SACRIFICING INTELLECTUAL EXCELLENCE TO ADMINISTRATIVE AND POLITICAL CONVENIENCE IN BRITISH COLUMBIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS: DEPARTMENTAL EXAMINATIONS RE-EXAMINED

By

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ABSTRACT

In 1973 Grade 12 external examinations for high school graduation were re-introduced. This thesis examines the heritage of key concepts central to these policy changes: external examinations, standards and critical thinking. It also reviews the historical context which influenced these decisions. Further, this thesis questions whether examination policy now, or in the past, has led to the encouragement of intellectual excellence.
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to Lois, Sarah, John and Dylan—Dryw
thank you
Chapter One

Introduction

The Problems

In November 1971 British Columbia's Minister of Education announced that regular Grade 12 Departmental Examinations would be discontinued after 1973. Yet in June 1984 these examinations were reinstated.

This reversal in policy raises several interesting questions, historical, political and epistemological in nature. When and how did the practice of using province-wide standardized tests as a means for determining high school graduation originate in British Columbia? When, and in what circumstances, did the practice itself originate? Is this practice educationally sound? If it is educationally sound, why were examinations discontinued? If not, why were examinations brought back? Did political agendas influence either one or both of these policy decisions? What were these agendas? Did "good quality" education accrue from these policy changes? Is the present policy a good one?

These are difficult and complicated questions. However, if we are concerned whether our education system encourages intellectual excellence, then we have no option but to consider these issues very carefully. This thesis will show that Departmental Examinations reinforce a concept of learning - "formalism" - that has gained influence over the entire school system. Should this influence be welcomed, reduced or rebuked? More particularly, does formalism help stimulate critical thinking, considered by many outstanding educators to be a necessary component of intellectual excellence?

Thus the 1971 and 1983 decisions should not be viewed as political or historical issues separate from pedagogical concerns.
Limitations of the Investigation

But how should these questions be approached? The difficulty is that we are predisposed to view past events within the framework of present experience. A researcher may look for evidence that lends credence to a belief that he has previously acquired, a belief established on intuitive or emotional grounds. This is a natural first step, but clearly will not be significant. The investigation must not end when mere bias has been "confirmed" by evidence. Rather, as Einstein and Popper suggested, a researcher must seek evidence that disproves theories or establishes a limit beyond which the theory no longer makes valid predictions or suggests possible explanations. This thesis has attempted to incorporate this view into its research design.

There are, nonetheless, research limitations to be noted. Except for two interviews (John Church and Bill Vander Zalm), this thesis has relied heavily on printed material available in the University of British Columbia's Main and Scarfe Libraries as well as material from the British Columbia Teachers' Federation library and archives. Although a reasonable attempt was made to study contrary opinions about the appropriateness of the 1971 and 1983 decisions — for instance, Ministry news releases, Gile's and Webster's interviews with Pat McGeer, Annual Reports, editorials in the Vancouver Sun, London's study of letters to the editor, newspaper stories, magazine articles, BCTF Newsletters, BCSTA convention minutes, B.C. Senior Secondary Curriculum Advisory Committee confidential memos, and secondary source material written by Fleming, Ellis, Bruneau, Stevenson, Tomkins, Wilson, and others — it cannot be assumed that the thesis has exhausted pertinent evidence.

Moreover the evidence obtained must itself be scrutinized for bias. Yet bias is unavoidable in ordinary circumstances. An important task of this thesis is to reconstruct the underlying rationale that the surface bias represents. To do this a methodology which incorporates both historical and philosophical techniques of inquiry will be used.

Common to the 1971 and 1983 decisions are three concepts and/or "fields for action" which major policy actors often referred to, took for granted, or ignored. These concepts/fields are "external examinations," "critical thinking," and "standards." This thesis investigates where and in what circumstances these
concepts originated and mutated before entering the policy discussions under consideration. The thesis then studies how major actors used these concepts in presenting their rationales for abandoning or reinstating the Departmental Examinations. Were these concepts recognized and used in a logical and relevant fashion? Have these concepts been misused or ignored? If the latter case is suggested by the evidence, is there an explanation for this discrepancy or oversight?

Several limitations apply to the above methodology. Crucial to our investigation of the external examination concept is a definition which clearly establishes what is to be investigated. This will be provided in the next section of the introduction. Even so, an underlying assumption must be openly stated here. This thesis endorses the view held by many scholars that the Chinese Imperial Examination system is comparable in nature to 19th and 20th century educational external examinations developed in Britain and the United States of America. This is not to imply a causal relationship although Creel, Brereton, Chang, Judges and Teng suggest that this may well have been the case.

A further limitation inherent in this methodology is that of obtaining evidence showing how these concepts were first introduced into B.C. Educational policies. Often the use of these concepts has been implied but gone uncommented. In such cases this thesis has made note of the inferences such indirect evidence necessarily requires, and has attempted to justify its use. Fortunately, besides the Annual Reports, we have Hindle’s 1918 dissertation (University of Toronto), the 1925 Putman-Weir Survey of the Schools and the 1960 Chant Royal Commission Report. These sources help provide the evidence we seek.

A final limitation is imposed by the currency of this research topic. Although the 1971 decision can be reviewed with some historical detachment, the 1983 decision is still a policy issue being debated. Where appropriate, the current debate has been examined and comment given on the implications for education in B.C. To avoid such comments may be prudent historical practice. However, as this thesis is also a policy investigation, occasionally comments have been made on the basis of multi-disciplinary reflection. Their purpose is not to support or discredit government policies but to indicate where policy might be improved in order to provide better quality education for our children. The thesis takes seriously the notion that a policy study is partly normative in character, and likely
to propose new visions of old policy, or new policy altogether.

Some Preliminary Definitions

Ralph W. Tyler, a noted authority in the field of tests and measurements, recommends that external examinations be defined as "those over which the local school has, or feels it has, no real choice as to whether its students take the tests." Central to this definition is the recognition that control and use of these examinations are external to local school personnel. Herrlee G. Creel, a specialist in early Chinese history, defines the institution of Imperial Examinations as

the recurrent and systematic practice of asking questions that are identical or are conceived to be of equivalent difficulty, of individuals, who are supposed to be comparable in their advancement in learning, and the grading of the answer in such a manner that the grades assigned are conceived to denote the degree of attainment of those examined.

These two definitions help to establish four important characteristics embodied in external examinations:

1. **External control and use**;
2. **Standardized questions**;
3. **Compares student achievement within a specific range (e.g. age, grade level, socio-economic status, etc.);**
4. **Uniform grading practices**.

These characteristics bring to our attention an important delimitation of this thesis. We are primarily concerned here with external examinations created to assess student readiness for high school graduation. These tests have been referred to commonly as Departmental Examinations. However as we shall see in Chapter Three, other types of external examinations were used by the Department of Education. The focus, though, must remain on Grade 12 regular Departmental Examinations, as they are obviously central to the 1971 and 1983 policy decisions.

A preliminary definition of critical thinking will be presented here although it is more thoroughly considered in Chapter Two. Critical thinking generally implies the ability and disposition to make good judgments. More specifically, critical thinking involves making good inferences from available evidence, along with the
use of good judgment in deciding what constitutes necessary and/or sufficient evidence to substantiate these inferences. The distinction between the two definitions is important. The first allows good judgment to be based on intuition or creative insight. The second requires a rational intent whereby a person actively recognizes logically and practically relevant reasons as the basis for his or her judgment. Critical thinking, then, is portrayed herein as an intellectual activity. Chapter Two considers arguments by Chu Hsi, Wang Yang-ming, Whitehead, Russell and Dewey, all of whom sought to establish critical thinking as an activity generally to be associated with intellectual excellence.

It is extremely difficult to present a preliminary definition for "standards" as it turns out to have multiple meanings. Standards are chameleon creatures which must be studied in the political environment that they inhabit. This study is presented in Chapter Four. A preliminary glance at standards suggests at least two different meanings – minimal standards as in "Back-to-basics," for example, "Let's bring back standards to our schools," and maximum standards as in good quality education, for instance, "We need higher standards in our schools." The two meanings are not necessarily compatible. This deceptive incompatibility will be examined in greater detail in Chapter Five.

"Major policy actors" refers to those who have a substantial influence on policy decisions regarding Departmental Examinations. Certainly the term applies to the Minister of Education, the Deputy Minister, ministry officials responsible for policy development in this area (e.g. Dr. J. Mussio) as well as invited participants on the Senior Secondary Curriculum Advisory Committee, and BCTF and BCSTA spokespersons.

Summary of the Method and Aims of the Investigation

This thesis establishes the heritage of key concepts used in the 1971 and 1983 policy decisions. Further, it examines whether major policy actors used these concepts in a well-informed, relevant and logical manner. Finally it considers present Departmental Examination policy in light of the need for the encouragement of intellectual excellence characterized by critical thinking.
Footnotes

1see footnote 8, Chapter 2.


[External] examinations are a hasty application of a Liberal watchword, "equality of opportunity."

Bertrand Russell, 1932.

Are external examinations an ill advised liberal policy that adversely affects the teaching and learning of critical thinking attributes?

External examinations appear to promote equality of opportunity by distributing educational goods and benefits according to meritorious academic achievement rather than family background. Nineteenth century British liberal reformers used this argument to persuade Parliament and educators to adopt external examinations. For example, John Stuart Mill in his presentation to the 1854 parliamentary committee investigating the recruitment of the Indian Civil Service stated:

For [the adoption of competitive examinations] would be the best vindication which could be made of existing political institutions, by showing that the classes who under the present constitution have the greatest influence in the government, do not desire any greater share of the profits derivable from it than their merits entitle them to, but are willing to take the chances of competition with ability of all ranks.

Another important liberal concept is that citizens are to be autonomous—"capable of running their own lives and functioning effectively in a democratic society." For Mill such autonomy required thinking individuals predisposed to act in a rational manner.

He who chooses his plan [of life] for himself, employs all his faculties. He must use observation to see, reasoning and judgement to forsee, activity to gather materials for decisions, discrimination to decide, and when he has decided, firmness and self-control to hold to his deliberate decisions.

