; Després et al., 2013). As of 2008 all provinces and territories had standardized assessment programs, signaling an acceptance of standardized assessment (Klinger et al. 2008).

In the United States the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLBA) of 2002, mirrored a worldwide movement that has led to expectations for greater accountability and an increase in assessment and evaluation programs (McEwen, 1995). The NCLBA intensified the policy trend towards the use of standardized testing to mandate educational excellence (English, 2006). As governments move towards educational excellence as measured by standardized testing there have been concerns raised about the effect that standardized
testing might have with respect to a narrowing of the curriculum. Teachers might increasingly care about the content being tested and not as much about how or what they teach “since we can't measure what we care about, we start to care about what we can measure” (Westheimer, 2010 p. 5). Our research questions will explicitly examine this point by looking at what aspects of education teachers’ value in relation to the examination medium and content of provincial exam assessment.

**Present test culture**

Current literature acknowledges that standardized assessment can be used effectively to measure aspects of student achievement, establish accountability for teachers and school performance, and inform educators of instructional improvements and trends (Vogler & Virtue, 2007). The proliferation of standardized tests in recent years has profoundly affected educational policies, practices and perspectives (Roach 2014; Amrein & Berliner, 2003). Despres et al. (2013) suggest that test results are now more respectable, rigorous and trusted by the public as a means of establishing accountability over education quality than teacher’s own assessments. In a similar vein, Brown (1995), found that increased emphasis on test results were closely fused with an increased emphasis on strategies such as basic skills instruction and drill and recitation to assure student success (as cited in Moon, Brighton, Jarvis & Hall, 2003, p5). The weight given to test results by educators and the public varies (Misco, 2010).

The growing use of standardized testing is tightly coupled with public interest in how well schools perform with respect to student achievement (Weike, 1976; Zins et al., 2004; Fryer, 2008). In 2008, an independent public opinion firm revealed that seventy percent of British Columbian parents of school-aged children agree with province-wide
testing (Fryer, 2008). A 2010 Ontario study by Hart and Livingston had similar results, as two-thirds of surveyed parents support standardized testing because they believe it makes the education system more accountable to taxpayers and parents. The importance of measurable achievement can be reflected in the increase in the number of parents who are willing to pay for independent evaluations of their children’s achievement in basic skills, as evidenced by the rise of private testing and tutoring centers (Haladyna, Haas, & Allison, 1998; Anderson, 1981). In the literature reviewed, two main factors affected the importance placed on test results by educators and the public: the connection between test performance and funding; and the publication of test results.

Because much of the research in this subject area was conducted in the United States we must acknowledge the role of funding as it can influence many educational decisions. While there is a wide variation from state to state regarding the implementation of standardized tests results (Misco, 2010), tests resulting from policies such as the No Child Left Behind Act as well as many statewide standardized tests are connected to levels of funding. For example Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Maryland, Mississippi, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, South Carolina Tennessee and Texas have all received monetary awards for high-performance or improving school assessment results (Amrein & Berliner, 2003). The connection of test results to funding can create a strong incentive for schools to adopt curricular learning that is reflective of standardized testing (Abrams, Pedulla, Madaus, 2003; Roach, 2014).

Since 1998, the Fraser Institute has used provincial exams results to publically rank schools in British Columbia (Fraser Institute, 2014). While test performance in British Columbia is not directly connected to levels of funding, the publication of Fraser Institute’s
rankings can influence school enrollment in British Columbia and this can have an impact on the funding a school receives. If a particular school receives a high ranking parents may be more inclined to send their children to that school. Since schools are funded by the provincial government on a per student basis, a change in student enrolment will have a direct effect on school funding. Increasing enrolment leads to greater funding for the school district. Furthermore, schools that are highly ranked by the Fraser Institute are often attractive to potential international students. The large tuition fees that these students pay has a positive impact on school funding as well. In 2011/12, international student tuition, which averages just over $12,000 per year for international students, generated $139M in the public system and an additional estimate of $29M for independent schools. School districts utilize revenue earned by international programs to support international students and to supplement operating funds, and these additional funds are deployed in support of a variety of services for resident students (BC Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 4).

The publication of school rankings subjects a school to similar kinds of performance pressures found in some school districts in the United States; therefore, the large body of research emerging from United States about test pressure is relevant to the BC context. Teachers and schools may alter their approaches to curriculum and instruction. In his 1994 study Moore stated that when test performance is publicized and creates a perceived need for improvement in school achievement there is often an impact on how teachers deliver assessment and the implementation of a statewide standardized test strongly influences teachers’ instructional efforts and curriculum. Moore concluded that 90 percent of teachers added test-related lessons to their curriculum and 70 percent of teachers eliminated topics to make more time for development of test related skills (Moore, 1994). Moore’s study
provides strong evidence that standardized tests and the publication of test scores can influence a teacher’s practice. Similarly, our study will attempt to examine whether or not teachers feel pressure to modify their teaching practices to accommodate BC’s mandated provincial exams.

Shepard and Bleim (1995) investigated elementary parents’ opinions of standardized tests compared to other forms of assessment to evaluate their child’s progress or judge the quality of a school. Their research revealed teachers often administered timed tests in math because it was the parents’ preferred method of assessment. In addition to parents expressing a need for normative data, four other findings surfaced: the approval of standardized testing did not imply disapproval of other assessments; parents trusted their teachers and had confidence in their professional judgement; a third grade parent is not going to respond in the same way as a high-school parent; and parents preferred standardized tests in mathematics because they believed, in math, there is only one correct answer (Shepard and Bleim, 1995). Shepard and Bleim’s research acknowledged that parents felt confident in their teachers’ professional judgment and that they did not disapprove of alternate forms of assessment, except in the area of mathematics where parents preferred standardized testing as a mode of assessment.

Throughout our study we will be gathering information from teachers who specialize in varying subject areas. This will give us an opportunity to analyze whether or not teachers who teach different subject areas have different attitudes surrounding standardized tests. However, the study will not address parents’ perspectives related to standardized testing.

By the year 2000, high standardized tests scores were considered a major goal of schooling and teachers’ attitudes towards standardized testing were forced to evolve
alongside the continuing quest for better schools and high achieving students (Moon et al. 2003). This recent shift in teachers’ perceptions is in stark contrast to the attitudes surrounding standardized tests administered prior to the educational reform movements of the 1970’s and 1980’s in the United States (Moon, et al., 2003). According to Goslin (1967), as cited in Moon et al. (2003), teachers at that time paid little attention to standardized tests. In Moore’s 1994 study of teachers’ use of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS), he found that approximately half of the teachers he surveyed reported feeling some form of pressure from their administrators to prepare students for the exam and to increase performance scores. Teacher pressure may intensify if they also feel a sense of responsibility to develop students’ social skills through collaborative exercises. It is important to recognize, however, that “teaching to the test is not a practice that, in the abstract, is good or bad [if] both the content of the instruction and the content of the test [are] related to educational objectives” (Mehrens & Kaminski, 1989, p. 14).

Our study will explore teacher beliefs around teaching practices as they prepare students for provincial exams. Specifically, we will look at how these exams do or do not influence a teacher’s’ instructional practice. According to Vogler (2005), there are two identified general methods or approaches to teaching: students-centered and teacher centered. SL emphasizes the use of a variety of student-centered instructional strategies, techniques and practices (Bear 2010). Group projects, role plays, debate and peer feedback are common examples of student-centered while a teacher-centered approach could consist of direct instruction, textbook based assignments and lecturing. Our research explores how exams might influence teachers’ decisions about the extent to which they incorporate SL activities in their instructional practices. Considerable literature indicates
that SL is important in a student’s education.

**Importance of Social Learning**

Within the reviewed literature we have identified a number of areas that speak to the importance of social learning. We explore the issues of success beyond the classroom including mental health, social justice, graduation and academic achievement.

**Social learning and workplace skills**

While authors do not dismiss the importance of academic knowledge, there is a greater emphasis being placed on social learning for success beyond the classroom. In many articles the skills associated with social learning fall under the slogan “21st Century skills.” The authors of *Education for life and work: Developing Transferring Knowledge and Skills in the 21st Century*, James W. Pellegrino and Margaret L. Hilton, maintain that enhancing students’ intrapersonal and interpersonal competencies optimally prepared students for work and life (Brint, Contreras, & Mathew, 2001; Pellegrino & Hilton, 2013). Pellegrino and Hilton (2013) refer to problem solving, critical thinking, communication, collaboration and self-management skills, as 21st Century skills. Greenhill (2010) brings further attention to this point in noting how the fundamental changes in the economy have reshaped workplaces and the nature of work itself. As the “economy based on manufacturing shifts to a service economy driven by information, knowledge, innovation and creativity,” employment opportunities underscore why education policies are teaching students to think “critically, solve problems, communicate, collaborate, find good information quickly, and use technology effectively (Greenhill, p. 6).” The positioning of social learning as 21st Century skills suggests that SL within the context of the classroom can transfer into adulthood and the workplace.
The prevalence of collaborative activities in adulthood and the workplace highlights the importance of providing cooperative learning opportunities in school (Brint et al., 2001). Weissberg and Cascarino indicate the lifelong relevancy of social learning and provide a definition of the associated skills:

Social and emotional learning involves the processes through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. (2013, p. 9)

Weissberg and Cascarino both support the idea that students do not stop utilizing social learning when they transition from school to the workplace. By the time students leave school and enter the workplace, employers expect that they will have these skills.

A common theme in the discussion of 21st Century learning skills is the need to apply these skills in culturally diverse settings (Dulak et al., 2011). The National Research Council of Canada (NRC) stated that in addition to being culturally literate and intellectually reflective, students with a strong academic foundation will be optimally prepared for work and life (as cited in Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013, p. 3). As such, the NRC is stating that schools need to provide students not only with academic content, but with the capacity to apply this knowledge in different settings and with different audiences.

According to a report from Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL), SL gives students the opportunity to: interact with diverse individuals and groups in socially skilled and respectful ways; practice positive, safe, and healthy behaviors; and contribute responsibly and ethically to their peers, family, school, and community (as cited in Weissberg & Cascarino 2013, p. 8).

The B.C. Education Plan emphasizes 21st Century learning skills by:

Placing greater emphasis on key competencies like self-reliance, critical thinking,
inquiry, creativity, problem solving, innovation, teamwork and collaboration, cross-cultural understanding, and technological literacy. We can also connect students more directly with the world outside of school, with increased focus on learning these skills across topic areas. (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2011, 4)

The BC Education Plan and proponents of 21st Century learning acknowledge the positive relationship between the use of social learning in the classroom and success in the world beyond. Developing both intrapersonal and interpersonal skills through learning engagement in the classroom is critical in being a good student, citizen and worker.

Literature surrounding 21st Century learning emphasizes a student’s future success in the workplace, which narrowly interprets the aims of education. Our interviews will use open-ended questions to allow teachers to explain what they think is the most valuable part of education. These responses will enable us to investigate the degree to which teachers might use SL activities to prepare students for the workplace and/or provide students with the skills necessary to be successful in all aspects of their lives.

Social Learning and Democratic Citizenship

Westheimer and Kahne (2004) describe three approaches to citizenship education, which they refer to as personally responsible citizenship; participatory citizenship; and justice oriented citizenship. These conceptions of citizenship contain a relatively distinct set of theoretical and curricular goals that are not cumulative. SL opportunities that promote communication, collaboration and maintaining positive relationships may not also enhance the skills necessary to develop participatory and social justice oriented citizens.

Social learning programs that seek to develop character by nurturing compassion, treating others with respect, being considerate of others and dealing peacefully with conflict, are closely aligned to a vision of citizenship that Westheimer and Kahne (2004)
refer to as the “personally responsible citizen.” The personally responsible citizen version, which receives the most attention from educators, places emphasis on individual character and behavior thereby distracting attention away from the analysis of the root causes of social problems and obscuring the need for collective initiatives (2004). A personally responsible citizen is one who attends to a problem without being prompted. For example they may take it upon themselves to deliver meals to homebound individuals, paint a mural over graffiti, plant flowers in a public area and volunteer at a local youth center.

According to Westheimer and Kahne (2004), a participatory citizen is one who actively participates in civic affairs and the social life of the community by taking on leadership positions. Educational program designs with this vision focus on teaching students how to plan and participate in organized events, run meetings and organize collective projects. Westheimer and Kahne compared young adults’ voting turn-out to the importance they placed on helping others. “In a very real sense, youth seem to be learning that citizenship does not require democratic government, politics, or even collective endeavors (p. 244).” Their findings speak to a concern for an exclusive focus on personally responsible citizenship in education that does not transfer skills, abilities or experiences to the other two versions of citizenship. Westheimer and Kahne would like to see schools focus on developing all three conceptions of citizenship.

Westheimer and Kahne’s (2004) third conception of citizenship, the justice-oriented citizen, is the least commonly pursued by educators. Proponents of this vision focus on the importance of social justice through educational programs that seek to prepare students’ abilities to critically analyze and address social issues at the root causes. Westheimer and Kahne’s research indicates that curriculum and education policies
designed to foster character education undermine efforts to prepare both participatory and justice-orientated citizens. By neglecting the latter two perspectives, SL educators may be reinforcing an individualistic notion of citizenship. Advocates of participatory and justice-oriented citizenship, “frequently complain that they are fighting an uphill battle,” with academic priorities and the emphasis on test scores limiting opportunities to learn about other roles of citizenship (p. 263).