Yet these two 19th century liberal notions – 1) external examinations as an instrument to implement equality of opportunity; and 2) the promotion of autonomous thinking – appear to contain a prima facie inconsistency which our 20th century perspective recognizes. Mill and his supporters did not see that an externally imposed examination system might cripple the efforts of educators to
encourage autonomous thinking. Ironically Mill was aware that the Chinese Imperial Examination System had negatively affected autonomous thinking in the celestial empire. He says the Chinese "have become stationary...[because] they have succeeded beyond all hope in making a people all alike, all governing their thoughts and conduct by the same maxims and rules." Mill thought this problem could be overcome by the use of objective rather than subjective questions. He does not consider whether the external examination system may be the cause of the problem. Nor was he likely aware that two great Chinese educator-philosophers, Chu Hsi (1130–1200) and Wang Yang-ming (1472–1529) had presented substantial arguments to show that their system did not promote rational or creative thinking. Were the liberal reformers in their enthusiasm for "equality of opportunity" blind to the serious educational drawbacks of an external examination system?

This chapter attempts to answer the above question. We will review the writings of Chu Hsi and Wang Yang-ming to determine the basis of their criticism. Does their criticism of the Chinese system contain any arguments which could be pertinent to western examination systems? Do we find similar arguments expressed by western educator-philosophers? What were the arguments made for and against the imposing of an examination system in 19th century Britain?

The emphasis in this chapter will be on reviewing arguments that were concerned about the effects of external examinations on critical or autonomous thinking. Why has the effect on thinking been chosen as the focus of this study? First, if we are concerned that our school system provides an education that truly promotes meritorious academic achievement, Peters and others argue that such achievement requires a capacity for and a disposition to use critical thinking. If well-established and persuasive arguments have been made against external examinations because they adversely affect critical thinking, we, as concerned educators, should be aware of those arguments. Did these arguments influence the 1971 policy decision in British Columbia to abandon external examinations for Grade 12 graduation? If so, why were the arguments rejected in 1983 when examinations were reinstated? Thus, this line of inquiry provides a useful means for examining educational policy decisions primarily in terms of their educational rather than their social or political context.
This is not to depreciate the approach used by Sir Michael Sadler, Clarence Karier or other educational historians who have criticized external examinations on the grounds that they are instruments of social control. However, their argument lacks a substantiated analysis of how external examinations serve to discourage the growth of autonomous citizens. This chapter attempts to provide part of this analysis and therefore the focus on thinking is crucial.

Let us consider more closely the notion of meritorious academic achievement. R.S. Peters suggests such achievement involves a cognitive perspective of some breadth, a conceptual framework that explains depth and a commitment to truth and excellence which predisposes a person to probe the principles underlying the body of knowledge he has learned. Each body of knowledge – eg, science, social studies, music, math – has a foundation of rational principles which govern practice. For example, in history one must be cognizant of the rules of evidence. If education is largely a matter in the later grades of initiating students into these rational traditions, then students need the opportunity to use and to become familiar with these principles.

Scheffler, who gives a closer analysis of knowledge says

We preserve knowledge only if we succeed in transmitting the live spark that keeps it growing, which is a product of each learner's efforts to make sense of public knowledge in his own terms, and to confront it with reality. Such confrontation involves deliberation and judgement and presupposes general and impartial principles governing the assessment of reasons bearing on the issues.

Through this confrontation, students gain "the ability to construct and evaluate fresh and alternative arguments, the power to innovate rather than the capacity to reproduce stale arguments earlier stored." Knowing in the "strong sense" means a student not only has adequate and relevant evidence for his beliefs about the world but he also appreciates the force of this evidence. This type of knowledge, which implies rational autonomy, is essential to an adequate concept of what it means to be educated. Thus an attempt to measure meritorious academic achievement would be seriously inadequate if it did not test autonomous thinking.

Can external examinations test autonomous thinking? This question has concerned many educators and philosophers during the long history of external
examinations. Their use first arose in China in 622 AD. Civil service examinations first appeared in Europe in Brandenburg – Prussia in 1693. During the late nineteenth century external examinations became common in Great Britain as well as in her colonies and many former colonies. Following World War I and the success of the first group test of intelligence, the U.S. Army Alpha, the testing movement in the United States rapidly expanded to include tests for scholastic achievement, mental ability, interest, aptitude and personality.

Thus the above question has a rich and diverse intellectual heritage. It has concerned many thinkers in various cultures for over a thousand years. This chapter will review their arguments. In the next chapter we will consider to what extent these arguments were referred to and used by educators in British Columbia prior to the 1960s.

The Neo-Confucian Debate

Chinese assessment of the examination system began during the reign of Emperor Shen-tsung (r. 1068-86) when Wang An-Shih was the chief minister. Wang was convinced that reliance on the system did not adequately foster outstanding merit for "the talented men who could become high officials are confined to useless learning," the memorization of texts and the writing of literary compositions. This criticism was often repeated but seldom did anyone consider why the learning was useless "in itself" rather than useless in terms of results. Chu Hsi (1130-1200) was the first Neo-Confucian philosopher to raise the level of criticism by addressing epistemological concerns.

Chu Hsi's position was founded on a theory of learning which emphasized thinking. Cheng I said "the source of learning is thought" and Chu Hsi comments that "thinking stimulates and develops intelligence." The first step was to know "how to doubt." The second step was to question the meaning of words in order to clarify the ideas of a text (3:22, 3:27). Next, one should probe and examine the principles contained within the ideas (3:66, 3:67, 3:33). The purpose of learning was to gain enlightenment (2:100), not to impress others (2:14). Chu Hsi reaffirms the traditional Confucian approach to intellectual enlightenment: "Study extensively, inquire accurately, think carefully, sift clearly and practice earnestly." This approach also involved mastering the dispositions which would enable a student to learn in a thoughtful manner. The form to be followed was inductive.
"Everything should be investigated to the utmost, and none of it is unworthy of attention." This last contention would be challenged by Wang Yang-ming who believed that observations did not lead necessarily to the identification of principles. Chu Hsi's position can be summed up as:

One must inquire deeply, understand quietly, and ponder for a long time, and then he will probably find out for himself. If a student is to learn from a sage at all, he must deeply ponder over the feelings and dispositions of the sage, and must not try to understand him merely in terms of words. If he does that, what he studies is nothing but writing.

Chu Hsi's essential criticism of the examination system was that...

Merely to memorize what one has recited and to have extensive information, but not to understand principle or to reach the point of thorough understanding and penetration, is to chase after what is small and to forget what is great. One will be impeding one's free and clear mind with useless things. This is to trifle with things and to lose one's purpose.

However when he was asked whether preparation for civil service examinations interfered with a student's efforts at real learning he replied:

If one spends ten days each month in preparing for the examinations, one can devote the remaining days to true learning... The danger of preparing for the examination is not that it hurts one's efforts at true learning but that it destroys one's will to study.

This is not as contradictory as it might first appear. Chu Hsi rejected Mencius's argument that a teacher had an obligation to enlighten others. Instead he advocates *Analects* 7:8—"Confucius would not enlighten those who were not eager to learn." Chu Hsi saw the examination as a means to separate the true learners from those who pursued knowledge only for the sake of advancement.

Chu Hsi also saw the examinations as a useful means of overcoming Taoist inaction and Buddhist "silence and annihilation." He was perhaps the prototype of those who argue that the examination system is good for character development. Further Chu Hsi believed purpose and activity could be isolated from each other causing a tension that was useful in the development of intellectual skills. He did not elaborate on how this tension would promote the mind's capacity to have free and clear thoughts.
Wang Yang-ming considered Chu Hsi's attitude toward learning to be a dangerous, intellectual trap that reduced scholarship to scholasticism. He said it allowed the state to replace "critical spirit, creative thought, and moral purpose and vitality" with "a concern for fragmentary and isolated details" that led to "the habits of memorization and recitation instead of searching for meaning and values." Wang believed Chu Hsi's separation of knowledge and action to be a fundamental error. "It is a delusion to believe that the quest of knowledge can be separate from its application." He thought Chu Hsi's doctrine had inadvertently provided the state with a means of neutralizing intellectual inquiry and moral debate. If Confucian knowledge had no value other than for extrinsic rewards gained after years of bookish study and examination writing, the real value of such knowledge was lost.

Wang Yang-ming's cure was to urge the student to make his studies "relevant". He suggested that to know is not to memorize a set of externalized values and concepts but to manifest what one has understood in concrete actions. To delay action was to make knowledge superficial. For Wang Yang-ming the important task of education was to encourage moral self-sufficiency founded on rational judgements. This purpose had become obscured by Chu Hsi's approach which emphasized the investigation of things, however small and seemingly irrelevant.

Yet both Chu Hsi and Wang Yang-ming believed in the Chun-tzu ideal first expounded by Confucius. The Chun-tzu considered learning a delight and a lifelong work, not a labour to be endured for extrinsic benefits. He was a superior man who possessed wisdom, compassion and moral courage. In all things he acted with virtue for "The superior man understands righteousness; the inferior man understands profit" (Analects 4:16). Both Chu Hsi and Wang Yang-ming sought to have a society where education's purpose was to create Chun-tzu who accepted official positions. Instead they lived in a society which educated men to become officials. A popular adage of the neo-Confucian age was "To study, to get the metropolitan degree [Ph.D.], to become an official, to become wealthy."

During the nineteenth century, the examination-education system in China was much criticized for failing to select officials who were capable of meeting the challenges imposed by western imperialism and Japanese aggression. The system was investigated by the Imperial Education Committee and they found;
...that it is necessary to discontinue the examination system at once, so that the management of the schools may improve in quality...

The examination system relies only upon the failure or success of one day; in the schools several years have to be spent in thorough investigation. In the examination system [the candidates] are selected merely for their polished style; there is no way to test their personal qualities. The schools, however, pay attention to the way of life [of the students], and moreover, the workings of their minds can be clearly known...

In 1905 the Empress abolished the civil service examinations on the grounds that they caused only "superficial knowledge" to be learned while what was needed were schools that taught "fundamental principles and practical applications."

The Chinese experience suggests that their external examination system could not test or promote autonomous thinking. It may have promoted a capacity for memorization and a disposition for hard work but it did not encourage rational reflection. Eventually the Chinese decided that the social and political usefulness of the examination system was outweighed by its educational inadequacies.

The Debate in Britain

The "competitive" examination idea gained rapid popularity in Britain during the nineteenth century. This was fueled in part by a political need, an available administrative solution, and an intellectual climate that was conducive to the solution being implemented. As the British became increasingly embroiled in the affairs of state on the Indian subcontinent, an effective model for securing ambitious and capable Englishmen as government officials was needed. In 1835 an acute political observer wrote:

The full development in India of this Chinese invention [civil service examinations] is destined one day, perhaps, like those of gunpowder and printing to work another great change in the states-system even in Europe.\(^{15}\)

This Chinese invention found fertile intellectual soil as the general idea of examinations was already well established in Britain, i.e. Trinity College began using entrance examinations in 1759 and Oxford began switching from the disputation system to setting examinations for the B.A. degree after 1802. However, the Chinese system was primarily an administrative tool which enabled the state to efficiently select and grade officials required by a mass bureaucracy. It encouraged prior education only so far as education prepared students to write
the examinations.

Liberal reformers, wishing to extend and to improve popular education in order to promote equality of opportunity, advocated the use of external examinations in the school system. John Stuart Mill wrote

The Chinese are remarkable in the excellence of their [examination] apparatus for impressing as far as possible, the best wisdom they possess upon every mind in the community, and securing that those who have appropriated most of it shall occupy the posts of honor and power.¹⁶

Mill believed external examinations were desirable as long as steps were taken "to prevent the State from exercising, through [examinations], an improper influence over opinion." His recommendation was that "Knowledge required for passing an examination... should, even in the higher classes of examinations, be confined to facts and positive science exclusively." Mill does not attempt to reconcile this call for objective tests with his earlier acknowledgement that "very few facts are able to tell their own story without comments to bring out their meaning." Neither does he reconcile his statement,

the examination on religion, politics, or other disputed topics, should not turn on the truth or falsehood of opinions, but on the matter of fact that such and such an opinion is held, on such grounds, by such authors, or schools, or churches,

with his central thesis that people need to reason, to think for themselves, to test and to discover the grounds of their opinions rather than to rely on inherited, authoritative doctrines. His key point is:

Never when controversy avoided the subjects which are large and important enough to kindle enthusiasm was the mind of a people stirred up from its foundations, and the impulse given which raised even persons of the most ordinary intellect to something of the dignity of thinking beings.

How then is the "dignity of thinking" to be encouraged by external examinations which call for the mere recitation of authoritative arguments or the memorization of facts tested out of the context that gives them meaning? Mill does not resolve this issue. Nor was he challenged, for the reformers were generally convinced that external examinations would cure many social ills and cause no ill effects. Their arguments usually included one or more of the following points:
1. External examinations provide for social advancement and career opportunity based on merit rather than inherited status, purchase or patronage.

This was the most important of all arguments and was most often cited. Dawes (1854) thought a competitive system would "help to reduce corruption and place-seeking." The Newcastle Commission (1861) thought it reasonable that people "value education as a means of rising to a higher station in life" and the Revised Code (1862) recognized that "open competitive tests serve to decide the fitness of candidates for public office or for an independent profession and may serve to bring forward able boys and girls from a lower social level and to give them opportunities for advancement through higher education."

2. External examinations are an effective government instrument for ensuring that schools (or in Mill's case, parents), are equipping students with the prerequisite academic skills and general knowledge which every future citizen needs if he is to have at least a minimum opportunity for success and to be a productive member of society.

For example, in 1862 the English Revised Code imposed examinations in reading, writing and arithmetic upon all elementary schools receiving government grants. Over a period of three years, a dramatic improvement was recorded at least as noted by examination results. A similar system was used in Ontario from 1876–1882. Mill wanted to fine the parents if their children were taught at home but had failed the examinations.

3. External examinations encourage positive character traits.

Booth (1847) argued "examinations...ensure that the adult had in youth acquired habits of application and industry... that success in examinations ensures the formation of habits of diligence and self-control."

4. External examinations provide an incentive for students to work harder,
particularly where the top students are rewarded with some prize, scholarship or position.

The British civil service examinations were introduced in 1855 with the announcement, "The educated youth of the United Kingdom are henceforth to be invited to engage in a competition in which about 40 prizes will, on an average, be gained each year. Every one of these prizes is nothing less than an honourable social position and a comfortable independence for life." 24

5. External examinations provide a means of inspecting teachers and a system for state control over schools.

The Taunton Commission (1864-68) recommended "a government servant should be responsible for inspecting endowed secondary schools and for presiding over the annual school examinations" which they were to regard as the pivot of their recommendation. Barry (1878) thought this "inspection and examination of a whole school did help parents to assess the efficiency of schools." The inspection would not only identify the "efficient teacher" but ensure as well that schools were following the guidelines of the Ministry of Education rather than the dictates of local pressure groups.

The public and the government in Britain were persuaded by these arguments. In 1850 the College of Preceptors began using external examinations with secondary students wishing to go to university. In 1855 civil service examinations were used for selecting officials who wished to serve in India. In 1857 Oxford began testing candidates and in 1858 Cambridge initiated a similar practice. By Order-in-Council in 1870, competitive examinations were made compulsory for admission to all civil service departments.

The tide of support turned against the use of external examinations in the 1870s as the potential for the examination system to affect adversely the educational system became increasingly apparent. A.R. Grant wrote in 1880...

All that an examination could do was to test "knowledge." It
provided few means of eliciting originality or appraising mental capacity. It could not test the balance of mental powers or assess soundness of judgement.

In 1887 the College of Preceptors began a review of their position on external examinations. A year later, the journal *Nineteenth Century* published a "protest" against these examinations signed by 400 persons of academic influence. In 1889 these arguments were collected together and published in *The Sacrifice of Education to Examination*. The arguments noted that examinations caused undue stress, checked independence and free development in teaching, and quenched the love of knowledge for its own sake. Moreover, it was argued external examinations wasted valuable educational resources by locking them up in the awarding of prizes and scholarships.

The debate in Britain between those advocating the use of external examinations for social and administrative reasons and those opposing the examinations on educational grounds was recognized and documented by the 1911 *Report of the Consultative Committee on Examinations in Secondary Schools*. In this report an attempt was made to discuss the issue primarily in educational terms. The Report listed six good effects brought about by examinations on the pupil including:

b) that they incite him to get his knowledge into reproducible form and to lessen the risk of vagueness;

c) that they make him work at parts of a study which, though important, may be uninteresting or repugnant to him personally;

f) that they enable the pupil to measure his real attainment:
   (i) by the standard required by outside examiners,
   (ii) by comparison with the attainment of his fellow pupils, and
   (iii) by comparison with the attainment of his contemporaries in other schools.

On the other hand, examinations may have a "bad effect upon the pupil's mind" (six reasons were listed):
a) by setting a premium on the power of merely reproducing other people’s ideas and other people’s methods of presentation thus diverting energy from the creative process;...

b) by favouring a somewhat passive type of mind;...

e) by inducing the pupil, in his preparation for an examination, to aim rather at absorbing information imparted to him by the teacher than at forming an independent judgement upon the subjects in which he receives instruction.

Further the Report considered the good effects of well-conducted examinations upon the teacher. These included inducing him to treat his subject thoroughly, to be organized, to pay attention to all pupils and to acquaint himself with the standard commonly achieved by other teachers. The bad effects noted were that external examinations:

(a) constrain him to watch the examiner’s foibles and to note his idiosyncrasies (or the tradition of the examination) in order that he may arm his students with the kind of knowledge required for dealing successfully with the questions that will probably be put to them;

(b) limit the freedom of the teacher in choosing the way in which he shall treat his subject;

(c) encourage him... to impart... groups of facts or aspects of the subject which each pupil should properly be left to collect or envisage for himself;

(d) predispose the teacher to overvalue among his pupils that type of mental development which secures success in examinations;

(e) make it the teacher’s interest to excel in the purely examinable side of his professional work and divert his attention from those parts of education which cannot be tested by the process of examinations.
The Report does not suggest which side has a stronger case. On inspection though, the case for external examinations, as separate from internal, teacher prepared examinations, depends on "(f) they enable the pupil to measure his real attainment" and they induce a teacher to do his job in a professional manner. What is meant by "real attainment"? Probably "the standards required by outside examiners." Will these standards include the recognition of thinking characterized by good judgement? This was unlikely if bad effect (c) on teachers was common. In such cases then, the standards used were not ones designed to test meritorious academic achievement as previously discussed and it is difficult to believe that they enabled a pupil to measure his "real attainment."

Secondly, the argument that examinations induce teacher professionalism is seriously jeopardized by the bad effects the Report noted, particularly a, b, and e. If inducement is needed, then would it not be more effective to have mentor teachers and/or principals work with those whose conduct is in question?

On the whole, the case for external examinations presented in the 1911 report boils down to an administrative means of efficiently inspecting schools to ensure compliance with centrally established "standards." The case against shows that these examinations are in conflict with the liberal concept that education is to promote autonomous thinking. The Report does not comment on this problem.

A.N. Whitehead did. Beginning in 1912, he presented a series of lectures on the aims of education which condemned the use of external examinations.

External examinations kill the best part of culture [defined as activity of thought, and receptiveness to beauty, and humane feeling]... The reason is that we are dealing with human minds and not with dead matter. The evocation of curiosity... [is] not to be imparted by a set rule embodied in one schedule of examination subjects.4

Whitehead bases his argument on a concept of learning which considers the mind as "never passive." He felt you could not "postpone its life until you have sharpened it" for whatever powers "you are strengthening in the pupil must be exhibited here and now." This position is remarkably similar to Wang Yang-mings' but Whitehead's intention is different. Whereas Wang was convinced primarily with the growth of moral self-sufficiency, Whitehead believes self-development occurs through intellectual development.
Whitehead's concern with the mind's growth leads to a theory of pedagogy.

In training a child to activity of thought, above all things we must beware of what I will call "inert ideas" – ideas that are merely received into the mind without being utilised, or tested, or thrown into fresh combinations.