The BC Education Plan’s notion of “21 century education” places greater emphasis on the individual learner with an impetus on career preparation and workplace competencies. It emphasizes the importance of self-management skills, self-reliance, critical thinking, innovation, problem solving, teamwork and collaboration, cross-cultural understanding, and technological literacy, which are workplace related competencies. In comparing this to Westheimer and Kahne’s (2004) work, we find that these learned technical abilities are designed for the workplace but are rooted in an interconnectedness with others that have the potential to nurture other roles of citizenship. These authors’ visions of citizenships can emerge through the BC. Education Plan if critical thinking, teamwork, collaboration and cross-cultural understanding are promoted in the classroom.

Social learning and mental health

Social learning opportunities that are characterized by collaborating, identifying and work towards a shared goal and maintaining positive relationships, can create a more welcoming and accepting learning environment for children and youth with mental health designations. A Canadian research update prepared for the British Columbia Ministry of Children and Family Development in 2002 noted that approximately 15 percent of children and youth, or 140,000 children, experience mental disorders causing significant distress
that impairs their functioning at home, at school, with peers, or in the community (Waddell, & Shepherd, 2002). The emergence of such SEL elements and targeted learning activities can enhance the quality of life of children and youth, and assists in preventing or reducing the risk of developing mental health-related concerns (Morrison & Peterson, 2013). This is particularly important considering that rates of clinically significant depression and anxiety in children are now five to eight times what they were in the 1950s (Gray, 2013; Caprara, Barbaranelli, Pastorelli & Bandura, 2000). A Canadian research study by Morrison & Peterson (2013) concluded that when explicit efforts are made to include SL elements into the curriculum and learning activities, a positive impact on students’ mental health was evidenced. Social learning, which includes students cooperating, helping and sharing, not only fosters mutually supportive social and intellectual relationships with peers, but also reduces vulnerability to depression and curbs engagement in transgressive conduct and other problem behaviours (Caprara et al., 2000; Alberta Health Services, 2013).

**Social learning, social justice, and bullying**

Individual schools may elect to promote social learning activities in response to bullying in schools (Bulach, 2002). Social learning can be an effective way to reduce the likelihood of bullying because it promotes skills, behaviours, attitudes and environmental factors that are incompatible with negative peer interaction. According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) and research by Durlak and colleagues on the impacts of enhancing students’ SL, bullying cannot flourish in a safe and caring learning environment (Durlak et al., 2011; CASEL, 2014). A safe and caring learning environment is characterized by supportive, positive relationships between teachers and students and among students, and an appreciation of difference.
Collectively these authors state that social learning can be an effective way to reduce bullying because it promotes the individual skills and attitudes necessary to create a safe and caring environment. Although Westheimer & Kahne (2004) would agree that SL practices should produce respectful, caring and helpful students, they also highlight the need for SL practices to focus on social justice. In other words, they encourage SL practices that go beyond the surface features of bullying to encourage students to address this social problem at its root. A justice-oriented element to SL students would encourage them to look critically at the problem beyond the individual bully to address both the causes and the needs of others and of society.

Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg and Walberg’s assert that SEL education involves “teaching children to be self-aware, socially cognizant, able to make responsible decisions, and competent in self-management and relationship-management skills” (2007 p. 6). Relating these competencies with the aforementioned conceptions of citizenship we find that the majority of SL literature begets personally responsible citizens. The literature frequently characterizes SL by having good character, being honest, responsible and compassionate, treating others with respect and abiding by the law. Additionally these same SEL also speak less directly to the participatory and justice oriented citizen that are earmarked by taking leadership positions within an organization and questioning and changing established systems or structures that reproduce patterns of injustice.

**Social learning and graduation rates**

Student retention, high school completion and graduation rates are also seen as direct beneficiaries of SL. For example, the Institution of Public Policy Research (IPPR), recommended improving teaching and learning in the areas of personal and social skills to
ensure greater access to post-compulsory education (Margo, Dixon, Pearce, & Reed, 2006; Dymnicki, Sambolt, & Kidron, 2013; Amrein & Berliner, 2003). A high school education should prepare students for postsecondary education or as an important step towards finding employment. Conversely, withdrawing early from school can reduce a person’s opportunities for work and earnings. Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, and Walberg (2004) and Elias, Zins, Graczyk, and Weissberg (2003) reported similar findings in stating that, “the best social learning approaches encourage application of social learning competencies to real-life situations, and combining social and service learning is an excellent way to utilize innovative instructional methodologies to engage students in the learning process” (Zins et al., 2004, p. 12), and that, “the benefit from promoting social learning competences through natural contexts and relationships occurs when learning is defined as children gaining knowledge to put to use in the real world” (Elias et al., 2003, p. 305).

Social learning, whether explicitly taught or facilitated through activities, provides students with the opportunities to develop skills needed in the workplace, address concerns related to mental-health, has the potential to mitigate bullying culture, and can motivate students to graduate from high school. Although social learning plays an important role in influencing these non-academic outcomes, it can also play a critical role in improving academic performance.

**Social learning and academic achievement**

“Achievement” is a term that is used by scholars in the fields of standardized testing and social learning and it requires a clear definition. Achievement is often associated with a quantitative measurement in the field of academic competence and is assumed to represent a student’s knowledge at a specific point (Haladya et al., 1998; Durlak, Weissberg,
The notion of achievement as measured through testing is often seen as being limited to lower-level school outcomes and may neglect to represent and appreciate the complex learning that is associated with social learning activities (Haladyna et al., 1998; Wentzel, 1993). A lower level problem could consist of a mathematical computation and a complex problem solving question being one that is rooted in an experience and considers opposing points of view.

Not only does social learning motivate students to succeed at school, but it may positively influence student achievement. A review of SL programs by Durlak et al. found that SL, “enhances connection to school, classroom behaviour, and academic achievement” (2011, p. 417). The same study used results from standardized reading and math achievement test scores, school grades in the form of GPA, and statewide tests of basic skills to discover an eleven percentile gain in academic performance due to the presence of social learning programs. These results are indicative of the connection between social learning and students’ achievement (Durlak et al., 2011). Building from this research, Malecki & Elliot’s (2002) longitudinal analysis on the influence of social behaviour on academic achievement provides further evidence of a positive correlation between social skills and academic achievement and, conversely, a negative correlation between problem behaviours and academic achievement. A study in Italy by Caprara, Barbaranelli, Pastorelli, Bandura, and Zimbardo (2000) as well as a study in the United States by Wentzel (1993) contribute to the consensus view that children’s prosocial behaviours are a better predictor of future academic achievement than present day standardized test scores.

The aforementioned findings support Wentzel’s assertions about the directional
relationship of academic achievement relative to peer relationships. Wentzel concedes that bidirectional and reciprocal relationships between SL and academic performance can exist, but, “the direction of effect is primarily from social competence to academic outcome” (1991, p. 15). She reinforces this point by stating that, “socially responsible behaviour can contribute to intellectual outcomes rather than the reverse” (1993, p. 362). Thus, social learning seems to address the interests of those who emphasize academic knowledge.

Pedagogy devoid of social learning activities could potentially hinder students’ achievement scores. A recent study in the United States showed that more than 96 percent of teachers stated that social learning is important in schools and enhances academic outcomes (Buchanan, Gueldner, Tran, & Merrell, 2009). Through the reviewed studies it can be seen that it is widely accepted amongst academics and educational professionals that there is a strong relationship between social learning and academic achievement.

Many scholars, educational professionals, and parents hesitate to encourage social learning as it is often viewed as incompatible and in competition for instructional time with academic learning:

Many stakeholders are concerned that focusing on SL may diminish or shortchange the development of academic outcomes. This perception is most likely because of the belief that time will be taken away from academics if social behaviors are given a prominent place in instruction. (Malecki & Elliot, 2002, 1)

Research on the matter, it appears, does not confirm this concern. Time spent on SL does not detract from academic learning; it enhances academic outcomes.

**Impact of Standardized Tests on Teaching Practices**

Certainly, testing has provided some benefits to educators. Moon cites research by Costigan; Herman, Abedi, & Golan; and Mehrens to indicate that tests have helped to define
instructional goals, develop formative information on students’ strengths and weaknesses, and identify gaps in instruction. However, the aforementioned benefits are overshadowed by the amount of instructional time lost to test preparation (Moon et al., 2003, p. 9).

Additionally, Moon et al. discuss how standardized tests restrict exploration of the curriculum because, “it leaves them unable to explore topics in the depth required to maximize student learning, or to allow students to pursue areas of scholarly interest” (2003, p. xxii). “Teachers and schools are under more pressure to do test prep and shift instructional priorities,” says Richard Rothstein, a research associate with the Economic Policy Institute (EPI) in Washington (Roach, 2014, p. 34). Teachers who spend the most time on test preparation because they are under the pressure of high stakes testing tend to use teacher-centered instructional practices, such as lecture, instead of student-centered approaches, such as discussion, role play, research papers, and cooperative learning (Vogler, 2005; Misco, 2010). Additionally, spending substantial class time reviewing old test problems without discussion, and in tandem with a lecture heavy lesson, may result in students collecting bits of low cognitive-level information (Vogler & Virtue, 2007). While this method of learning is regarded as the most time-efficient way to address the curriculum it gives little mention or regard for how this information impacts a wider community and does not promote a balance of cooperative interactions (Vogler & Virtue, 2007). Alternatively, Gerwin (2004) contends that teachers who traditionally implement a teacher-centered instructional practice prior to the introduction of standardized assessments, experience minimal changes when instructing.

**Social Learning and Pedagogical Practices**

When reviewing the literature surrounding teachers’ beliefs of SL, two significant themes
emerged: pedagogical priorities and classroom management.

**Pedagogical priorities**

Teachers who believe that students’ social development is important and malleable are more likely to devote time and commitment to creating and prioritizing social learning opportunities in the classroom. Social learning beliefs are key indicators of teachers’ perceptions and judgments, which in turn affect their teaching practices (Brackett et al., 2012). If teachers want students to possess social traits they admire most or deem both effective and essential, they need to teach them what those traits are and provide spaces for practice (Milson and Mehlig, 2002).

A teacher’s beliefs about the aims of education can greatly shape the delivery of curriculum in a classroom. Some teachers may feel that their job is to teach academics while others prioritize social learning. As stated earlier, the relationship between social learning and academic success is not necessarily exclusive. Whether or not a school emphasizes social learning (through mission statements, administrative priorities, or professional development), teachers may feel that SL is beyond their job description and may be unlikely to implement it with fidelity (Greenberg 2005; Schultz 2010). Still others may feel SL is an integral part of a well-rounded student, because students can learn broader social and emotional competencies such as interacting with diverse individuals and groups in socially skilled and respectful ways. They can practice positive, safe, and healthy behaviours, and contribute responsibly and ethically to their peers, family, school, and community (CASEL, 2013a, 2013b). Our study will use interviews to investigate how teachers in Vancouver high schools view the relationship between social learning and academic achievement and how this view impacts their delivery of curriculum.
Much of the research indicates that only in schools with high teacher implementation quality and high levels of administrative support over multiple years, did children demonstrate better than average social learning growth (Schultz, Ambike, Stapleton, Domitrovich, Schaeffer, & Bartels, 2010). The success of social learning is dependent on many factors. Our study employs interviews to explore how educators reflect on their own beliefs of pedagogical priorities, their efficacy in utilizing instructional techniques, and the school culture and administrative support essential for social learning.

**Classroom management**

It is possible that classroom behaviour influences teachers’ preference for students and, in the process, has an impact on the quality and type of instructional exchanges (Wentzel, 1993). Wentzel’s study indicates that students whose behaviour matches teachers’ expectations may enjoy better educational experiences and possibly higher academic achievement. Teachers’ ability to deliver curricular goals is compromised if students are inactive, a classroom is chaotic, or the material is not at the right developmental level (Elias et al., 2003). As a result of this belief teachers often use their instructional time to manage the classroom environment. A 2001 study that examined teacher-initiated interactions with students in American classrooms by Brint, Contreras and Mathews (2001) highlighted the difference between the social learning activities that are planned and those that are delivered. Their research findings showed that three-quarters of teachers’ messages to students were related to orderliness in the classroom, while the next most frequent, one-seventh had to do with effort. In two-fifths of the classrooms visited effort was the only message (Brint et al., 2001). Inferring from Brint’s study, teachers often see order and organization in the classroom as not only necessary to
learning but also as learning itself. With such a belief about classroom management, social learning becomes less about discovering how students explore their individuality within society and more about matching their behaviour to the expectations of people in authority. We will explore teacher responses to investigate the methods of instruction used to facilitate learning. Further studies could be conducted to investigate how teachers use classroom management to reflect their values of learning.

**Social Learning through instructional practices**

Small-group tasks allow students a chance to build both the interpersonal and intrapersonal skills they need for life success as well as success in all kinds of academic circumstances (Ferretti, MacArthur, & Okolo, 2001). Group work is recognized as a valuable tool for students to develop and practice social learning skills. Through group tasks students can receive support from their peers rather than the teacher and this can allow students to develop leadership and communication skills. While group projects can invoke rote procedures geared toward task completion, they can also be used as an opportunity to engage and promote critical thinking and develop appreciation for individual differences. Students do not learn alone but rather in collaboration with their teachers, in the company of their peers and with the support of their families (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2007; Zins et al., 2004). Students need a balance of relationships between teachers, peers, and parents.