Clearly external examinations which encourage teachers "to impart groups of facts or aspects of the subject which each pupil should properly be left to collect or envisage for himself" (1911 Report) are harmful, in Whitehead's opinion, to intellectual growth. He believed that education "is the acquisition of the art of the utilization of knowledge"; external examinations killed this art by encouraging learning based on rote memory. As such they caused "educational waste." To avoid this he advocated that schools rather than scholars should be inspected.

P.J. Hartog, while endorsing Whitehead in principle, argued that external examinations might be acceptable if they were used only in "that part of education in which it is useful and necessary to think more or less on a model" which he refers to as "education for technical efficiency."

This movement towards accommodation with external examinations by recognizing differing spheres of influence was rejected by Bertrand Russell. He believed "all higher instruction should be given with a view to teaching the spirit and technique of inquiry rather than from the standpoint of imparting the right answers to questions." External examinations discouraged inquiry, encouraged "docility and the belief that definite answers are known on questions which are legitimate matters of debate." Russell was concerned that learning encouraged the use of books, the development of reasonable arguments, the formation of sound judgements and an enthusiasm for the acquisition of knowledge. He did not consider these aims to be possible "while the tyranny of examinations and competition" persisted.

In review, the debate in Britain had undergone a significant shift. It is important to note that the 1911 Report does not advance the liberal claim that examinations promote "equality of opportunity." This nineteenth century rationale had been replaced by a concern for administrative efficiency and accountability. As Roach says,
Originally competitive examinations had been a reforming slogan to set people free from patronage and traditional interest, and to make sure that the best men came to the top. Now competition, instead of being a means of breaking up the traditional order, had been in one sense captured by that order, and had become the instrument of collectivist and centralizing power.

The British historical experience suggests that external examinations do not test or promote autonomous thinking and can be quite damaging to a liberal education. However those opposed to these examinations lacked a spokesperson who could articulate persuasively a theory of learning which demonstrated the need for autonomous thinking. Certainly both Whitehead and Russell had presented arguments which were in sympathy to this theory but neither had systematically developed it into a philosophy of education. The American, John Dewey, did.

John Dewey and the Early American Debate

In *How We Think* (1911, revised 1933) and in *Democracy and Education* (1916), Dewey speaks at length on the need for education to promote thinking capacities and dispositions.

Dewey considered that the purpose of school education was to ensure the "continuance of education [throughout life] by organizing the powers that ensure growth" (*D.A.E.*, p. 51). Growth is hampered and closed off when reflective thinking does not accompany habit or skill formation. Reflective thought is "the active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends" (*H.W.T.*, p. 9). Such thinking involves:

1. a state of doubt, hesitation, perplexity, mental difficulty in which thinking originates; and
2. an act of searching, hunting, inquiring, to find material that will resolve the doubt, settle and dispose of the perplexity (*H.W.T.*, p. 12).

There may however, be a state of perplexity and yet thinking need not be reflective:

For the person may not be sufficiently critical about the ideas that occur to him... To be genuinely thoughtful, we must be willing to sustain and protract that state of doubt which is the stimulus to
thorough inquiry, so as not to accept an idea or make positive assertion of a belief until justifying reasons have been found. (H.W.T., p. 16).

Wang Yang-ming and Chu Hsi also stressed the importance of doubt as an initial step in thinking. Dewey argues that certain dispositions need to be cultivated which "are favourable to the use of the best methods of inquiry" and these include open-mindedness, whole-heartedness, absorbed interest, and intellectual responsibility. Wang Yang-ming's concern about the unity of action and knowledge finds expression in Dewey's words that "An ounce of experience is better than a ton of theory simply because it is only in experience that any theory has vital and verifiable significance" (D.A.E.p. 144) and in "Isolation of subject matter from a social context is the chief obstruction in current practice to securing a general training of mind" (D.A.E.p. 67). Dewey says that "effective teachers give the pupils something to do, not something to learn; and the doing is of such a nature as to demand thinking, or the intentional noting of connections; learning naturally results" (D.A.E.p. 154).

The real desideratum is getting command of scholarship or skill under conditions that at the same time exercise thought... Information, merely as information, implies no special training of intellectual capacity; wisdom is the finest fruit of that training (H.W.T.p. 63-64).

Dewey's theory of educational practice can be summed up by "The sole direct path to enduring improvement in the methods of instruction and learning consists in centering upon the conditions which exact, promote and test thinking" (D.A.E.p. 153).

Thinking characterized by critical reflection rather than passive acceptance can be promoted through questions that require the student "to use material already learned in dealing with a new problem," keep ideas developing in an orderly and consistent manner, "extract the net meaning of ideas" and clarify what is significant, provide a sense of intellectual accomplishment and "instill an excitement" about some coming topic. (H.W.T.p. 267).

Such thinking can be tested if assessment is made "a constant function." Dewey says "the mistake lies in supposing that the need for testing is met merely by tests of ability to reproduce subject matter that has been committed to
Rather, the important thing is to test:

(a) progress in understanding subject matter;
(b) ability to use what has been learned as an instrument of further study and learning;
(c) improvement in the general habits and attitudes that underlie thinking: curiosity, orderliness, power to review, to sum up and to define, openness and honesty of mind, etc.

Examinations can serve a very useful educational purpose. By constantly testing to determine whether students understand the knowledge being presented, whether they can utilize it beyond the original context in which it was given, and whether they are developing dispositions that reinforce critical reflection, examinations can serve a very useful educational purpose.

However Dewey condemns external examinations because they encourage teaching practices that "violate intellectual integrity and cultivate mental servility" (H.W.T.p. 257). Dewey has mistakenly been accused by his detractors – eg. Hilda Neatby – as being little concerned with the child’s intellectual development. His comments presented here suggest the opposite. Dewey had a wide ranging vision of education that was not shared by all his followers. He believed the school system should provide education which encouraged

...practical attitudes of efficiency to be formed, moral dispositions to be strengthened and developed, esthetic appreciation to be cultivated... upon its intellectual side, education consists in the formation of wide-awake, careful, thorough habits of thinking (H.W.T.p. 78).

Dewey opposed external examinations not because he discounted intellectual growth but because he feared such growth was crippled by the examination system. "No one other thing, probably, works so fatally against focusing the attention of teachers upon the training of mind as the domination of their minds by external examinations" (H.W.T.p. 65).

Dewey say that external examinations came into vogue through "the tendency of parents and school authorities to demand speedy and tangible evidence of progress" and because "the securing of external results is an aim that lends itself naturally to the mechanics of school administration" (H.W.T.p. 65). For Dewey, encouraging thinking was a higher priority than maintaining an artificial system of public accountability.
Dewey's position was challenged by those who advocated a scientific management of schools based on efficiency techniques developed in the business world. Ellwood P. Cubberley, for many years dean of Education at Stanford, wrote

Our schools are, in a sense, factories in which the raw products (children) are to be shaped and fashioned into products to meet the various demands of life. The specifications for manufacturing come from the demands of twentieth century civilization, and it is the business of the schools to build its pupils according to the specifications laid down. This demands good tools, specialized machinery, continuous measurement of production to see it is according to specifications, the elimination of waste in manufacture, and a large variety in the output.  

Those who belonged to this "cult of efficiency" demanded that teachers show results which could be readily seen and measured. This movement dismissed E.G.Holmes 1911 warning that "in proportion, as we tend to value the results of education for their measurableness, so we tend to undervalue and at last to ignore those results which are too intrinsically valuable to be measured."  

The efficiency movement was supported by the new testing techniques developed by Thorndike and his disciples: objective, multiple-choice tests designed to scientifically evaluate performance. In 1929 the American Historical Association commissioned a study to investigate to what extent the "new-type test techniques" could provide "speedy, comprehensive and accurate" examinations in the social sciences. Their underlying assumption was that the "ability to repeat the verbal definitions" of concepts did not prove understanding. Rather "the ability to apply the term or its definition correctly would be more convincing, especially if the application were to a new situation not previously met."  

They stress the need for learning to involve practical applications, warn against inert facts and knowledge based solely on memory. Further they state

The skill most difficult to acquire in the field of the social science subjects is that called critical ability. It... assumes proficiency in the other skills, has certain procedures of its own, and involves at every turn the application of judgement. The real aim in a test... is to have the student demonstrate his ability to do. [This] can only be demonstrated by individual performance under competent critical observation -- a task beyond the reach of new-type test techniques. 

The commission concluded that...

The form of the tests... seemed to imply a verbal precision for which social science offered little justification. Social ideas and social phenomena are usually capable of description and expression in a
variety of ways. Furthermore, such minute samplings of social science knowledge clearly did not constitute a test of the student's comprehensive knowledge, or of his ability to develop a sustained exposition of large ideas and to include the conditional elements which qualify any but the most simple of social situations. In other words, the extremely short answer form of the test seemed an artificial limitation which must confine such tests to the measurement of only the fragmentary beginnings of social science knowledge.

This five year, empirical study questioned the validity of objective tests to measure critical thinking and their conclusion reinforced Dewey's position. In the United States, the epistemological debate since the 1930s over external examinations has tended to focus on whether they test or promote "critical" rather than "autonomous" thinking. What is the relationship between these two concepts?

Critical Thinking and the later American Debate

Critical thinking belongs to a family whose deeds are characterized by good judgement and reliance on reason. In a narrow sense it refers to the assessment of statements to determine if they embody valid inferences. This approach was typified by the U.S. Institute of Propaganda Analysis in the 1930s. S.N.F. Chant, who influenced the external examination debate in British Columbia, subscribed to this view. Writing in 1957 he said "To be critical means exercising judgment upon what we read and hear with regard to the distortions of fact, intentional or otherwise, that are commonplace in all forms of communication."

Dewey used critical in an operational sense whereby if a person was

to be genuinely thoughtful, [he] must be willing to sustain and protract that state of doubt which is the stimulus to thorough inquiry, so as not to accept an idea or make positive assertion of a belief until justifying reasons have been found.

Whitehead, indirectly, supports this operational sense with his insistence that learning involves the active participation of a student's mind. Russell's insistence on the "spirit and technique of inquiry" suggests that he also adhered to this use.

This concern with critical judgement as an element of good thinking was adopted by the Educational Policies Commission of the National Educational Association in 1938.
Critical judgement is developed... by long and continuous practice under the criticism of someone qualified to evaluate the decisions. The child must learn the value of evidence... He must learn to defer judgement, to consider motives, to appraise evidence, to classify it, to array it on one side or the other of his question, and to use it in drawing conclusions. This is not the result of a special course of study, or of a particular part of the educative procedure; it results from every phase of learning and characterizes every step of thinking.\(^{36}\)

Glaser considers critical thinking in a broader sense by viewing it as involving three principal elements:

1. an **attitude** of being disposed to consider in a thoughtful, perceptive manner the problems and subjects that come within the range of one's experience;

2. **knowledge** of the methods of logical inquiry and reasoning;

3. **skill** in applying these methods.\(^{37}\)

He introduces the idea that "creativity supplements critical thinking" although it may not be an essential ingredient. Glaser argues that intuition and associative thinking are creative traits that are essential to effective problem solving. As solving problems may be an outcome of critical thinking, the forms of perception and the thought which lead to discovery and hypothesis are to be included in the critical thinking family.

Ennis supported this broad concept of critical thinking by elaborating the attributes involved to include seven proficiencies and nine tendencies.\(^{38}\) Siegel added to this approach with his analysis of the "critical spirit."\(^{39}\)

In its broadest sense, critical thinking has tended to become synonymous with autonomous thinking, that is, thinking which is responsible, original [when this is an asset], rational, insightful and self-directing. R.F.Dearden argues that autonomous thinking does in practice presuppose critical thinking.

A person is autonomous, then, to the degree that what he thinks and does in important areas of his life cannot be explained without reference to his own activity of mind. The explanation of why he thinks and acts as he does in these areas must include a reference to his own choices, deliberations, decisions, reflections, judgements, plannings or reasonings.\(^{40}\)

However the two concepts are not synonymous for the concept of autonomous thinking includes a political connotation that implies a freedom to act in one's best interest. Critical thinking has no such connotation. Rather it is a pedagogical
instrument for acquiring knowledge in the strong sense. Certainly critical thinking may lead to autonomous thinking but they are not identical concepts.

In the United States, the epistemological question has become whether external examinations can test critical thinking. Although it is a less political question than its British counterpart for it is divorced from the 19th century liberal concepts of autonomy, it is still concerned with ascertaining whether meritorious academic achievement is tested, promoted or damaged by external examinations. Dewey has very forcefully argued the case against external examinations on the grounds that they interfere with learning which embodies significant epistemic qualities. Dewey's epistemology has influenced a great many educators. For example, in the early 1960s following the "Sputnik" scare and the corresponding fear that American public education was inferior to the Soviet system, a renewed interest was sparked in the encouragement of thinking. The 1961 Educational Policies Commission of the National Education Association said:

The purpose which runs through and strengthens all other educational purposes – the common thread of education – is the development of the ability to think... this particular objective will not be generally attained unless the school focuses on it. In this context, therefore, the development of every student's rational powers must be recognized as centrally important.41

A review of this period's literature, particular in Social Studies, reveals the persuasive influence of Dewey's argument.42

However, his influence in society-at-large has been countered by the efficiency movement which promises accountability and competence based on behavioralist, industrial models. That these models do not promote autonomous thinking is not a concern for behaviorists such as B.F.Skinner who argues in Beyond Freedom and Dignity that autonomous thinking is a myth.

During the 1970s the accountability movement gained political popularity and eclipsed the Deweyan position. Recent studies suggest the pendulum is about to swing in Dewey's favour. In a report prepared by Mullis in 1984 for the National Assessment of Educational Progress (N.A.E.P.) which reviewed academic scores of over 1,000,000 young Americans on N.A.E.P. standardized tests administered since 1969, it was found:43

1. Students do not tend to react to mathematics or science problems
thoughtfully; they simply react. There is little evidence that students consider their ideas, that they realize an idea may be revised, discarded or retained;

2. [In reading], when asked to explain or defend their points of view, few students provided more than superficial responses... They do not appear to have learned how to look for evidence for their judgements in a systematic fashion;

3. [Summary] Most students have rudimentary skills, but tend to think of information in isolated bits and pieces... Further we have evidence in the reading, writing and science assessments that thinking abilities of 17 year-olds have been declining across the Seventies.

In June, 1984, the N.A.E.P. submitted a proposal to the National Institute of Education for funding to develop "higher-order skill assessment techniques" in mathematics, science and technology. They acknowledged in their proposal that during the past decade the basics have been stressed with successful results. However they see an educational crisis because there has been a "constant decline in the achievement levels of more able students".44 They wish to advance the measurement process so that it will be possible to evaluate "whether students know why they think particular things in particular ways."

In 1983, George H. Hanford, President of the College Board, speaking at the First International Conference on Critical Thinking, Education and the Rational Person, asked his audience to consider "How do we shift the emphasis in education from the routine, repetitive activities that have been identified as "basic skills"?"45 He quotes Ted Sizer, former Dean of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, who is conducting "The Study of High Schools."

Secondary schools should be primarily places where young citizens learn to use their minds... (with a)... curriculum that stresses ways of knowing and thinking rather that sweeping coverage of things barely grasped...

This overload of material is largely memorized data assigned by teachers for students to absorb, display and then forget... we give little opportunity for students to engage with problems... to reason... to imagine, to hypothesize, to analyze, to synthesize... that is, to
think. It is important that we increase those opportunities.

Current trends in the American debate suggest educators, even those with an external examination bias, are recognizing that education which does not encourage critical thinking is defective. The efficiency movement is attempting to regain credibility by creating new tests which will measure critical thinking in the content areas. The American Historical Association's 1934 study suggests this effort may be futile for important epistemological reasons outlined by Dewey. In any case, if it is found that external examinations can not test critical thinking, and do in practice discourage its growth, will the efficiency movement admit this severe limitation and restrict their use?

Will others who use external examinations be influenced by the N.A.E.P. and the College Board and abandon their tests on the grounds that they are educationally deficient as they don't readily measure critical thinking? This is particularly important at the Grade 12 level for here we expect our students to have previously mastered the basics. Therefore we seek evidence that our senior students are educated, capable of critical thinking, before they graduate into an adult world of responsibilities. Dewey and others suggest this assessment is best done by a competent, critical teacher who knows his students well and has the time to observe their habits and dispositions along with their proficiencies.

The American debate is entering a phase where the Deweyan premises concerning learning have been conceded by some of his opposition. They have not conceded that external examinations are incompatible with the encouragement of critical thinking but they admit their examinations are deficient if critical thinking is not tested.

Summary

There is no definitive answer to the question whether external examinations can test critical thinking. Chu Hsi and Wang Yang-ming seriously questioned the Chinese examination system because they argued it negatively affected learning based on thinking characterized by doubt, inquiry, clarification of ideas and the recognition of principles. Chu Hsi felt one should study until principles were realized before action was taken but Wang Yang-ming believed it was a mistake to separate knowledge from its application even at the initial stages of learning. In
1905 the Chinese examination system was abandoned on the grounds that it did not promote thinking.

In Britain external examinations gained popularity between 1850-1870. Liberal reformers, such as J.S. Mill, believed external examinations could promote equality of opportunity. Their use was questioned by those who believed autonomous thinking, culture and an appreciation of learning were undermined by such examinations.

John Dewey denounced external examinations on the grounds that they interfered with the encouragement of thinking characterized by doubt, inquiry and critical judgement. He believed external examinations lead to teaching practices that violated intellectual integrity and caused mental servility.

The efficiency movement in America, particularly the behavioralists involved in constructing measurement devices, challenged Dewey's epistemology. Recent events suggest important segments of the measurement industry are attempting to accommodate Dewey's views with their practices in order to stimulate critical thinking which is now regarded as an important goal of education.

In conclusion, Bertrand Russell is correct – external examinations are a "hasty application" of a liberal doctrine. For the liberal reformer who wanted an instrument to promote equality of opportunity and for those who sought to make schools accountable, external examinations are an enticing idea. However they have a fatal flaw recognized by the Chinese and by John Dewey. As previously constituted, they do not encourage autonomous or critical thinking. The Chinese found it was not possible to encourage students to have a respect for learning and thinking as long as the examination system rewarded mere form and facts unencumbered with personal meaning or practical application. They knew this and yet they did not act on this knowledge until their nation suffered defeat and humiliation in war. Only then did they accept that learning of "real value" which encouraged autonomous thinking was more important than the administrative usefulness of external examinations. Will we learn from their experience?

Let us now review the experience in British Columbia with external examinations. In narrowing the focus of discussion to the B.C. case, it is important to keep three themes in mind. First, external examinations are a long established, widely used administrative instrument. They were endorsed in China during the 7th
century, in Britain by 19th century liberals and in America by the 20th century efficiency movement. Second, their use has been questioned by many educators and philosophers concerned with intellectual growth in general and critical/autonomous thinking in particular. Since Dewey in the 1930s this argument has been well articulated and growing in recognition. Third, British Columbia policy decisions regarding external examinations have been made within an intellectual milieu influenced by the above. This is not to imply that B.C. policy makers were fully aware of the influence or even cognizant of the philosophical issues. Rather they made decisions partially based on arguments which have been identified in this chapter.

Chapter Three examines the somewhat meagre record of this influence in British Columbia. That a record exists at all is a tribute to the past educators in a frontier province. In 1902 there were only 735 public school teachers for the entire province and they were scattered among 335 schools. As late as 1947 fewer than 5000 teachers were employed in B.C. public schools. However the Annual Reports of the Public Schools (A.R.P.S.), the B.C. Teacher published by the B.C.T.F., the occasional newspaper article, the rare dissertation, and most importantly, the comments contained in the 1925 Survey of the School System and the 1960 Report of the Royal Commission on Education do provide sufficient evidence to suggest that B.C. educators were not totally unaware of the larger educational debate over external examinations. From this record we can attempt to reconstruct the history of the debate in British Columbia concerning external examinations. Whereas Chapter Two provided a global perspective on the issues involved, Chapter Three will give a provincial view of the local arguments inherited by the 1971 policy makers.
Footnotes


5Israel Scheffler, Conditions of Knowledge (Chicago: Scott, Foresman, 1965), p. 16.

6Ibid, p. 112.


11By principle, Chu Hsi meant a second–order concept. "In reading history, one must not only remember the historical facts. One must understand the principles of order and chaos, peace and danger, rise and decline, existence and extinction" (3:66).