While there is evidence to support the multiple benefits to group work and collaborative learning, there are limitations to its successful implementation within the classroom. The effectiveness of group work is dependent upon a teacher’s ability to facilitate discussion and provide an environment where students have to depend on each
other and work together in a cooperative spirit while recognizing that they each have
different talents and come from a range of backgrounds, and cultures (Brint et al., 2001).

Successful participation in group activities needs to be inclusive of diverse student
personalities and values. Often social learning traits valued by one community group may
differ from those valued by citizens of another community. For instance, self-assertion,
willfulness, modesty, silence, humility and shyness may be misread as undesirable traits
that run counter to the teacher’s notion of appropriate levels of social development and
engagement (Stickney, 2010). What a teacher perceives as silence could represent a mode
of communication, stubbornness, confusion or it may signal shyness, deep thought or
humility. For other students, withdrawing from verbal participation in a discussion group
may occur because it is viewed as contradictory to the habitus of another group’s culture
(Arnot, Evans, Reay, David & Miriam, 2004).

Students engaged in collaborative tasks can capitalize on each other’s collective
knowledge, talents and perspectives. Adversely, teaching to the test may discourage
students from becoming lifelong learners because they are drilled and “taught how to find
test clues,” a skill which has little transferability outside of school (Wright 2009, p. 119).

Potential Barriers to Implementation of Social learning Activities:

Our review of literature revealed a number of potential barriers preventing teachers
from creating social learning opportunities in the classroom. We will not comment
extensively on each of the barriers to SL but rather give an overview as identified in
literature. The importance of the following issues must be emphasized but deserve far
more discussion than can be provided here.
Measurability

Teachers are less apt to utilize social learning because it may lack clarity (Elias, Zins, Graczyk, & Weissberg, 2003), immediate results (Meidl & Meidl, 2011) or assessment accountability (Schonert-Reichl & Hymel 2007). Conversely, content knowledge can be easier to teach, is often positioned as more important, and gets greater focus and attention, as evidenced by accountability systems on standardized tests. If teachers feel pressure to focus on standardized test outcomes, they may be less inclined to incorporate social learning activities into their teaching practice. Our study will use surveys and interviews to discover if there are differences in the use of social learning when teachers teach a subject with a provincial exam and, if so, why.

Professional development in social learning

Teacher training, professional development and ongoing support are needed for effective implementation of SL activities. Cooperative learning tasks, group projects, and whole class discussions are dependent on teachers for their design, implementation, and continuation. Those expected to deliver SL or expand on existing SL practices need to receive sufficient preparation and ongoing training and professional support to help them develop the necessary attitudes and skills to carry out their responsibilities successfully. This is of particular concern as the quality of lesson delivery by a teacher impacts the quality of the program implementation (Schultz et al., 2010; Brackett et al., 2012). Our research team will use a survey and interviews to address the level of support teachers feel from administrators, the school culture (via mission statements), and professional development opportunities related to SL.
Lack of Administrative Support

Administrators often feel that choosing anything other than the vigorous pursuit of academic excellence puts their jobs at risk (Elias et al., 2003). This can be problematic to the pursuit of SL initiatives, especially if SL and academics are viewed as separate entities and are not given equal time or considered to be of the same importance (Schultz et al., 2010; Brackett et al., 2012). Schultz et al.’s research suggests that teachers place high value on the priorities of their administrators. As such, administrators’ values regarding the aims of education can greatly influence a school’s teaching staff and unless the school administrators play an active role in SL initiatives, teachers may simply pay lip service to SL tasks. It is important for school administration to recognize that different levels of effort are required to deliver, administer, and to continue SL opportunities. Specifically, financial and human resource management need be considered early in the planning process (Elias et al.).

A school needs to establish a culture and a space whereby teachers have the capacity to share ideas around the implementation of SL (Elias et al., 2003). Teachers require preparation, support and time to facilitate SL opportunities. In addition to the quality and quantity of training that is crucial for program implementation (Schultz et al., 2010), teachers also need to believe that their efforts can improve education (Brousseau, B. A., Book, C., & Byers, J. L., 1988; Elias et al., 2004).

School administrators can play a key role in supporting teachers’ perceptions about, and capacity to enact, social learning. Teachers’ beliefs, confidence, and perceived self-competence are vital aspects for SL success. Educators who strongly recognize that social learning is an integral part of schooling may need to have courage to follow their
convictions if they feel or see no visible supports, or do not have the time needed to cultivate this type of learning. Teachers need to believe that social learning is important for student success (Schultz et al., 2010).

CHAPTER THREE
METHODS

Research was carried out in two phases: a survey for all participants and an optional interview for which we selected five participants.

Andres (2012) points out, using a variety of methods of data collection helped paint a more detailed picture of the context of the data. With this in mind our research design used a mix of quantitative and qualitative research methods. Our quantitative research consisted of an online survey. This survey provided us with data regarding teachers’ values, attitudes and opinions about social learning and provincial exams. After collecting the data generated from our survey we began our qualitative research in the form of semi-structured interviews. Using a semi-structured interview allowed us to ask questions specifically pertaining to our research topic, but at the same time allowed the interviewee a great deal of leeway in deciding how to reply (Bryman et al, 2012).

The research used a mixed-method approach because a quantitative approach or a qualitative approach, by itself, is inadequate to develop multiple perspectives and a fulsome understanding about our research topic. Qualitative research and quantitative research provide different pictures and each has its strengths and limitations (Creswell, 2010). A quantitative phase is weak in understanding a setting or context. A qualitative phase contains a potential weakness in interpretations made by a researcher. The strength
of one method may offset the weaknesses of the other. Our quantitative survey captured information from a larger pool of participants and gave us a general understanding of how teachers incorporate social learning into their classrooms and how provincial exams influence the learning activities selected by teachers. Our qualitative interview allowed us to explore a small number of participants’ perspectives in greater depth. It provided deeper insights into the possible influences provincial exams have on the learning activities selected by high school teachers.

The study used an inductive approach to conduct research. An inductive approach to qualitative research as defined by Bryman, Bell, & Teevan involves collecting field research and then developing theories and concepts from it (2012). A survey allowed us to reach a large number of participants and increase the data available to us about teacher perspectives on social learning and provincial exams. Although we had general research questions to guide our research, we had not established hypotheses for testing, which is indicative of a more deductive approach.

In addition to the data generated from the survey, interviews provided further details about how teachers value and incorporate social learning in their classrooms as well as the influence of provincial exams. Our interviews used open-ended questions to encourage teachers to explain their thoughts about the most valuable aspect of education, the influences of provincial exams. Participants were encouraged to describe their perspectives, speak to specific experiences and to explore their meaning (Seidman, 2013).

In analyzing the interviews for recurring themes and patterns regarding the relationship between social learning, provincial exams and teachers instructional practices, all interviews were coded. Some coded responses came directly from the interview script.
questions. For example, question four asked participants if they thought SL within the classroom was a valuable part of high school education? In addition to specific questions pertaining to the aforementioned relationships, further codes were highlighted throughout the transcribed interview. The analysis of interview data occurred throughout the data collection process. Coded data was collected, counted and assembled into categories (Lecompte 2000). The category descriptions included themes that viewed SL as a means to constrain or enhance provincial exams.

We used thematic coding to explore themes identified by the research questions and additional themes that emerged in the data, thus taking a more inductive approach to research (Thomas, 2006). Finding these themes, as described by Lecompte (2000), consisted of multiple sifts and sorts of the interview data to identify items that were frequently stated by interview participants. Once the initial items were identified, they were collapsed into categories. These items and categories were then compiled and compared before any initial hunches about relationship between categories emerged.

After all three research team members generated categorical systems; these categories were then discussed and adjusted. The aim of this step was to guard against researcher bias (Burnard, 1991).

**Setting**

The Vancouver School Board (VSB) is an urban and multicultural school district that includes some of the most affluent and impoverished urban neighborhoods in the country. It is the second largest school district in British Columbia and employs approximately 3100 full time teachers. The VSB is made up of 18 secondary schools, 92 elementary schools and 16 elementary annexes. It consists of 26,000 secondary school students and 29,000
elementary school students with a total annual enrolment of approximately 54,000 students. The Vancouver School Board is among the most diverse public school systems in Canada. According to its website 25% of its Kindergarten to Grade 12 students are designated ESL and 60% of its students speak a language other than English at home. There have been 126 languages identified within VSB schools. Additionally, throughout the VSB there are 2000 self-identified aboriginal students representing 600 bands and nations (Vancouver School Board. (n.d.). Retrieved December 1, 2014, from http://www.vsb.bc.ca/).

Participants

Participation in our study was open to grade 8 - 12 teachers who teach in the subject areas of Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, and English Language Arts in the Vancouver School Board. Participants were limited to these inclusion criteria because our research is specifically looking at subjects that involve a mandatory provincial exam. While we recognized there are no provincial exams in grade 8 and 9 courses, some of these teachers could have taught provincially examinable courses, therefore it was important to include them.

Our research consists of two different phases of data collection and required recruitment of two groups of participants. Our first phase of participant recruitment invited all grade 8-12 teachers in the VSB to participate in an online survey. Targeting a large population captured a broad snapshot of teachers’ values and experiences with respect to social learning and provincial exams.

The first phase of participant recruitment commenced upon approval of our research proposal by the Vancouver School Board and the University of British Columbia.
(UBC). First, we emailed a letter of invitation as well as a participant consent form to all high school principals within the VSB and requested that they forward these documents via email to all teachers that meet our inclusion criteria. The letter of invitation and the participant consent form contained contact information for the research team as well as information about the purpose of our research, details about participant involvement, confidentiality, data storage and participant consent.

Embedded within the letter of invitation was a hyperlink to our online survey. The survey took approximately 10 minutes for participants to complete. In accordance with the participant consent form, consent to participate in our study was granted when the participant completed the online survey.

The second phase of data collection required the recruitment of survey participants to take part in a follow-up interview. As indicated in the letter of invitation, teachers who were interested in participating in a follow-up interview returned a copy of the signed consent form indicating what subject area and grade level they teach and providing contact information. Once we had received the completed consent forms, five participants were selected to take part in the interview process. The research team did not have to seek a balance of those who taught provincially examinable and non-provincially examinable courses because the number of participants did not exceed six. Participants were contacted to arrange an interview time, date and location.

**Data Collection**

Our study required that we conduct two different phases of data collection. Our first phase of data collection was an online survey and our second phase consisted of interviews.
Our online survey asked eleven Likert scale questions and six additional closed questions. The survey gathered information pertaining to the participants’ attitudes, values and experience with respect to social learning. Additionally, the survey gathered information about the courses participants taught, the type of social learning activities the participants used in the classroom, and whether or not these activities changed when participants are teaching a course with a provincial exam compared to a course with no provincial exam. Our survey assisted us in answering research questions 1, 2 and 3 as outlined in the “Research Questions” section on page 5.

Using a Likert scale is one of the most common ways to investigate participant attitudes (Bryman et al., 2014). With this in mind our research team decided to use a Likert scale to gather information pertaining to our participants’ attitudes and values on social learning. The Likert scale we have designed is a 5-point scale that ranges from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”. The middle position of our scale is “neutral” to allow our participants the opportunity to indicate neutrality on any particular item (Bryman et al., 2014). While scales with more points are considered slightly more reliable, our aim was to craft a study that was more considerate of people’s time (Dawes, 2008).

The survey was completed online through FluidSurveys website at http://www.fluidsurveys.com. Participants were provided with a link to the survey and completed the survey at their convenience within two weeks of receiving the initial letter of invitation. After two weeks the research team closed the survey in order to start phase two of our data collection process.

The second phase of data was collected through the use of a semi-structured interview. For this interview we had set up a general structure and decided in advance on
11 open-ended questions to be asked. However, it was important to note that semi-structured interviewing is a flexible technique and the person being interviewed has a certain degree of freedom in what to talk about, how much to say, and how to express it (Drever, 1995). A semi-structured interview allowed for follow-up questions and probes to be asked to increase the richness and detail of interviewee responses (Marshall and Rossman, 2011). The interviews were conducted at the participant’s school. Each interview took approximately twenty five minutes to complete. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed by the interviewer. Before any interview data was used in the study a copy of the transcript was provided to the participants. They were asked to review the interview transcript and to check that it accurately reflected their responses.

Data Analysis

The two phases of data collection required analysis of two different sets of data. Analysis of the data collected from our online survey commenced when the survey closed (two weeks after our initial letter of invitation had been sent out). Data collected from our survey was organized to address research questions 1, 2 and 3 as outlined on page 5. Data analysis of each interview began after we received confirmation from the interviewee that the interview transcript accurately reflected their responses. Data collected from our interviews were used to address all five of our research questions.

The survey data was initially organized to present a snapshot of how many participants taught within each subject area of interest (math, science, English and social studies) as well as how many participants taught each course within a particular subject area. Reports were then constructed to compare subject areas to the number of SL activities used, the frequency of SL activities used, and whether or not more or less SL
activities were used when teachers taught a provincially examinable course. Finally, we constructed reports that provided insights into individual teachers perceived level of support of social learning from their school administration as well as how confident teachers felt in their ability to implement SL activities into their teaching practice.