12For a good discussion of this see Wing-tsit Chan, A Sourcebook in Chinese Philosophy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), particularly chapters 27 and 34.

Franke, p. 7. The following quotations are found on pages 60 and 64 respectively.

Têng, p. 295.

Mill, p. 72. The following quotations are located on pages 108, 109, 19, 109, and 33 respectively.


Ibid, p. 41

Ibid, p. 9

Ibid, p. 4


Roach, p. 58.

Ibid, p. 25. Roach also quotes Henry Latham who argued this point somewhat uniquely. "The existence of prizes helped to produce a class of cultivated persons who raised the tone of English social life. These advantages result from the prizes of learning, just as improvement in the breed of cattle is effected by the money subscribed as prizes in the shows" p. 274. The following quotations are found on pages 230, 272 and 271 respectively.


P.J. Hartog, *Examinations and their relation to culture and efficiency* (London: Constable and Company, 1918), p. XV. It is interesting to note with regard to Karier's theory of corporate social control that Hartog, who attempts to accommodate the administrative usefulness of external examinations with the pedagogic concern that students be encouraged to think, was invited to the 1933, 1935, and 1938 International Conferences on Examinations. These conferences were funded by The Carnegie Corporation and the Carnegie Foundation. However, how would Karier explain the present of Sir Michael Sadler at these conferences?

Roach, p. 281.

The following quotations are found on pages 162 and 171 respectively.

30 I deliberately avoided listing the "general features of a reflective experience" found on page 150, D.A.E. because Dewey's five stages have often been misused. As Coombs points out "most versions of the problem solving method are based on Dewey's analysis, and Dewey provided a logical reconstruction of the components of scientific thinking, not a recipe for doing such thinking." I am concerned here that the focus be on thinking rather than problem-solving. See Jerrold R. Coombs, "Critical Thinking and Practical Reasoning," In press.


34 Although this Commission does seem influenced by Whitehead's and Dewey's ideas, I think the safest interpretation of "ability to do" is expressed by Sophocles, "One must learn by doing the thing; although you think you know it, you have no certainty until you try."


37 Ibid, p. 25.


43Ina V.S. Mullis, "What do N.A.E.P. results tell us about students' Higher-Order Thinking Abilities." (Princeton: Mimeographed, 1984). Quotes 1, 2, and 3 are found on pages 3, 89, and 20 respectively. My appreciation is given to Ina V.S. Mullis for sending me this paper as well as the following NAEP proposal.

44National Assessment of Educational Progress, "Research on Higher-Order Skill Assessment Techniques in Mathematics, Science and Technology," A proposal to the National Institute of Education. (June, 1984.). p. 4. The following quote is located on page 19.

45George H. Hanford, "Only Connect," Paper presented at the First International Conference on Critical Thinking, Education and the Rational Person. Sonoma State University, Rohnert Park, California (August 18, 1983.), p. 13. The following quotations are found on pages 11 and 8 respectively.

46Ibid. "Critical thinking or reasoning' was perceived as central... not only as an integrating competency... but also as a separate competency, like the others, necessary for adequate access to the context of the six Basic Academic Subjects." p. 6.
Chapter Three

The High School Examination Debate in B.C. prior to the 1960s.

It is harder to get rid of the [Departmental] examination influence in the modern curriculum than to move a graveyard.

Major H.B.King, 1936.

The British Columbia school system has long been addicted to the use of external examinations. Before the first high school opened its doors in 1876, its students had been chosen by external examinations. Each June thereafter, until 1973, senior high school students wrote Departmental Examinations. Throughout this long period, the examinations reinforced a formalistic view of the world – there were right answers to be learned that could satisfy any question.¹ Such a view never seriously considered where or on what basis these answers originated and examinations therefore avoided questions that provoked doubt or controversy.

This chapter considers to what extent B.C. educators were aware that external examinations hampered intellectual growth by discouraging critical thinking. Did they recognize the arguments of Whitehead and Dewey as being pertinent to their situation? Did they misuse or use these arguments in a confused manner? Did they reject these arguments? If so, on what grounds?

Before addressing the above questions we will review the rationale used to institute external examinations as a mainstay of the B.C. school system.

External Examinations Instituted

The first external examinations were held in March, 1876 as a means to identify students who were perceived to be academically ready for a high school education. These examinations were not constructed or influenced by high school teachers, for no high schools existed. Instead they were prepared under the direction of the Superintendent of Public Schools, John Jessop. They tested arithmetic, grammar, spelling and geography.

Jessop was disappointed by the examination results. Of the 160 applicants only 68 (42.5%) passed. Twenty-one schools supplied candidates but Victoria
Public School alone supplied 54 of those who qualified for admission to high school. Jessop did not question the appropriateness of the examinations but rather questioned the capability of the teachers.

Teachers in old established schools must now be reminded that failures in the future to pass pupils in this competitive examination will be attributed, with but few exceptions, to inefficiency in imparting instruction, or want of attention to school duties and industry in the performance of them, *...Every succeeding year will make this provincial test of educational acquirement in the Public Schools more and more searching*, while the results as a matter of course, will tell strongly in favour of or against each particular teacher.

Jessop's decision to administer external examinations was probably influenced by the prevalent education opinion of the day. For instance Jessop was a great admirer of Ryerson and the Ontario system he had created. There, George Paxton Young, an inspector of grammar schools and a university professor, was championing the idea of "payment by results" first introduced in England by Lowe and made policy by the Revised Code of 1862. Young was largely responsible for installing a system from 1876 to 1882 whereby high school students wrote external examinations and these test results determined the amount of financial aid the province gave the school. Ontario abandoned the system in 1883 because parents protested that their children were just cramming and not really getting an education. As one Ontario Inspector said in 1878, "There is yet too much attention paid to cramming the memory rather than to developing the mind. ...Our pupils, as a rule, are not sufficiently educated to think for themselves." Jessop ignored or was unaware of such criticism. He may have been enthralled by the idea that external examinations could enable him to effectively and efficiently uncover incompetent teachers. Although Jessop never endorsed the payment by results scheme, he did advocate employment by results.

Further, Jessop's decision was typical and in accord to the educational thought prevalent in the British Empire-Commonwealth of the period. The Taunton Commission (1864-68) had recommended "a government servant should be responsible for inspecting endowed secondary schools, and for presiding over the annual school examination." In the 1872 School Act creating the public school system in British Columbia, Jessop wrote that one of the duties of the Superintendent was "To examine, at each yearly visit, the state and condition of the school as respects the progress of the pupils in learning." Jessop's decision
was not original or unique; it was expected.

Examinations were not just to be used for inspection though. As Booth had argued in 1847 and Lantham in 1868, competitive examinations could encourage positive character traits. This message was brought to British Columbia on September 18th, 1876, by the Governor-General of Canada, Lord Dufferin who, visited the newly opened Victoria High School. He presented the school with one silver and two bronze medals to be competed for on the basis of academic achievement. He reminded the students and assembled dignitaries that competitive scholarship led to habits of discipline and self-restraint which would be of great assistance to them throughout life. Further he advised the students that if he ever had an opportunity to assist the winners in any way, he would "deem it a pleasure and a duty to do so."

The education system not only used external examinations for selecting students, inspecting teacher efficiency and promoting "good character" but found them a convenient means for selecting teachers. Prior to 1901, high school education was viewed as sufficient training to allow a student to become a teacher provided he or she passed a Teacher's Examination. Many took this examination. For example, in the years 1882 and 1883, 44 of the 74 high school graduates became teachers. Their lack of professional or indepth intellectual training had a serious impact on the school system for they constituted more than two-thirds of all new teachers certified during these years. The others were generally from outside the province and their qualifications were often difficult to ascertain. Jessop's successor, C.C., MacKenzie, may well have felt that external examinations for students were necessary to determine whether these inexperienced, untrained or undocumented teachers were truly able to teach some knowledge and skills. Such were the problems of a frontier education system. Lacking acknowledged expertise, the system depended on a centralized authority to ensure that at least a minimum standard of achievement was obtained.

By 1898 this minimum standard had become the primary standard by which educational achievement was judged. Overturning a 1884 policy which had given high school principals the authority to judge whether a student deserved a diploma or not, the new policy removed this discretionary authority. Now one gained a High School Diploma, "considered equivalent to a certificate of Graduation," only "by undergoing the annual Departmental Examinations." The institutionalized
Edward B. Paul, Principal of Victoria High School, suggests how persuasive this authority could be. "High Schools can now devote themselves entirely to the preparation of pupils for these examinations." Paul welcomed this change in policy.

There had been no attempt to bring the High Schools' curriculum into harmony with university matriculation and the teachers' examinations, the consequence being that the aims of each pupil had to be taken into consideration in determining the subjects he ought to study. Experience in pedagogy is not required to perceive that much energy must be dissipated by such a system.

There is no record that this "efficiency" view was countered by anyone concerned about the system becoming standardized and depersonalized. Rather the arguments were over the exclusive academic nature of high schools, not the quality of the academic instruction being provided.11

In sum, external examinations were instituted in British Columbia as an administrative means of selecting students for high school, high school graduation and the teaching force. They were also used to ascertain the efficiency and capability of teachers. Third, they inspired competitive scholarship which was glorified by the Governor-General's silver medal. Finally, they provided a focus to standardize high school instruction. Overall, the establishment of external examinations in British Columbia reflected a belief that the teaching force needed to be closely monitored and guided. Poorly trained teachers could not be trusted to provide competent instruction or to make good judgements about a student's level of achievement. This belief may have been a reasonable one during B.C.'s frontier days. However, we will find it resurfacing when the 1983 decision is considered in Chapter Five.
Early Criticism of the External Examination System in B.C.

Little official criticism of the examinations can be found in the Annual Reports but J.B. DeLong, Inspector of High Schools, does mention in his 1916 report that the elimination of the "Departmental Examination for the Preliminary Course Junior Grade has proven beneficial in many schools." He says that "pupils have studied more systematically throughout the year" and the tendency for cramming has been removed. However, despite this criticism, DeLong was probably a supporter of the examination system for it enabled him to identify "weak" teachers as his 1917 comment reveals:

The disastrous showing [on Department Examinations] made by these two or three schools should give principals and teachers pause. This showing is due only in part to the presence of a few weak teachers. There are weak teachers and principals and trustees should realize that they cannot afford to keep them any longer.