Interview transcripts were analyzed for emerging themes and recurring patterns and were then coded using six overarching themes: value placed on SL, value placed on provincial exams, examples and defining social learning, pressures on provincial exams, provincial exam impacts and challenges to implementing social learning. Data collected from the interviews were used in conjunction with the data collected from our survey and are discussed in detail in the finding section of our report.

Ethics

Before conducting the research our proposal was submitted to UBC’s Behavioral Research Ethics Board for ethics review. We understand that informed consent, confidentiality, and protection of identities are paramount in reducing risks to all participants and we have addressed these concerns.

To obtain informed consent we created a participant consent form that was emailed to participants in conjunction with our letter of invitation. To ensure there was no external pressure from the research team these two documents were emailed to potential participants via their school administrators. The consent form explained the purpose of the study and provided information pertaining to the research procedure. Furthermore, it provided potential participants with an approximation of the time commitments required to complete the survey as well as the interview if selected. Finally, it informed participants about confidentiality and data storage. The participant consent form was used to obtain
informed consent for both our survey and semi-structured interviews. The form explicitly stated that by completing the online survey, participants consented to participate in our study. If participants wished to take part in the follow up interview they provided additional consent by completing the form and sent it to the research team either by mail or email. It was made clear in the consent form that participants could withdraw from the study at any given time without facing repercussions.

With respect to the survey, we have addressed issues of confidentiality by structuring it to exclude identifiers such as name, work location, and age. The only identifiers that the survey collected were gender and courses taught in the 2014/2015 school year; however, data were aggregated and individual participants were not identified. It is important to note that all surveys were completed through fluidsurveys.com. At the time of this research, SurveyMonkey acquired FluidSurvey. SurveyMonkey is a host web survey company located in the USA; and as such it is subject to U.S. laws. Therefore, we informed survey participants that data they provide in the survey using this platform may be sent outside of Canadian borders. This may increase the risk of disclosure of information because the laws in other countries dealing with protection of personal information may not be as strict as in Canada. This survey did not ask for personal identifiers or any information that may be used to identify participants. At the conclusion of the project the fluidsurveys.com account was closed and all information was deleted.

All interview data were completely confidential. Before the interviews were conducted participants were provided with a copy of the interview questions to help them prepare their responses. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. A copy of the transcribed interview was provided to the participant in order to ensure accuracy of their
responses and to notify us if there was any information that may potentially identify them. Any personal information that may identify the subject was removed from the transcripts and subsequently removed from the study. There may be a possibility that a participant used a learning activity that is unique to their class and may be identifiable by others. Interview participants were made aware of this in the consent form. Interview participants were given pseudonyms to ensure that their identity is protected. An electronic version of all data collected, including audio files, will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the research supervisor's office for five years.

At the conclusion of the study, results were publicly presented to senior management in the Vancouver School Board and research participants were invited to attend this presentation. A report was made available to all of those who took part in or supported our research. A summary of the completed report was sent to the Learning Services Department at Vancouver School Board.

Social Position and Reflexivity

Our research team is composed of two elementary school teachers and one high school teacher. We are all full-time teachers and part-time students in the Masters of Education in Educational Administration and Leadership at the University of British Columbia. All of us are from middle class backgrounds, and are multi-generational Canadians, Caucasian and English speaking males. These characteristics have made us part of the dominant group of Canadian society and has offered little in the way of exposure to barriers to success as experienced by minority groups. We also recognize that as native English speakers our communication abilities have influenced our values around the importance of social learning: We have been able to use our social skills and
communication skills to develop relationships with peers and establish personal and professional networks to enhance our opportunities for success.

Research findings will be shaped by the social context in which our relationships with participants are constructed. Finlay (2002) states that it is important for researchers and participants to share a common language in the terms used in the study. To address these issues we have: created a definition for social learning to provide participants with a common language to connect to social learning activities; incorporated interviews into the research to allow participants to provide context and depth to survey responses; and engaged in a process of reflexivity to disclose how our experiences have shaped our own interpretations of social learning and provincial exams.

The reader is entitled to know about our values regarding provincial exams and social learning, as they may impact the way we collect and interpret data (Turnbull, 1973, as cited by Bryman, et. al 2012). By engaging in a process of reflexivity, we hope to empower the reader to assess how our perspectives may have influenced our study.

As teachers we regard social learning as equally important as academic learning. Our collective experiences are such that the development of students’ social capacities has been part of our approach to education; that is, we feel that in addition to academic knowledge, the development of students’ abilities to socialize with their peers, share knowledge, and apply understanding outside of the classroom are fundamental aims of education. Each of our teaching philosophies is centered on developing positive relationships with students. Through these relationships we are able to model how students can interact with others to develop various forms of communication, conflict-
management, collaboration to identify and work towards a shared goal, and maintenance of positive relationships.

When comparing our teaching experiences, we have found that elementary schools have placed a greater importance on social learning than high schools. Elementary teachers devote more time to explicitly addressing social learning through activity design or discussion. They spend considerably more time communicating with parents about students’ social development than high school teachers do. Examples of this imbalance was evident in the amount of time Rob and Roland have spent working with their elementary students to facilitate group participation, conflict management skills, and activities to create and sustain positive relationships with others. As a high school teacher, Tom has found that his teaching efforts in academic subjects have been more focused on ensuring his students understand the core content, as reflected through Prescribed Learning Outcomes. Though he recognizes this style of teaching may enable students to meet the academic standards required by post-secondary education institutions, it is not conducive to incorporating social learning activities. Tom's perception of the role of high school teachers is supported by Leming’s (1997) statement that high school teachers become subject area specialists and move away from the culture of social learning emphasized in elementary classrooms.

When comparing our experiences we question why high schools have a marked difference in the importance of students’ social learning opportunities: Is there an assumption that students’ social competencies are fully developed by the time they reach high school? Has the British Columbia Ministry of Education designed the curriculum to
purposefully address academic content acquisition in tandem with social skills development?

The research team has a proclivity towards encouraging students to develop social skills in addition to academic knowledge. Families in the Vancouver School Board may not share this perspective and they may prefer that teachers emphasize academic understanding rather than social learning. The researchers have all had experiences with parents who value academic achievement above all other forms of learning. The researchers are aware that participants may share this experience and parental pressure may be enough in some circumstances for teachers to modify the selection of teaching activities to accommodate parent demand.

While elementary students do not write provincial exams, they take part in Foundational Skills Assessments (FSAs). The FSAs assess students in Grade 4 and Grade 7 in mathematics, writing, and reading comprehension. FSAs and provincial exams use similar methods to assess students’ understandings through multiple choice answers and written responses. Because the results of the FSA are made public and are frequently used to compare schools some parents are concerned about a school’s performance on these tests. As such, Rob and Roland understand how teachers feel pressured to develop test taking strategies and teaching to content as assessed by a written exam.

As elementary school teachers Roland and Rob have noticed a greater emphasis placed on the development of students’ social learning when reporting to parents. Tom has observed that parents typically become more concerned with students’ academic achievement as students near graduation from high school. Our survey allowed teachers to indicate whether they feel pressure to have students score well on provincial exams.
(survey question 8) and our interview was able to follow up about the source and nature of this pressure.

**Delimitations and Limitations**

The study examined teachers in high school subject areas with a provincial exam in Vancouver. High schools have been selected because provincial exams that affect graduation do not occur at the elementary level. We have selected the Vancouver School Board as the location of our research because it offers a large pool of prospective participants, it services a large student population within a wide range of demographics, and it is geographically accessible to the research team. Our research study must be kept manageable and achievable within time allotted for completion of the capstone project within our Masters of Education program.

We have limited our interviews to a maximum of six in order to stay within the time frame given to complete the study. In contrast, an online survey is accessible to a larger number of participants and the use of Likert scale responses reduced the time commitment asked of participants. By increasing accessibility and reducing time commitments through a survey we aimed to increase the response rate. Using a large participant population for our survey should have enabled us to get a broad snapshot about how provincial exams may impact social learning across the Vancouver School Board.

The research team acknowledges that students’ opportunities to engage in social learning may be limited by factors such as language. The Vancouver School Board services a population of students where 60% of those students speak a language other than English in their home yet the language of instruction is normally English or French, in the case of French Immersion programs. A teacher’s decision to include social learning activities may
be influenced by the number of students in the classroom accessing English Language Learning resources due to potential communicative limitations for those students. The study was not designed specifically to take this into consideration; however, teachers may raise this issue during the interviews.

Our study is also taking for granted students’ abilities and desires to work in social settings. Students often require emotional-regulation capacities to work in social environments. As such, our research does not investigate how resource teachers or classroom teachers help students develop the skills and capacities necessary for social interaction.

Because our project was entitled “Provincial Exams and Social Learning in Vancouver High Schools” teachers who participated in the study may be teachers who are already inclined to use social learning activities in their practice or who have particular perspectives about the relationship between social learning and provincial exams. We attempted to present questions about provincial exams and social learning in non-evaluative terms in an attempt to reduce researcher bias.

Participants self-reported about their classroom learning activities and this may have led to an exaggeration of the importance teachers placed on social learning activities in their classroom. Because we wanted our survey to require minimal time commitments from participants to encourage greater participation, we elected not to include questions that would weed out participants who provide conflicting responses.

Students who participated in the social learning activities are well positioned to identify social learning activities used in the classroom and assess their value. However,
students have been omitted from this study due to time constraints and ethical considerations.

Our survey used Likert scale responses that may limit and possibly influence teachers’ selections of answers. While using a Likert scale allows for an ease of quantification and comparison of research data it may dissuade participants from identifying different approaches used to address social learning that we have not included, although space is provided for participants to do so.

**Research Limitations**

As noted previously, social learning programs vary greatly in their intended goals (e.g. violence reduction, health promotion, social skills improvement, drug awareness), methods of delivery (e.g. taught content, number of hours of input, delivery by school staff vs. external agencies) and component structure (e.g. curriculum, parents/community and/or ethos/environment) (Wigelsworth et al., 2012). Collectively, this creates mixed research results in the social learning literature, as schools choose social learning components and programs to fit into their existing structures and to meet their needs.

**CHAPTER FOUR**

**DATA ANALYSIS**

In order to address our research questions, as outlined in the purpose section of our study, our research team constructed and implemented an online survey as well as conducted five follow up interviews with high school teachers working in the Vancouver School Board (VSB). This chapter provides a detailed analysis of the data collected from the survey and interviews. It is organized into two sections: the first section describes the
survey and interview participants; the second section will present the findings of our survey and interview questions.

For the purpose of our research the term “subject” will refer to the field of study, such as chemistry, mathematics, English or social studies. The term “course” will refer to a specific subject and grade level, for example English 12, Apprenticeship & Workplace Math 10, or Communications 11.

Participants

Survey Participants. Through correspondence with school administrators we invited survey participants from a pool of approximately 2000 teachers working within the 18 secondary schools in Vancouver. Of the school administrators who were sent an invitation for participation one principal declined the opportunity to participate in our study. We have no way of knowing how many principals forwarded the invitation to teachers; however, three principals confirmed that they forwarded our invitation to their staff. We received twenty-one completed responses and another twelve incomplete surveys for a disappointingly low response rate of approximately 1%. The small sample size is non-representational of the population and gives significant weight to individual responses. While helpful insights can be gleaned from the data, we in no way suggest that the findings are generalizable to all secondary teachers in the VSB. Survey data reflect the views of those who participated.

All survey participants were high school teachers in the Vancouver School Board who taught within a subject area with a mandatory provincial exam in either grade 10, 11, or 12. The examinable subject areas in BC are English, math, social studies and science. Though it is possible that some participants may also teach a subject with no provincial
exams (for example, physical education) we did not ask for that information; the influence of teaching a provincially non-examinable subject was not within the scope of our study. Of the twenty-one participants who completed the online survey, seven were social studies teachers, three were science teachers, five were math teachers, five were English teachers and one taught both English and social studies.

**Interview Participants.** The follow-up interview was open to grade 8 - 12 teachers who taught in the examinable subject areas of mathematics, science, social studies, and English language arts. Five survey participants volunteered and all were interviewed.

Of the five interview participants, three were social studies teachers and two were English teachers. Three interviewees were male and two were female. Teaching experience ranged from 10 to 25 years, with an average of 20 years experience. Two participants completed their teacher training in the United States while three completed their training in British Columbia. Three interviewees have marked provincial exams in previous years. Each interview participant is profiled in further detail below.

Participant #1 is a male who has taught for 20 years at the Vancouver School Board. He completed his Bachelor of Education in Canada in secondary education and specialized in special education. Prior to becoming a teacher, Participant #1 completed his Bachelor of Arts in English in Canada. He has previously marked the English 12 provincial exam. Participant #1 is currently teaching Social Studies 8, 9, and 11. His survey responses indicated that he found social learning to be a valuable part of education and that he feels competent and supported by his administrators in utilizing strategies that incorporate SL into his teaching practice. He has attended two professional development sessions related
Participant #1 mentioned that he found the provincial exams to be a valuable part of teaching and that they did not greatly alter his instructional practices.

Participant #2 is a male who has taught for 15 years. He spent 8 years teaching abroad and has spent the last 7 years teaching with the Vancouver School Board. Participant #2 graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in History in the United States. He completed his Bachelor of Education and his Masters of Arts in Education in Canada. Participant #2 has never marked provincial exams. He is currently teaching Social Studies 11. His survey responses showed that he strongly valued social learning as a part of education. He believed that his administrators valued and supported social learning. Participant #2 had not attended any professional development in the past year addressing social learning and did not believe that he had adequate training in using social learning activities in his classroom. He indicated that provincial exams have an impact on the types of activities he utilizes in his classroom.

Participant #3 is a male who has taught for 25 years. He did his teacher training in Canada and has an academic background in Geography and History. He currently teaches Socials Studies 11. His survey responses indicated that he felt very strongly about the role of social learning in the value of education and in his teaching practice. Participant #3 agreed that he felt adequately trained in the area of social learning but that he had not attended any professional development pertaining to social learning in the past year. He strongly agreed that his administrative team values and supports social learning at his school. His responses indicated that provincial exams caused him to use fewer social learning activities in comparison to teaching courses without a provincial exam.
Participant #4 is a female who has taught for 10 years. She completed a Bachelor of Arts in English and her teacher training with a concurrent Masters of Education in the United States. She pursued a second Master's in public administration. She is currently teaching English 10 and 12. Her survey responses indicated that she strongly valued social learning as a part of education. She felt that her school’s administrative team supported and valued social learning. Participant #4 believed she had adequate training in utilizing social learning in her classroom and she had attended one professional development session regarding social learning in the past year. Through her survey response she indicated that provincial exams have no impact on the activities she selects for her classes.

Participant #5 is a female who has taught for approximately 20 years. She has spent all of those years with the Vancouver School Board except for one year in another district in BC. She completed her Bachelor of Education in Canada with a language and curriculum cohort and she completed a linguistics course to gain a background in English Language Learners (ELL). She has previously marked the English 10, English 12, and Communications 12 provincial exams. Participant #5 is currently teaching English 8, 9, and 12. Her survey responses indicated that she agreed that social learning was a valuable part of education. However, Participant #5 felt that her school was not pro-active in addressing social learning. She felt that she lacked adequate training in utilizing social learning practices and had attended one professional development session on social learning in the past year. She stated that provincial exams have an influence on the types of learning activities she utilizes in her classes.

Whereas survey data provided an overview of participants’ perspectives with respect to our research questions, interview data enabled us to explore the issues in
greater depth with a subsection of the survey participants. In presenting our findings, we have integrated interview data with survey data to help explicate patterns that emerged.

Findings

Our findings have been organized into five sections. The first section examines the frequency that teachers reported using social learning activities. By comparing the frequency of SL activities used in provincially examinable courses to non-provincially examinable courses we examine trends that may address to what extent, if any, provincial exams impact how often teachers use SL learning activities. The second section presents the variety of social learning activities that teachers reported using. Comparing the types of SL activities used in provincially examinable courses to non-provincially examinable courses enabled us to explore whether or not provincial exams have an impact on the types of SL activities that teachers implement in their classrooms. The third section considers teachers’ values surrounding SL as well as what factors influence these values. The fourth section investigates the extent provincial exams impact teachers’ selection of instructional activities. Finally, our fifth section considers the challenges participants faced when implementing SL activities.

How do provincial exams influence the frequency of social learning activities?

Analysis of our collected data illustrated that teachers used social learning activities at different frequencies. The following section provides a detailed account of the frequency of social learning activities being used in both provincially examinable courses and non-provincially examinable course between grade levels and subject areas.
Frequency of social learning activities by grade level. We analyzed whether grade levels influenced the use of social learning since it could be a factor other than provincial exams that influences the use of SL activities.

Table 1 – Frequency of Social Learning Activities by Grade Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade level</th>
<th># Of Teachers who taught each grade level</th>
<th>Less than once/month</th>
<th>Less than once every two weeks</th>
<th>Once per week</th>
<th>Twice per week</th>
<th>Three times per week</th>
<th>Four to five times per week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade 8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>XXX (22.2%)</td>
<td>XX (22.2%)</td>
<td>XXXXX (55.6%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Grade 9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>X (14.9%)</td>
<td>XXX (42.9%)</td>
<td>XX (28.6%)</td>
<td>X (14.3%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>X (8.3%)</td>
<td>XXX (25.0%)</td>
<td>XXX (25.0%)</td>
<td>XX (16.7%)</td>
<td>XX (16.7%)</td>
<td>X (8.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>XXX (18.2%)</td>
<td>XXXXX (27.3%)</td>
<td>XXXXX (36.4%)</td>
<td>XX (18.2%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>X (16.7%)</td>
<td>XXX (50.0%)</td>
<td>X (16.7%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 11/12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>XXX (75.0%)</td>
<td>X (25.0%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When we looked at trends in the frequency of SL activities compared to grade levels (Table 1) we noticed that the majority of responses within each grade, with the exception of grade 12, were in the range of “once per week” to “four to five times per week”.

The data indicate that most participants in the study incorporate SL activities in their classroom at least one time per week and their rationales for doing so varied. Participant #1 indicated that his use of social learning was an extension of his personality. Participant #5, who reported using less SL instructional practices in grades 8 and 9, believed that students lacked the necessary self-management skills, discipline, and maturity. Participant #5 also felt that when students gained these traits in their senior years, SL activities like small group discussions, peer feedback and debates were viewed by teachers as an effective platform to deliver academic content. From these insights it can be interpreted that some teachers view SL activities as being more appropriate to use once social learning skills have been previously developed by the student. This approach would see the role of teachers at the secondary level described as delivering more curriculum based content and designating the development of social learning to elementary schools.
**Comparing the frequency of social learning activities by subject area.** We compared frequency of SL activities by subject area to determine if certain subjects used more SL activities than others. We believe it is important to see whether or not the use of SL activities is influenced by subject area before examining the influence of provincial exams.

Table 2 provides a snapshot of how often SL activities are used within each subject area. Our data do suggest that the subject area in which our participants taught may influence the use of SL learning activities.

The data in Table 2 suggest that participants tend to use social learning activities with greater frequency when teaching social studies or science than in comparison to math or English. The lowest frequency was reported in math. Not one math teacher reported using social learning activities more than once a week. A possible explanation might be related to Shepard and Bleim’s (1995) research that concluded parents preferred standardized tests as a form of assessment in mathematics. If math teachers adhere to this sentiment it may be that they are more concerned about delivering content in “the one correct way,” and preparing students for tests than they are with exploring SL opportunities (Shepard and Bleim, 1995, pg. 30). We may infer then that math is a subject where teachers are not as likely to see SL as being as relevant as in social studies. Therefore, the influence of provincial exams in math would likely be less pronounced.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject Area</th>
<th># of courses /subject area</th>
<th>Less than once/month</th>
<th>Less than once every two weeks</th>
<th>Once per week</th>
<th>Twice per week</th>
<th>Three times per week</th>
<th>Four to five times per week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Studies</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>XXX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>XXXXXX</td>
<td>XXXXX</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>XXX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>XX</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>XXX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>XXX</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Teachers of math and science were not available to be interviewed so we are unable to gain further insight into their views on how provincial exams impact their implementation of SL activities.

Whereas math, science and social studies teachers were fairly consistent in their frequency responses, English, as a subject area, demonstrated more variance. Survey results showed that 57% of English teachers used SL less than once every two weeks while the other 43% used SL between two to five times per week. Given the small sample size, our results may be heavily influenced by the idiosyncrasies of individuals. However, we found that the two English teachers we interviewed reinforced the polarized results of our survey. Participant #4’s view on the role of social learning was summarized by her statement that:

> English is all about communication ... a lot of what we do in the classroom is discussion and a lot of the ways that we approach understanding the material that were trying to learn the skills that we're trying to develop is through interaction with peers in the classroom.

She felt that SL helped to reinforce students understanding of the course material and used the curriculum to explicitly facilitate peer interaction through communication. In contrast Participant #5 rarely used social learning in her classrooms and that was a result of her views of the maturity of the students:

> At the same time even though I told you there is no difference in how I approach 8 to 12, I do think that the junior grades would need, wouldn't mind [social learning]. Grade 9, that’s a nice place to put it, but grade 10, 11, 12, there’s a tendency to focus not on that.

Participant #5’s use of social learning in English is dependent on her perceptions of the students’ preparedness to use social learning independently. This proves significant
because her perception of her students and actual classes may vary year to year and therefore her survey and interview responses could vary as well.

**Frequency of social learning activities within subject areas.**

According to Table 3b SL instructional practices were used more often in Mathematics 8 and 9 when compared to Mathematics 11 and 12. A similar pattern is displayed in Science 8 and 9 as compared to Biology 11, 12 and Chemistry 11, 12.

Examining social studies and English in the same manner, we find a more even distribution of SL instructional practices throughout the grades. These responses indicate that there is a trend towards using fewer social learning activities when teaching courses in senior-level courses within math and science while English and social studies indicated a similar usage of SL activities regardless of grade.
Variety of social learning activities used

The information in Tables 4a and 4b presents the variety of social learning activities used by survey respondents. Table 4a includes responses from teachers in provincially examinable courses while Table 4b includes responses from teachers in non-provincially examinable courses.

Table 4a – Social Learning Activities Used in Provincially Examinable Courses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provincial Examinable Courses</th>
<th># Of Teachers /Course</th>
<th>Group Discussions</th>
<th>Group Projects</th>
<th>Presentations</th>
<th>Peer Feedback</th>
<th>Student Led Teaching</th>
<th>Games</th>
<th>Drama Activities</th>
<th>Debates</th>
<th>Labs</th>
<th>Online Blog</th>
<th>Field Trips</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English 10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>XXXX</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>XX</td>
<td>XX</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>XXXX</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English 12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>XXXX</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>XX</td>
<td>XX</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>XXXX</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Studies 11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>XXXXX</td>
<td>XXXXX</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>XXXX</td>
<td>XXXX</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics 10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A&amp;W Math 10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science 10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>XX</td>
<td>XX</td>
<td>XX</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4b – Social Learning Activities Used in Non-Provincially Examinable Courses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-Provincially Examinable Courses</th>
<th># Of Teachers /Course</th>
<th>Group Discussions</th>
<th>Group Projects</th>
<th>Presentations</th>
<th>Peer Feedback</th>
<th>Student Led Teaching</th>
<th>Games</th>
<th>Drama Activities</th>
<th>Debates</th>
<th>Labs</th>
<th>Online Blog</th>
<th>Field Trips</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English 9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>XX</td>
<td>XX</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English 11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>XX</td>
<td>XX</td>
<td>XX</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social studies 8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>XX</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Social studies 9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>XX</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Social studies 10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>XX</td>
<td>XX</td>
<td>XX</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Math 9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>XX</td>
<td>XX</td>
<td>XX</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Math 11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>A&amp;W Math 11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Math 12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pre-Cal 12</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science 9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biology 11/12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>XX</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemistry 11/12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Our survey data reported a wide variety in the types of SL activities used in the classroom. When we analyzed Table 4a and Table 4b we found there was little variance in the types of social learning activities used when teaching a provincially examinable or non-examinable courses. Provincial exams do not appear to influence the type of SL activities that teachers select. The only subject with a notable difference in the variety of SL activities
used was in math where the amount of activities used decreased as the grade level increased. Because of our small sample size we were unable to further explore this trend.

**Why Do Teachers Find Social Learning Valuable and What Influences Their Decisions?**

Responses to the survey and interview questions showed an overwhelmingly positive view of the role of social learning in education. In this section we present findings related to what teachers valued about social learning as a part of education and in their own practice.

**To what extent do teachers value social learning as a part of education and in their own practice?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Likert Statement</th>
<th>Number of Teachers</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Learning is a valuable part of education</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>XXX</td>
<td></td>
<td>XXXXXXXX</td>
<td>XXXXXXXX</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Learning is a valuable aspect in my teaching practice</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>XX</td>
<td>XXXXXXXX</td>
<td>XXXXXXXX</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Table 5, when asked if social learning was a valued part of education the majority of teachers either agreed or strongly agreed. When asked if social learning was a valuable part in their own teaching practice even more teachers agreed. From these data we can see that social learning is a valued part of a high school education.

Our interview data revealed varying reasons to why social learning held value for educators. The value teachers placed on social learning activities ranged from instrumental purposes such as delivering curriculum content, to developing and maintaining positive relationships.
Social Learning through content. As noted by one of our survey respondents, social learning can be an unplanned product when teaching curricular content. The respondent states, “My activities focus on curriculum with social learning as a by-product and therefore I don't initially consider them to be social learning activities." In this quote we see that social learning can organically take shape while exploring the curriculum. This inference is particularly meaningful as Brint, Contreras and Mathews’ (2001) research acknowledges how the stories and lessons within language arts and social studies classes recognize themes related to diversity, tolerance, the ways of life of different people and the importance of interpreting things from multiple points of view.

Student centered social learning. Participant #5 varied in her responses to using and valuing SL. She acknowledged the importance of knowing how to interact with other people, reading their body language and developing positive relationship in order to find and maintain a job, however, she did not believe that it was the responsibility of the teacher to develop these skills. “We kind of don’t really take responsibility for [SL] in high school I don’t think. We expect the students to come with a particular mindset and attitude.” Although all five interview respondents valued SL, Participant #5, and to a lesser degree Participant #2, would not go out of their way to use SL activities if students lacked a required minimum level skill, attitude and maturity. This implies that some participants value SL to a point, but ultimately prioritize the academic component of the curriculum. Simply said, “the what” is more important than “the how”.