The examinations are to be regarded as the weak points in a very strong system. The emphasis placed upon examination results as criteria of school efficiency must be counted among the few questionable acts of a very capable administration. He argues against their use on several grounds including that they do not promote teacher professionalism or learning which activates thinking.

Examination results... are in many cases the only means by which trustees judge the work of their teachers... More than once this writer has heard, "He is the best teacher we ever had"... passed on a teacher [I] knew... to achieve the desired results by a vicious system of rote memorization and intellectual drudgery.

Hindle contends that there is "little professional reading and little effort to attain distinction through scholarship" in B.C. because "these things do not produce examination results." His criticism of "teaching for examinations," that

...centres attention on the product of the mind, the written page, produced by the pupil, rather than the mind of the pupil itself. The dead examination paper commands more attention than the living child,...

is very similar to Whitehead's argument, discussed in Chapter Two. Hindle's criticism concludes with the observation:
Examinations have come to be regarded by the more thoughtful and progressive educators as of doubtful utility... It is admittedly one of the unresolved problems of modern pedagogy, whether to provide a substitute for them or to counteract the evils incident to their operation. In the hands of the unskilled teachers and thoughtless school authorities they work untold harm.

Yet Hindle is an anomaly. He does not seem to have had any significant influence on the debate. He is worth noting though for he provides a view of teaching practices that confirms the observations made by Putman and Weir a few years later. He also gives evidence to suggest that Whitehead's argument had spread rapidly and was known, but not common knowledge, in British Columbia. How many people read his book, published in Trail, a small smelting town in B.C.'s West Kootenay area, and thought about the issues he raised? He is intriguing but not influential.

Two influential educators who did contribute a great deal to the debate over external examinations in B.C. were J.H. Putman and G.M. Weir. They were asked by the provincial government in 1924 to survey the B.C. school system and to provide recommendations with regard to its improvement. Putman and Weir state in their report that "the greatest exponent of modern sociological theory underlying rational school practice is probably Professor John Dewey whose viewpoint...should be constantly kept in the foreground." That they subscribe to Dewey's view, at least in principle, is substantiated by comments in the sections concerning the aims of education and child development. They believe adolescence "is the proper period for rationalizing every bit of school work that can be shown to depend upon reason" for the adolescent is striving to realize his powers of reasons.

Further they say:

The great defect in modern society is a lack of these fundamentals of character that will enable people consistently to "think straight." [Such thinking] is one of the chief aims of modern education – it greatly transcends in importance the periodic passing of written examinations.

What is meant by thinking straight? Putman and Weir do not elaborate except to imply that it is a skill and a disposition which facilitates self-education. They seem to be arguing the liberal case for autonomous thinking, whereby
education develops the individual's capacity for rational and independent thought. It is not surprising then to learn that they severely criticized the external examination system for entry into and graduation from high school.

Rigidity and formalism in school organization, undue emphasis on the curriculum, "Grad–grind" [sic] methods of instruction, and the tendency to estimate educational results by terms such as marks, percentages, or proportion of "passes" are the besetting sins of those schoolmen who consider examination results to be the chief criterion of the teacher's success in the classroom or the most reliable measure of the school's efficiency.

The art of writing examinations should not be elevated to an end in itself that requires special emphasis on the eve of the day of reckoning when the pupils must make a creditable showing or be sacrificed to the Moloch of Examinations.

They criticized the system for causing undue grade retardation (noting the financial cost), for being unreliable and for being costly in terms of time, energy and dollars. They mention ten other "defects" including Hindle's concerns that "teachers lacking in culture and weak in inspirational power in the classroom are frequently successful 'examination experts' "and that inspectors and school boards "have a tendency to attach too much importance to examination results in the rating of their teachers." Their key epistemological criticism was that the examinations were based on the "traditional formal disciplinary doctrine" which they believed fostered a "tendency to transform the school into a mere knowledge factory, where drill upon dull, lifeless subject matter is made an end in itself."

However Putman and Weir were not opposed to the use of external examinations per se. They believed the "evils incident to their operation" (Hindle) could be overcome by the new type tests designed by Thorndike and his colleagues.

British Columbia may fairly claim the distinction of being the first Province in Canada to use standardized intelligence and achievement tests on a large scale [17,000 students]... The way has directly been opened for a notable advance in the scientific measurement of education.

One purpose of this testing programme was to evaluate the "quality of the teaching in the schools of British Columbia." They dismissed the method of observing the work of pupils and teachers in the schools because the results obtained were "unduly influenced by the personal bias and inaccurate judgement of the observer." Putman and Weir preferred the use of standardized tests which gave
results "that are objectively statable in mathematical terms and thus aid greatly in the objective evaluation of the school product" [italics mine]. Their bias was clearly stated:

Findings or conclusions based on the scientific use of standardized intelligence and achievement tests are obviously more authentic than the mere opinions of schoolmen and administrators and constitute the most reliable sources of information on classroom conditions available in British Columbia.

It seems strange that Putman and Weir considered artificially imposed tests more authentic than the judgement of those in the field. Field judgement can be based on regular classroom observations, recognition of professional involvement, parent opinion, and student success as shown by academic, social, sport and leisure activities both during the year and in later years. When opinion is founded on critical and competent observation over an appropriate period of time, surely such judgement is more authentic than conclusions based on "objective" and depersonalized data. Admittedly the observers may be biased but probably the standardized tests will be more so. This is an example of professional mistrust mentioned earlier. The experts, Putman and Weir, did not believe they would rely on the judgements of those "beneath them."

Putman and Weir's endorsement of the scientific management approach also implied that learning had to be organized according to discrete, measurable units. As the quality of teaching was to be judged by student success on external examinations, Putman and Weir did not alter the formalistic intent or authority of examinations. There were still right answers to be imparted, inert ideas to be memorized.

Thus there are contradictory tendencies in the Putman-Weir Survey regarding external examinations. In theory, they want senior students to develop their rational powers; in practice they endorse standardized achievement tests which are objective and "free from ambiguity." Here we find a twentieth century case reminiscent of J.S. Mill's position noted in the last chapter. The difficulties inherent to this position have not been addressed or resolved by Putman and Weir.

Secondly, although they say Dewey's viewpoint should "constantly be kept in the foreground" they ignore his concerns that "Education must measure its efficiency in terms of increased humanism, increased power to do, increased
capacity to appreciate,"Rather, Putman and Weir believe "efficiency cannot be reliably determined without the widespread use of standardized tests." Putman and Weir's loyalties are divided between the scientific management principles of Bobbitt and Dewey's emphasis on encouraging critical reflection.

This confusion is shown by the Putman-Weir recommendation that high schools be accredited. On the surface this appears to be a triumph for those opposed to external examinations. This is a false impression. Certainly - in theory - the burden of Departmental examinations which tested knowledge in the traditional disciplines would be removed from the top students in accredited schools. However, many educators, such as Major H.B. King, principal of Kitsilano High School in Vancouver, were concerned that standards could not be maintained unless some form of uniform tests were taken by Grade 12 students. Others felt that these uniform tests would cause the same pedagogical problems as the Departmental examinations. This issue was debated at the 1934 British Columbia Teachers Federation's Spring Convention.

The most constructive criticism of the [uniform test system] (and the one which appealed particularly to the gathering, if one is to judge by the enthusiastic applause with which it was greeted) was offered by Mr. Dilworth of Victoria. He suggested that the classroom be turned into a classroom and that a corps of trained supervisors be appointed to approach the teachers with sympathy and wisdom ("no science of education mentioned", objected Major King), and advise them in their work. Thus, he felt, would we attain the uniformity of achievement which is necessary for the accrediting of High Schools. The idea of uniform tests, while it had its advantages, would influence the quality of the teaching. Mr. Dilworth felt that the shadow of examinations would still cramp the style of teachers. They would prepare their students for the points on the objective tests and would feed them the conventional type questions. Mr. Dilworth then stressed teaching rather than testing, and the meeting seemed to be with him.

When high school accreditation finally came into effect in 1937 it was quickly followed by a rapid rise in the career of Major King and the use of provincial achievement tests. According to Mann, King was an advocate of the scientific management principle developed by Franklin Bobbitt, instructor in educational administration at the University of Chicago. Bobbitt believed education was a "shaping process as much as the manufacture of steel nails." Just as the manufacturing process required standards, so too did education. If standards were sufficiently defined "teachers would know instantly when students
were failing and principals would know when teachers were insufficient." In Bobbitt's view, just as standards and specifications for steel nails were set by the consumer, so should educational standards be set by the community and not by the educators.

When Weir became the B.C. Minister of Education in 1933, he appointed King as his technical advisor. By 1939, King had become the Chief Inspector of B.C. Schools. Mann asserts that King believed vocationalism and social control were the essential roles of school. He considered "intellectual training necessary only for those few who would become the leaders of the future." This, if Mann's view is correct, was a disavowal of Dewey's argument that "the purpose of school education is to ensure the continuance of education by organizing the powers that insure growth," an argument that led to the necessity for all students to develop their powers of critical thinking.

King, with Weir's tacit approval, began developing standardized achievement tests based on American models but adapted to B.C.'s curriculum. The first province-wide testing of reading was conducted in 1941. By 1946, the new Division of Tests, Standards and Measurements was created.

Was accreditation truly a move away from an education system dominated by external examinations? Certainly the Departmental examination had lost its pre-eminent role. The demise in official respect given these examinations was symbolized by the decision in 1937 to discontinue awarding the Governor-General's medals. Perhaps these medals, long associated with scholarship and competitive achievement, were not in keeping with progressive ideals of practical efficiency and social co-operation. However, Departmental Examinations were dethroned not to free the system from formalism and to promote critical thinking, but to enthrone a new king, standardized achievement tests.