Social Learning has Value Beyond the High School Classroom. Almost all interview participants brought up the applicability of SL to opportunities beyond the
classroom. Through our interviews we found that teachers’ rationale for valuing social learning could be placed into broad themes of workplace readiness and citizenship.

*Workplace Readiness.* Participant #5 stated that the most important aspect of a high school education was to prepare academically for post-secondary learning opportunities and work. When Participant #1 was asked to discuss why SL was important in his classroom he responded:

> We are social beings and so I think it has to... to be able to interact with one another and to be able to present ideas and to express one's self, I think is of primary importance in life. Because that’s me I’m a social being so there may well be students... that think it’s not that important but I would have a hard time understanding that.

Many of the teachers we interviewed acknowledged the importance of SL in developing skills that are applicable beyond the classroom. In these responses we see a similarity between the interviewee’s notions of social learning and Pellegrino and Hilton’s (2013) 21st Century learning skills -- problem solving, critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and self-management skills. The teachers interviewed wanted students to be able to meaningfully participate in the economy and to be able to solve relationship problems. Social learning activities can develop skills that are transferable beyond the classroom.

*Citizenship.* The idea of becoming good citizens and human beings was voiced by a number of participants. This notion centred on social awareness, group dynamics, communication and Community Participation.

*i) Social awareness.* Social awareness was seen as an extension of social learning in the classroom. Participant #2 mentioned the 1968 film entitled, “A Class Divided” and how it influenced his approach to teaching. The film focuses on a classroom activity that
simulates a social hierarchy wherein the students experience discrimination due to an unchangeable physical trait.

...The whole activity is social learning. The kids are discriminating against other kids and that’s where they get the learning. That’s the power of the experience. So for me, I love to try as best as I can to create those opportunities...

He further indicated that the socialization of students and their awareness of authority was an important function of high school. It might be prudent to point out that such activities have been subject to much debate related to ethics.

...I definitely don’t think the main part of high school is focused on content. I do think it is a far more intangible set of outcomes that come ideally from secondary education. I think we also see that concretely in elite private schools, um, in what kinds of things they are teaching the kids. And in you know, it’s you know, 'I bow down to power,' uh, 'I walk in a straight line,' 'I don’t act up,' you know? So in elite private schools... the hidden curriculum is much more explicit I think. And so I don’t think it’s that controversial to acknowledge that these social elements are that important but I just don’t think they’re necessarily emphasized within our policy.

Participant #2 is speaking to the importance of being aware of how society is structured. He viewed high schools as places where students can develop awareness of the various societal structures that may be reflected in schools or vice versa. This is especially evident when he comments about bowing down to power, walking in a straight line, and not acting up. Participant #2 found it important to address these issues within his teaching practice through the use of SL activities such as debates, class discussions, and modelling behaviours.

Not all participants were concerned with students addressing the root causes of social issues. When teaching Social Studies 10, Participant #3 used the curricular content of the electoral system of Canada as a way for students to become participatory citizens
through volunteer experience. This volunteering experience mattered to Participant #3, “ [...] because I want them to be participating, I want them to get involved in it. And that experience, I got some amazing feedback for that. The kids came back and it had opened up their minds to a whole other world out there.” Participants #2 and #3 felt that social learning helped develop students’ sense of the world and to critically analyze how society functions and their role within it. This is reflective of Westheimer and Kahne’s social justice conception of citizenships that asks educators to prepare students’ abilities to critically analyse and address social issues at the root causes.

Participants #2 and #3 emphasized social justice citizenship as described by Westheimer & Kahne. These participants suggest that students need opportunities to, “analyze and understand the interplay of social, economic, and political forces and to take part in projects through which they might develop skills and commitments for working collectively to improve society” (Westheimer & Kahne 2004, p3). Participant #2 and #3 are bringing attention to an idea of citizenship that requires students to examine and question government policies, politics and corporate responsibilities that can advance or hinder social problems.

ii) Group Dynamics. Teachers interviewed found that having students cope with group dynamics was a valuable element of social learning. Group dynamics were seen as something that would be important post-graduation, as students would not necessarily be working with their friends. Participant #3 elaborated on the value of teamwork:

Because a lot of their learning is in how to function within a society of diverse people and how to work together. Its why we do things like group work so that you know you may not like your group members but
you have to learn to learn at least how to get on, you know get along to achieve a certain goal. So social learning is extremely important.

Teachers often use group work as a means to have students work with different classmates to experience different group dynamics. The ability to manage conflict or to coordinate effort in a group were largely viewed as an extension of 21st Century learning in that the greatest application of teamwork was tied to economic participation. The positioning of group dynamics as 21st Century skills suggests that SL within the context of the classroom can transfer into adulthood and the workplace.

iii) Communication. Students’ abilities to communicate with others were seen as a high priority for three teachers we interviewed. While communication takes many forms, teachers were largely referring to oral communication. Participant #5 extended the discussion of communication to include non-verbal body language. The importance of communication was nicely summarized by Participant #1 who said that, “[...] to be able to interact with one another and to be able to present ideas and to express one’s self, I think is of primary importance in life.” Participant #5 indicated that communication, as developed through SL, could affect a student’s ability to obtain and maintain a job. She elaborated on this point to include the important role communication plays in fostering a relationship or marriage. Participant #1 and #5 referred to communication as a fundamental element of SL. They suggested that being able to communicate ideas and emotions allowed students to not only extend their learning, but was a valuable transferable skill once they had left high school.

iv) Community Participation. Several teachers identified SL activities as a medium to promote community participation. When elaborating on how SL was used in his classroom, Participant #3 shared:
This year we had the municipal elections, so [students] do a voting project where they go out and have to learn about the political parties, learn about what they do, how they function, all the rest of this. I also give, its a two parter, and one of the things is they can also skip a lot of the paperwork if they go out and volunteer for 6 hours for a political party. I don’t care who - they can even work for the enemy as far as I’m concerned - because I want them to be participating, I want them to get involved in it. And that experience, I got some amazing feedback from the kids [who] came back and it had opened up their minds to a whole other world out there ... [to] see how that works and it’s a fascinating experience. So I want to get them into the world as much as possible to understand how that stuff works.

Participant #3’s response touches on learning that takes place outside the classroom in an authentic context. When asked what he felt was the most valuable aspect of education, Participant #3 continued to highlight his idea of using SL as a means to further student’s engagement in society:

Its preparation for continued learning in the sense of whether that’s learning in an academic sense or non-academic sense. It gives them the ability to continue the learning process. It also provides me with security in the knowledge that we’re going to have participating citizens in the future.

This thought speaks to the idea of SL being a vehicle for academic achievement as well as developing connections and experiences with the larger community beyond the school where students learned the planning, problem solving and decision-making processes aimed at improving the social, political and cultural well being of the community. It could be suggested that his motivation to promote SL is fuelled in part by the social studies curriculum and a wish to promote participatory citizenship, as defined by Westheimer and Kahne (2004). In this response, and others, we see a focus on what Westheimer and Kahne refer to as participatory citizenship. When teaching his students about municipal or federal elections and political campaigns, Participant #3 encourages his students to get involved and volunteer. He stresses the importance of civic participation as students learn of the
important contributions they can make, while developing relationships, common understandings, trust, and collective commitments. His students learn that, “democracy is not a spectator sport” (Westheimer, 2010, p10). A teacher’s view on community and citizenship plays a significant role in shaping how he or she views the aims of education and the role social learning plays in that.

**Pedagogical competence and the role of professional development.** A teacher’s ability to implement SL into their teaching practice may be profoundly affected by his or her perceived level of confidence in addressing SL. If teachers don’t feel confident in their ability to incorporate SL activities into their practice it may be a factor contributing to the use or non-use of SL activities.

**Table 6a – Levels of Teacher Training in Social Learning**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel that I have adequate training in the area of social learning.</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>47.6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 6b – Professional Development in Social Learning in the Past Year**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Zero</th>
<th>One</th>
<th>Two</th>
<th>Three</th>
<th>Four or more</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In the past year the number of professional development events on social learning I have attended is:</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
<td>38.1%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6a and Table 6b provide a picture of how prepared participants feel with respect to implementing SL into their classrooms. Despite a high value placed on social learning (as indicated in Table 5) many teachers have not pursued social learning as an area of development.

Many participants agreed that social learning was a trainable area and that it would be of benefit to their teaching practice. As stated by Brint et al., the effectiveness of social
learning activities is dependent upon a teacher’s ability to implement them (2001).

Participant #1 felt that he could always use improvement in the area of social learning but that it would not be in the top three of his priorities for professional development as he felt it was already a strength of his. In contrast, Participant #5 felt that she would benefit from greater training to improve her confidence when using social learning in her classroom, “I think that I could be confident if I learned more about it. I think I could. I’d be interested.”

The beliefs about SL and teachers’ ability to deliver or model them can greatly shape the delivery of curriculum in a classroom. When asked about how to effectively use social learning Participant #1 responded, “So first of all I think modeling, so you model proper discussion... you model respect for one another's opinion.” Teachers who incorporate SL activities have to be comfortable modeling what social learning looks like.

Teachers who are expected to deliver SL or expand on existing SL practices need to receive sufficient preparation and ongoing professional support to help them develop the necessary attitudes and skills to carry out their responsibilities successfully. Participant #5 brought this to life when asked if she would value further professional development in the area of social learning, “… but only if its complex, deep, professional development. Not wishy-washy, you know, professional development that’s going to give me nothing that I don’t know before.” This response shows that teachers value new SL professional development when its underpinning values are explicit and explained, it transfers into their classroom and is aligned to school wide goals.

While teachers expressed a desire to learn new ideas in social learning and how it can be used in their practice, Participant #3 talked about how professional development can be used as “self-validation” and that it can be “overdone”. His referral to self-validation
refers to teachers choosing to participate in professional development that speaks to practices they already use rather than developing new skills or practices.

*Influence of administrative values and support.*

**Table 7 – Administrative Support in Social Learning**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My school’s administrative team values social learning.</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>52.4%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My school’s administrative team supports social learning.</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My school has an established mission statement that promotes social learning.</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>52.4%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teachers place high value on the priorities of their administrators (Schultz et al., 2010) and, because of this, administrators’ values regarding SL can greatly influence a school’s teaching staff. Teachers may incorporate SL to lesser or greater extents depending on their perceptions about the level of administrative support for SL. According to Table 7 participants believed that their school administrators supported SL. When asked to respond to the statement, “My school administrative team values SL,” 52% of teachers agreed, and 19% strongly agreed. The remaining 29% indicated neutrality. Furthermore, when participants were asked to respond to the statement, “My school administrative team supports SL,” 67% of teachers agreed, 14% strongly agreed and 19% indicated neutrality. The fact that no teachers responded negatively to these statements suggests that teachers feel SL is generally well supported by VSB administrators.

When elaborating on how social learning was situated within his school, Participant #3 highlighted the important role administrators play in giving meaning to a mission statement and encouraging a staff culture that values and incorporates social learning:
[Our mission statement] is meant to encourage participation, you know, active functioning within the school system and within the community. So we do, but again, our previous administration, the previous vice-principal was very active in that; he was actively trying to change our culture here. And it was, and to many degrees, it was a success.

Participant #3 stated that having active administrators will not always be enough to change the culture of a school but that administrators can be play a key role in encouraging staff to focus on the development and use of social learning activities amongst staff.

Scheduling decisions made by administrators also impact the perceived importance of some courses over others. When Participant #2 was asked about the frequency of SL instructional practices in a class with a provincial exam, he referred to the loss of teaching blocks as contributing factor. Participant #2 suggested that school administration indirectly placed more emphasis on courses with provincial exams via scheduling of special event decisions:

I would love to have more of [SL], but its, [...] although the provincial exams that makes a serious impact on my socials 11 class. But like, for my socials 10 class, well... I lose blocks because they've got an assembly. I lose blocks because um, another teacher needs to come in and let them know what course selections are going to be about for socials 11, I lose blocks because they, you know, a guest speaker has been brought in or whatever. And I can't predict that.

Participant #2 is suggesting that special events are more likely to interrupt non-examinable courses as opposed to examinable courses. School administrators’ decisions related to schedule interruptions could be interpreted by staff members that provincially examinable courses are given more priority, have less flexibility or have more curriculum content to cover than non-provincially examinable courses.

**The value of mission statements.** The degree to which a school encourages SL can often times be found in its mission statement. Our survey data indicated that 57% of
participants agreed or strongly agreed that their school’s mission statement promoted social learning, while those who disagreed accounted for 5% each. The remaining 38% of participants remained neutral. During interviews, many participants could not recall their school’s mission statement. When asked what if their school’s mission statement promoted social learning responses ranged from, Participant #1 stating, “Who cares,” to Participant #4’s confirmation. A few participants found that a mission statement without action from administrators gave little meaning to their practice. Participant #1 indicated that a mission statement needed to be something visual and meaningful to students and staff:

… We have a big huge thing by the office about respect and it looks at respect in the halls, respect in the classroom, respect in the lunchroom, and it covers everything so yes we do, but how much that trickles down to the students, you know if it... the line between what schools in the mission statement and what the students actually understand is very different

Participant #3 highlighted the importance of having administrative support for a mission when he said:

It is meant to encourage participation; you know active functioning within the school system and within the community... Our previous administration, the previous vice-principal was very active in that; he was actively trying to change our culture here. And it was, and to many degrees, it was a success.

From the aforementioned testimony we can see that a mission statement without action held little value. These responses show that the capacity for mission statements to shape a school culture is limited at best. It can be inferred that the beliefs of teachers we interviewed surrounding social learning were largely self-driven, but that pro-active administrators can motivate teachers to adopt, or at least reinforce, the use of social learning activities.
To what extent do provincial exams influence education?

Provincial exams were found to have a complicated impact on teachers’ selection of instructional activities. We found common themes related to teachers’ practices, students’ motivation, and post-secondary education.

*Teachers’ practices.* Table 8 provides an overview of what teachers reported with respect to using more or less SL activities when teaching provincially versus non-provincially examinable courses. This table allows us to see whether or not teachers alter their teaching practice to accommodate provincial exams.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I use fewer social learning activities when teaching a provincially examinable course</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>38.1%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use more social learning activities when teaching a provincially non-examinable course</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>42.8%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When asked if teachers used fewer SL activities when teaching courses with provincial exams the data was balanced between negative and positive responses. 42.9% of participants either agreed or strongly agree while 42.8% either disagreed or strongly disagreed. The remaining 14.9% indicated neutrality. Responses varied more when teachers were asked if they used more social learning activities when teaching a non-provincially examinable course. 57.1% agreed or strongly agreed while only 33.4% disagreed or strongly disagreed. Our data suggest that use of SL activities is, to some degree, affected by provincial exams.

Throughout our interviews we found that teachers valued provincial exams. They felt that provincial exams matched well with the academic outcomes of the provincial
curriculum and were able to accurately assess the content required in each course. It was noted that the provincial exam allowed for a consistent method of assessment for all students in the province. Participant #1 states,

   My reason for wishing the provincial exam to stay is because if students are using their marks to get into university I want to know that there has been some continuity across the board as far as what students have covered in various grades and that a...and that a student can’t jump into university based on an easy teacher and nobody has ever called me an easy teacher.

   Teachers frequently spoke to the importance of curricular content because that is what they are required to assess and report on as opposed to social skills. Participant #2 spoke to the importance of content, as measured by the provincial exams, and how it influenced his use of SL activities, “They’ve got to know the content, that’s what’s in the provincial exam... it doesn’t matter if they can debate at the end of Socials 11. It does matter if they can do the provincial exam.” When asked if provincial exams influenced social learning, Participant #1 stated that in comparison to Socials Studies 10, “Generally yeah, Socials 11 [a provincially examinable course] is a little bit more delivery.” Further to this, Participant #2 said:

   I’m not marking them whether or not they can make friends or whether they can’t make friends. You know? And do I want to be? I’m not really sure. But that’s definitely what they, I guess, the number one token that comes out of my work that others look at is the, is that mark.

Participant #2 is acknowledging the difficulty that comes with emphasizing social learning as teachers may be expect to assess it. Relative to social learning and development, academic content is more easily assessable. Haladyna, Haas and Allison’s (1998) and Wentzel’s (1993) research suggests that standardized testing in the United States largely consist of lower-level problems like a multiple choice mathematical computation that are easy to mark.
Some teachers acknowledged that while provincial exams were valuable for measuring academic content, they failed to acknowledge the different ways in which students can express their understanding of the academic content. Methods of assessment on the provincial exams - multiple choice, short answers, and essays - are not reflective of the multiple ways a student can demonstrate understanding. Furthermore, the BC Ministry of Education values these multiple methods of understanding. For example, English Language Art’s prescribed learning outcomes for grades 8 to 12 outline the achievement indicators as incorporating listening and speaking, reading and viewing, and writing and representing. Although it is expected that all six facets of the English language arts curriculum be taught, they may not be emphasised in the classroom because they are not assessed on a provincial exam. Participant #4 highlights this point when she remarked, “We value speaking supposedly, we value listening, we value representing our ideas, and... viewing. So these are the strands of the curriculum that don’t get measured on a provincial exam.” Because provincial exams cannot measure students’ speaking, or listening skills it may not be emphasized in the classroom. The aforementioned quotes are indicative of the larger patterns of ensuring that students have academic outcomes met before social learning was addressed.

**Students’ motivation.** Several teachers perceived that students placed greater emphasis on curriculum content than SL opportunities, particularly in grades 11 and 12. This message is clearly articulated by Participant #2, “You know kids [say], ‘What is the point?’ ‘Is this on the test?’ ‘Is this for a grade?’” Collectively students, teachers and parents appear to be placing greater emphasis on quantifiable outcomes that get recorded and
reported. Participant #4 supports this assertion when asked about provincial exam pressures and extends it by discussing her students underpinning motivations:

    Not sort of overtly from administration or anything, not overtly from, well sometimes from parents, but from the kids the pressure was huge, especially Grade 12. Because they just want to be, you know, the best and they’re all vying for these massive scholarships and things at mini-schools.

In contrast, interview responses for grade 8 and 9 teachers varied. Participant #5 limited her SL activities to whole class discussions due to her students being unable to stay focussed, be responsible and behave. Alternatively another participant used a wide variety of SL activities as a means to engage, support and motivate his students. These different perspectives may be connected to administrative support and professional development, teachers’ experiences and beliefs and the measurability of SL.

    **Post-secondary education considerations.** According to Participants #1, #3, #4 and #5, the narrowing of instructional activities could be traced to universities’ and colleges’ admission requirements. Participant #4 summed it up best when saying, “So the pressure comes when you get reports from [a university], that, 'Oh well, if your provincial exam mark is much lower than your school mark well we’ll only consider what you got on the provincial exam.’” As a result of universities emphasizing provincial exam marks, teachers feel a pressure to assess and teach in a manner that is congruent with provincial testing.

    Evident throughout all interviews were themes of care and concern for students’ current and future well-being. Teachers often viewed university and college education as a means of achieving this end. It is therefore not surprising that teachers’ instructional practices changed when teaching provincially examinable courses to focus more on curriculum content. Teaching content would help students achieve high scores on tests and
help their chances of successfully applying to post-secondary education. Teachers interviewed wanted to ensure that they are doing their best to set up students for success in writing the provincial exams. However, by prioritizing academic content, valuable social learning opportunities may be lost and some students who are not pursuing post-secondary education could be marginalized.

**What are the challenges to implementing social learning activities?**

Participants identified several challenges to implementing SL activities. These challenges are related to student diversity and addressing the scope of curricular content.

**Diversity.** Our interview data frequently highlighted teacher issues of educating students with diverse needs and abilities. In this section we explore these findings related to English language proficiency, learning preferences and needs.

**English language proficiency.** The Vancouver School Board is among the most diverse public school systems in Canada with 60% of its students speaking a language other than English at home (Vancouver School Board, 2014). The impact of language diversity was addressed by Participant #2 and Participant #4 as they identified language fluency as a challenge when using SL instructional practices. According to Participant #2 these challenges were compounded when teaching provincially examinable courses because he already felt constricted by the time given to cover the curriculum. Consequently he suggested that students have less opportunity to develop social skills related to interacting with diverse individuals and groups in respectful ways. Participant #4 reported that some English language learner (ELL) students consider the social and language component of a subject when making courses selections:

> We’ve got a population here which is high percentage of Asian immigrants go to the school, we have a high population of ELL kids who are struggling
essentially to catch up to a norm that our non-ESL kids are already at. So they're huge pressure on those kids, huge. And again, partly because of the demographics of the Asian population, you know, there's a huge emphasis on math and science as opposed to humanities.

ELL students at this particular high school tended to gravitate towards mathematics and the sciences, instead of enrolling in subjects with a higher written and oral language component. This could be explained in part by students taking subjects and courses where they would be successful both in terms of academics and social development. Participant #4 postulates that if SL is an integral part of a well-rounded student, then a challenging but unique opportunity may be lost if ELL students enrol in fewer courses that include more SL activities.

*Learning needs and preferences.* Our data show that teachers adopted a variety of SL activities to meet the learning needs of their students. These SL tasks included whole class, small group and paired discussions, peer feedback sessions, online blogging, debates with different collaborating roles and community service learning. Participant #1 acknowledged how this additional work has merit in terms of addressing students’ different learning preferences and needs, but it comes with challenges:

The different personalities involved and that can go into groups, certain students try to dominate the conversations, can be an issue although there’s ways around that. Kids automatically dissolving into the wallpaper you know to stay out of it. What other challenges are in that? Yeah I think it comes down to students’ not being willing to take the risk to share.

Participant #4 continued this thought and added:

One of the things that’s always challenging is mixed ability classes because you get some kids that are, you know, so shy and reticent, or so, you know, so much less able to socially interact that for them sometimes it's not very happy, you know, to be forced to talk to people all the time.
Finally Participant #5, uses explicit instruction to help students who have difficulty with social learning and group participation:

Sometimes I think it is explicit. Sometimes when they’re in groups and they’re sharing, I will say ok these three people in the group, the quietest person will speak first, or they’ll speak in order, it doesn’t matter who, and the idea there is that everybody shares, you know, what they know about this piece of information, so sometimes it’s explicit like that.

These Participants recognize that the diversity of students calls for diversity of instructional practices, with some needed explicit instructions.

All participants spoke often and at length about student diversity and the challenges posed by family backgrounds, socio-economic contexts, learning designations and international values. When asked about how confident Participant #2 was in implementing SL activities, he remarked:

It would be easier if I had smaller classes with less class composition issues, I would say that would be the bigger, the big... class size and class composition with underlining the composition because in my case I would guess around twenty percent of my students are international. So they’re not speaking English when they go [home]. ... And so I’ve got international students, I’ve got kids that have got written output issues, I’ve got, I don’t know how many kids with IEPs, you know designated in each class and I’ve got, I don’t know how many that are borderline designated in each class.

From Participant #2’s input it can be seen that there are a variety of factors related to diverse learning needs that affect a teacher’s decision to use social learning activities. When a teacher has a classroom full of children, each with challenges to learning, it becomes difficult to choose an activity in which all students can be meaningful participants.

*Classroom management.* Cross-referencing our survey data with our interview data, we found that teachers’ motives to implement SL tasks are mixed. It appears that teachers with grade 8 & 9 students focused more on maintaining order through classroom management strategies while grades 10 to 12 classes were more governed by provincial
exams. Specifically, teachers arrive at distinctions between two types of student motivations towards SL, students’ behaviours such as sharing resources and working harmoniously to solve problems, and class disturbances that discourage SL exercises (Wentzel, 1993).

_The scope of curricular content._ During interviews many participants discussed the pressure of addressing the entirety of the curriculum when teaching a provincially examinable course. Teachers felt that they had to address all of the content in the curriculum in order to prepare students for the provincial exam. When asked what was the biggest factor influencing his use of social learning activities in a course with a provincial exam, Participant #2 responded, “Content. Content, content, content, content, content, and content.” He felt strongly that students needed to make sure they have been through the curriculum in order to be prepared for the provincial exam. Participant #1 explicitly addressed the difference between teaching a course with a provincial exam and one without, “Time, and you’re not as worried about covering the curriculum. Socials 8 [a course without a provincial exam], if we don’t get to the reformation, I can live with that.”

The subtext of the above quotes is that teachers feel teaching content through activities that also promote social learning is a time intensive process. In a course without a provincial exam teachers felt like they had greater opportunities to explore facets of the curriculum in which students were interested. This allowed teachers the time to use social learning activities such as projects and debates that require a significant amount of instructional time to organize.
Summary

Provincial exams did not seem to have a significant influence on the frequency or types of social learning activities used across subject areas. For example, social studies teachers, regardless of grade level, reported using a similar variety of SL activities at similar frequencies. On the other hand, we did note frequency and variety of SL activities change between subject areas. For example math reported using SL activities with the lowest frequency and variety, whereas social studies reported using the most. From this we can conclude that subject area has an influence on how teachers use social learning more so than provincial exams.

Our data revealed that teachers strongly valued social learning. Teachers found social skills to be important for students to have beyond the high school classroom. Teachers spoke to the value of social learning in developing skills and attitudes needed to participate in post-secondary education, the workplace, and society.

Our data suggest that although teachers value social learning this did not necessarily result in a greater use of SL activities in participants’ classrooms. Interviews revealed that a teacher’s personality and confidence played a role in their selection of learning activities. Participants also felt that professional development and administrative support for social learning could enhance their understanding and use of social learning activities.

From our survey data and interviews we can see that a teachers’ use of social learning is not influenced exclusively by provincial exams. Participants frequently highlighted challenges of educating students with diverse needs and abilities. The influence of learning designations, language fluency and classroom behaviour were all identified as
challenges when using SL instructional practices. Participants also felt that teaching curriculum content through SL activities was not feasible due to time constraints. There is an intersectionality of influences that come together to shape a teacher’s use of social learning activities.

CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSION AND REFLECTIONS

Our study examined how provincial exams impacted teachers’ decisions to incorporate social learning into their practice. Throughout our research however, provincial exams were found to be only one factor in this complex topic. The overall design of our study allowed teachers to explore the multiple influences that shaped their use of social learning in a high school classroom. Our survey allowed us to gather quantitative data relevant to a small number of teachers’ values and use of social learning as well as a basic snapshot of how provincial exams affected their inclusion of SL activities. In studying whether or not provincial exams influenced social learning we discovered diverse perspectives and values that teachers have regarding these two matters and their relationships. Our research has demonstrated that education for social learning is a balancing act among many factors. By using interviews to probe these connections in greater depth we found themes such as, personal values, student diversity, postsecondary success and workplace readiness became apparent influences to their teaching practices and inclusion of social learning. A teacher’s understanding of SL and their use of SL activities are influenced by the unique circumstances of his or her classroom and course.

An analysis of our collected data revealed that provincial exams do play a role in influencing the extent to which teachers use social learning activities and what types they use. However, we found that this impact was not expressed by participants as strongly as
we initially thought it would be. More importantly our study shows that social learning is a complicated topic that is impacted by many intersecting factors. Teachers’ decisions regarding the extent to which they address SL cannot be attributed solely to the provincial exam. The implications of our data findings will be discussed in three themes: teachers’ perspectives on social learning; teachers’ perspectives on provincial exams; and the relationship between social learning and provincial exams. Following our discussion we will make recommendations to educators, policy makers, and future researchers. We will close with a reflection on our role as researchers.

**Teachers’ perspectives on social learning**

After completing our data analysis we found that social learning was far more complex than we initially appreciated. Specifically, teachers may have considerable differences in their understanding of SL activities, their outcomes, and the concept of social learning. One teacher may recognize and promote social learning as a process in which students learn from each other, with an emphasis on constructing meaning by considering alternative perspectives, while another teacher may view social learning as a process with which students can develop social norms that may help them behave in our diverse society.

We found that teachers highly valued the role of social learning in their practice, primarily because of the applicability of social learning to a student’s life beyond the classroom. Teachers valued social learning as a means to develop students’ communication skills and their roles as citizens. Through the multiple interpretations of citizenship, according to Westheimer and Kahne, we can see how teachers approached social learning as developing personal responsibility, participatory citizenship, or justice-oriented citizenship (2004). For example, Participant #5, who valued an idea of social learning that
was closer to personal responsibility, emphasized a pedagogical approach to having students develop socially appropriate behaviours, such as taking responsibility, nurturing compassion and treating each other with respect. Participant #3 valued social learning in terms of becoming participatory citizens and his curriculum encouraged students to participate in the democratic process. Specifically, he wanted his students to get involved in political campaigns during elections by volunteering for a political party of their choosing. Participant #2 interpreted social learning as a means to developing justice-oriented citizenship and encouraged students to debate different societal power structures.

A teacher's perspective on social learning plays a significant role in their pedagogical approach. Our findings suggested that some teachers do not always see their course as conducive to teaching deeper levels of social learning and citizenship. Perhaps this is due to teachers taking a narrow view of curriculum content without examining how the curriculum can be applied to larger issues outside the classroom. Teachers often indicated that their role was to ensure the content was delivered and assessed, therefore its meaningful application received less attention.

**Teachers’ perspectives on provincial exams**

Teacher’s perspectives about provincial exams were somewhat surprising. Going into our study the research team was under the assumption that teachers were going to respond more negatively to provincial exams than they did. Though some teachers appreciated provincial exams more than others, none of our interview participants rejected them as they all felt they had a place within the provincial education system.

Interview data revealed, to varying degrees, that participants valued provincial exams because they helped address discrepancies in assessment between teachers across
the province. Interview participants appreciated this accountability because, to some extent, it levelled the playing field for students applying to universities. This reiterates Participant #1’s concerns in that some of his students could be denied university entry with lower percent averages; as compared to other classes whose students received higher percentage averages, yet both earned equivalent grades on the provincial exam. Teachers wanted to ensure that if students would be competing academically to get into university that there would be some congruence between assessment measures for all students in the province.

Teachers interviewed appreciated that provincial exams ensured teachers would address the scope of the curriculum across the province. Although addressing curriculum expectations is important to ensure that students are prepared for the provincial exam, teachers understood that covering the entirety of the curriculum often limited the amount of time they could devote to social learning activities. Teachers from different subject areas felt varying levels of restriction; Social Studies 11 has a large curriculum to cover and this content was recognized as a significant limitation to teaching practices while English teachers did not feel as great a degree of pressure to cover content and focused more on teaching skills such as reading and writing. Because each subject area has different curricular outcomes, a deeper comparative analysis into how provincial exams influence teachers in each subject area might be of value.

Interview participants unanimously agreed, to varying extents, that they felt pressure for their students to score well on provincial exams. Teachers suggested that these pressures stemmed from a number of sources, including: students, parents, administrators, universities and their own desire to have students succeed. This
intersectionality of pressures may influence the manner in which a teacher approaches their practice when teaching a provincially examinable course.

We explored participants’ values as they emerged throughout our interviews and they gave us valuable insight into how teachers’ beliefs were shaped; however our study was not designed to address this issue in depth. A more comprehensive study that explores the varying attitudes and perspectives of teachers in regards to provincial exams would be beneficial in gaining a greater understanding of the emerging themes. Future research that accounts for this consideration could provide a more accurate understanding of teachers’ views and values towards the complex and dynamic interplay between provincial exams and SL.

The relationship between social learning and provincial exams

From the complex intersectionality of factors influencing social learning we can see that teachers feel they have to make choices about how to balance their values related to social learning with exam preparation when teaching a course with a provincial exam. Teachers wanted to ensure that their students were prepared for academic assessments but did not want to limit their teaching to content delivery for the purposes of exam performance. Teachers often had to compromise on their ideal delivery of curriculum and use of social learning to ensure that students would be able to perform to the best of their abilities on the exams. For example, Participant # 2 suggested that he would like to be able to spend more time on social learning as well as developing his students’ writing skills in his Social Studies 11 class. However, he felt that at the end of the day his students needed to know the curricular content to be able to succeed on the provincial exam. In this we can see
that teachers need to make choices about what to cover in their classrooms. Often times SL was sacrificed in order to cover curricular content.

While understanding that not all students would necessarily require exam scores for post-secondary education, teachers interviewed expressed a duty of care to ensure that the interests of students going further in education would be met. From this interpretation we can see that the existence of provincial exams emphasizes the interests of academic advancement rather than the development of social learning. While the exploration of content related to provincial exams can also occur alongside social learning activities, many teachers felt that the scope of the content addressed on the provincial exams limited the extent to which social learning could be addressed in their courses.

Finally, the methods of assessment on the provincial exams - multiple choice, short answers, and essays - are not reflective of the multiple ways a student can demonstrate understanding. While teachers acknowledged provincial exams were valuable for measuring academic content, they failed to acknowledge the different ways in which students could learn and express their understanding of the academic content.

**Recommendations**

*Educators*

It was noted during our interviews that teachers who valued social learning and who had an understanding and appreciation of how social skills are significant beyond the classroom, seemed to be the most confident when addressing SL in their classroom. It makes sense that teachers who feel comfortable modelling appropriate social behaviours and facilitating social activities would be more able to develop these social skills in their students. Improving teachers’ familiarity and confidence with social learning through
professional development opportunities may increase the use of social learning in a teacher’s practice.

Meaningful professional development that addresses how teachers can connect curriculum to issues of citizenship would be beneficial. Professional development to help teachers engage their students in citizenship skills such as; interpersonal communication, cooperation, constructing informed opinions, representing views to others and critical thinking may positively impact a teacher's use of SL within their practice. Moreover, training that examines how social learning can be used to prepare students for provincial exams might be beneficial to educators who find covering the curriculum to be an obstacle to the use of social learning activities.

**Administrators**

Administrators have the capacity to shape teacher culture and pedagogy as they can use their position to enact school-wide initiatives and influence teaching approaches. Furthermore, they have the capacity to prioritize social learning by shaping the aims of education within the school. Administrators can further emphasize its importance by encouraging staff, providing visible initiatives that value SL, and co-ordinating meaningful professional development targeting social learning.

By providing district-wide professional development seminars or in-school development and collaborative opportunities that pertain specifically to SL, administrators at the district and school levels can help guide teachers’ professional development. This in turn may be reflected in a teacher’s practice.
Policy Makers

Because universities currently use provincial exams as a benchmark for admission when applying for post-secondary education, it raises questions about how provincial exams affect students who are not planning on post-secondary education. Students who are not planning on higher education may not benefit as much from a curriculum geared towards a provincial exam because ultimately they will not need to achieve high scores on their provincial exams. These students may be losing out on other more relevant aspects of education such as creating meaningful relationships and learning beyond content memorization or academic skill attainment.

The Ministry of Education needs to consider the implications of making provincial exam results accessible to the public as third-party institutions may interpret these results in ways unintended by the Ministry. It is possible that public pressure from school rankings using provincial exams could have an impact on teaching practices. Furthermore, the Fraser Institute's use of provincial exams to rank secondary schools may be viewed as another source of pressure on teachers to have their students perform well on provincial exams. Though this pressure was not of concern to our research participants, it is a possibility that teachers could construe the public ranking of schools by the Fraser Institute as a ranking of their teaching abilities. Consequently these rankings could promote a public perception that the students in their classroom were not receiving a good education. We suggest that provincial exam scores be accessible only to the students, schools, post-secondary institutions, and government because third party organizations may not be aware of the intersectionality of influences that affect students' learning. Provincial exam data can be misinterpreted and not reflective of students' learning and teachers' abilities.
Further Studies

Further studies about how teachers navigate the intersecting factors that influence their teaching practices would be beneficial to the study of social learning in high schools. After identifying the issue of academic accountability and noting the importance teachers place on congruence between provincial exam and class marks, research into how provincial exams impact the assessment practices of teachers might provide greater detail into how provincial exams change teaching practices. Further to this point, a qualitative analysis of the rationale behind why and how teachers weigh their classes may also provide additional insights into how teachers value and use SL. For example, many teachers assign a portion of their students’ grade to class participation and it would be interesting to explore why. Do teachers use participation marks to address aspects such as student preparedness, attendance, punctuality, ability to follow instructions and meeting deadlines? Or do they place a greater emphasis on SL skills such as a student’s ability to communicate, collaborate, negotiate, contribute to the class and work towards a shared goal? Alternatively, if a teacher strictly uses test and assignment scores to assign a student’s grade, does that mean they don’t address SL? It would be interesting to explore whether or not a teachers rationale for grade distribution reflects their views on SL.

Our research was centered on how teachers value and use social learning in their practice. It may be of value to conduct a qualitative study exploring student’s perspectives of social learning. It would be interesting to discover what social learning means to high school students and what social skills they may value. As students are the targeted beneficiaries of the SL strategies that teachers use, they may be able to provide valuable
insights as to what makes for meaningful social learning activities and how the
development of their social skills can be used beyond the classroom. If students don’t see
the value in social learning and are not invested in the SL activities that teachers use, a
teacher may have a very limited effect on a student’s SL development.

Of particular interest to our research would be a study that explores the relationship
between students and their peers and how those relationships influence social learning.
Our research showed that students gleamed value through the use of marks given by both
teachers and provincial exams. Do students also interpret and socially construct meaning
related to SL activities?

**Reflections on our role as researchers.**

Our definition of social learning was centred on enhancing the ability of students to
participate effectively in society. This learning includes the development of various forms
of communication; conflict-management; collaborating to identify and work towards a
shared goal; and maintaining positive relationships. This definition proved problematic, as
teachers will have different interpretations about what “effective participation” means and
looks like. Some teachers interpreted it as the ability of students to join the workforce,
some felt that participation focussed around communication of ideas, and others felt it was
the ability to participate in a democratic society, or to critically analyze power structures in
society. As stated by Westheimer and Kahne (2004), there are multiple dimensions of
participation and our understanding of these dimensions became more comprehensive
during our literature review and data collection. Our study may have benefitted if we had
considered these specific dimensions while defining SL at the onset of our investigation.
As researchers we have learned that it is difficult to analyze how a single factor, such as provincial exams, influences social learning in the classroom. When we initially explored how provincial exams would affect SL we did not anticipate the complexity of the issue or how many other factors were involved. No two teachers had identical values surrounding social learning or the impact of provincial exams on SL, making it hard to identify relationships. A larger survey sample size coupled with a statistical analysis may have enabled us to get a broader and deeper understanding of these relationships. Furthermore, our survey could have included a greater number of questions to help build a better picture of our participants. Questions such as years of teaching experience, and teachers’ values about provincial exams would have given us a more robust snapshot of our sample.

Throughout our research we realized how important participant population and sample size is when trying to analyze data for existing relationships. For our particular study we learned how important it is to try and incorporate a diversity of perspectives. Though it was helpful to have multiple perspectives from teachers in social studies and English, we were unable to explore, in great detail, the impact of provincial exams on SL in math and science as none of our interview participants taught in these subject areas. Furthermore, we found that the small sample size of our survey participants limited our research in that no generalizable conclusions could be made.

Qualitative research requires elements of guesswork and hope: Hope that your topic will attract sufficient participants and educated guesswork regarding the questions to ask that will generate data and information. As our project comes to a close we learned that it was helpful to have no fear when pursuing insights into your area of research. Researchers have to purposely seek and be actively engaged in meaningful dialogue between fellow
researchers, research advisors, participants and colleagues in order to enrich their own understanding of the topic. We found that it was these discussions and probing questions that often generated the richest sources of information for our study.
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