In retrospect, the Putman-Weir Survey left a confused legacy. They acknowledged Dewey but they ignored his arguments against scientific management and external examinations. Instead Putman and Weir argue against Departmental Examinations because they are based on "traditional formal subjects" which lack "definite objectives and scientific standards of measurement." This is a weak argument. It is an argument for innovation that blames all problems on the
traditional system without really considering what has caused these defects. In their enthusiasm for "progress," Putman and Weir preferred Bobbitt to Dewey. The influence of the confused legacy has been substantial. Progressive education has been blamed for a decline in intellectual fare – an assertion that mistakenly assumes that intellectual development was once held in high regard – and Dewey, not Bobbitt, has been tarred as a contributor to this decline. As we will see in the next section, the rejection of progressive ideology in the 1950s was partially caused by a perception that this decline had become a threat to national honour and security. The solution, generally advocated, was a return to the disciplines on the belief that studying such subjects intrinsically caused intellectual excellence. Why this simple, atavistic approach was inadequate will be explained in the discussion concerning the Chant Report.

The Chant Report

In the years between the 1925 Putman–Weir Survey and the 1960 Chant Report major changes occurred in British Columbia's school system. The school district system itself was revamped by the 1945 Cameron Report and new grants were allocated to facilitate equal educational opportunity regardless of location. In elementary schools, the school population more than doubled during these years and such innovations as continuous progress were commenced as early as 1948. The greatest changes occurred in the high schools where the enrollment leaped from some 9,000 in 1922 to almost 75,000 in 1957. New composite programs and an attitude that high school education was a universal right fueled this massive increase. However Stevenson notes high schools were troubled by two fundamental issues which many educators felt were mutually inconsistent. Was the ideal of universal secondary education incompatible with the equally pressing desire for scholastic excellence?

In 1946 the newly formed Central Curriculum Committee proposed that a gradual reorganization of the curriculum for secondary schools be undertaken. Included was a recommendation "that advanced elective courses be provided in the major subject fields in order that students might pursue their intellectual interests further in high schools than is now possible." In 1951 the Department of Education reinstated the Governor-General's silver and bronze medal awards for scholarship. In 1953, Hilda Neatby, a historian at the University of Saskatchewan,
published an attack on progressive education entitled *So Little For the Mind*. This book was widely read and commented on. For example an editorial in the Victoria *Times* on February 11, 1957 reported that the University of Saskatchewan’s Dean of Education, when questioned about Neatby’s thesis, stated, "a large number of gifted children are being retarded by present high school standards." The editorial continues "Perhaps more attention should be given to the influence imposed on the brighter students by the Mortimer Snerds in the class." Did the reaction against progressive education constitute a "movement"? Certainly Neatby was not alone in her attitude but Stevenson argues that her view was idealistic, paternalistic and elitist, and as such, appealed to only a small segment of the Canadian public. Patterson suggests progressive education lost its momentum and popularity because of contradictory and vague positions that attracted "bandwagon acceptance" only until the faults of the system were corrected. As the system became increasingly responsive to reform, more attention was given to the faults in the progressive position. In any case, external criticism and internal contradictions both undermined the public’s confidence in the progressive approach.

On 4 October 1957 the public’s confidence was thoroughly shaken by the U.S.S.R.’s ability to launch the Sputnik satellite, a feat beyond the capability of the democratic West. London suggests conservatives blamed the education system for the West’s failure to keep ahead of Soviet technology. Three months after the Sputnik launching, a Royal Commission chaired by S.N.F. Chant was appointed "to enquire into and report upon the state of education in the Province of British Columbia," with particular attention to be focused on programmes of study and pupil achievement. One of the reasons given for establishing the Commission was "a prevalent opinion that Canadian education was not yielding results that were equal to those obtained in some other countries."

In bold letters, the Commission recommended in 1960 that "The primary or general aim of the educational system of British Columbia should be that of promoting the intellectual development of the pupils and that this should be the major emphasis throughout the whole school programme." This aim in high school was hindered for

...The presence in the University Programme of so many students whose talents are not suited for academic studies has impaired the value of the programme for superior students and has tended to lower its standards.
A greater reliance on examinations was seen by the Commission as an effective means of "excluding from the higher grades those who fall behind" which "would enable a programme to be set that would challenge those capable of going on." These examinations were not to be intelligence tests championed by the earlier progressives. On the contrary, the Commission stressed "achievement of the pupils in their school work as an index of ability, in order to offset a present tendency to overemphasize their IQ's." Departmental Examinations were praised because, as they approached there was "a tendency to tighten up the standards in order to meet the tests." However they believed the examinations should be improved and recommended "more essay-type questions be used in subjects that stress the understanding of knowledge rather than the recall of items of information."

What is meant by the "understanding of knowledge"? This idea is made clearer by the Commission's criticism of earlier pedagogical practices.

The nineteenth century method was quite effective for memorizing certain types of detail, but explanations and interpretations were not stressed, and there was little attempt to get the pupils to think for themselves.

From these diverse quotes one can assume that Chant believed that understanding involved independent thinking demonstrated by explanations and interpretations. By what method is this thinking to be encouraged? Surprisingly the Commission endorses the progressive approach of Dewey without mentioning his name.

As the emphasis shifted toward growth and development, the methods of instruction placed less stress upon routine text-book learning, rote-memorization, and intensive preparation for examinations. A greater effort was made to interest the pupils in their courses, widen the scope of their studies and add to their understanding.

There is evidence to indicate that [this] method when properly applied should contribute to better learning.

The Commission found that "one of the most frequently stressed aims of education was that pupils should be taught to think." Two of the submissions it highlighted were:
(17) How can people think critically if they are not brought up to question and to reason?

(60) The primary aim of education should be to produce a responsible, reasoning human being, who is not only informed but knows how to think. Our schools should stress therefore i) knowledge, ii) interest in continuous learning, iii) critical reasoning.

The Commission agreed that encouraging thinking was a "worthy aim."

How were the goals of encouraging thinking and improving standards, through increased examination use, to be reconciled? The Commission attempted to answer this by stressing the relationship between the growth of academic knowledge and the increased capacity to think effectively. "Modern thinking requires a much greater accumulation of knowledge upon which to draw than did primitive thinking. All of this must be learned, very largely in school." Their position is clearly indicated in their statement "The ability to think effectively... is characterized by the accurate use of words and numbers, understanding of man’s heritage and the appreciation of human values." Thus examinations, which test knowledge, would by definition lead to higher standards of education and more "effective" thinking.

There are several difficulties in this position. Foremost is Chants’s narrow and misleading characterization of intellectual development. Why has he excluded the growth of reason? What is meant by such vague notions as the "understanding of man’s heritage" and "the appreciation of human values"? What is the purpose of this understanding or appreciation? Would it not make more sense to say intellectual development was furthered by the ability to think effectively, where "effectively" referred to making judgements in a critical, informed manner?

Yet Chant, just three years prior in 1957, had expressed a different view which seems less confused. He had argued that "effective thinking is achieved through the development of useful mental habits" which included flexibility and orderliness. The habits grow through knowledge and experience which provide new concepts that are "merged into the structure of one’s thinking." The purpose of effective thinking is to have a valid conceptual foundation which enables a person to make good judgements. Chant emphasizes that the knowledge needed for effective thinking is brought about through mastery of concepts not information fragments. His position is as follows, "Insofar as man fails to develop his intellectual ability or restricts the freedom of thought, he is retarding
the progress of the human race to higher levels of attainment."

This last argument would have been well received by critics of the progressives but did they understand the complex interaction between knowledge and thinking that Chant was presenting? Was this complexity muddled in a tide of anti-progressivism when the report was written? Or was Chant's 1957 position overwhelmed by the widespread North American movement for curriculum reform based on intellectual excellence and cognitive achievement which evolved from the 1959 Wood's Hole Conference? This movement, led by Jerome Bruner and popularized by his 1960 book, The *Process of Education* stressed that subject matter should be taught according to its particular structure. Effective thinking – particularly intuitive thinking – was to be developed through mastery of these structures.  

The Commission seems to be endorsing a position similar to Bruner's. This position is very well expressed by Paul Hirst.\textsuperscript{32} Hirst argues that "the achievement of knowledge is necessarily the development of mind – that is, the self-conscious rational mind of man."\textsuperscript{33} He asserts that various forms of knowledge exist which can be classified as either distinct disciplines or fields of knowledge. The former distinction is particularly important for schools. By learning the various conceptual schemata embodied in each form – eg. history, mathematics, physical sciences, etc. – a student will "learn to see, to experience the world in a way otherwise unknown, and thereby come to have a mind in the fuller sense." Each different form of knowledge involves the development of thinking, communicating and so on "in ways that are peculiar to itself as a way of understanding experience."\textsuperscript{34} Education will thus be composed of the study of at least paradigm examples of all the various forms of knowledge. According to Hirst, a liberally educated person is one who knows the forms of knowledge so that he can rationally draw on the appropriate structure when faced with a problem or decision.

Hirst attacks Dewey's doctrine of growth as being too vague and insists that curriculum objectives must be spelled out not as behaviors but as "states of mind" – beliefs, knowing and understanding – based on concept formations and criteria for truth. He dismisses Dewey's emphasis on inquiry as mere mastery of scientific methodology with limited application to other forms of knowledge.\textsuperscript{35}
Hirst has not presented Dewey's care accurately and in so doing reveals serious inadequacies in his own case. Dewey argued that "the real desideratum is getting command of scholarship - or skill - under conditions that at the same time exercise thought."\textsuperscript{16} Dewey stressed critical thinking rather than the mastery of a particular process – his problem-solving model was a reconstruction of a process meant to provoke thought rather than a formula to be imitated. Hirst does not communicate this.

Dewey does not believe rationality is inherent to knowledge or knowledge forms but rather that it is gained through critical reflection when knowledge is being learned.

Any subject, from Greek to cooking, and from drawing to mathematics, is intellectual, if intellectual at all, not in its fixed inner structure, but in its function – in its power to start and direct significant inquiry and reflection. Dewey's position is supported by the studies of Thorndike in the 1920s that found no one subject had special intellectual virtue. "The expectation of any large difference in general improvement of the mind from one study [eg. Latin versus French] rather than another seems doomed to disappointment." It is also supported by common observation. Dewey commented that

Because their knowledge has been achieved in connection with the needs of specific situations, men of little book-learning are often able to put to effective use every ounce of knowledge they possess; while men of vast erudition are often swamped by the mere bulk of their learning because memory, rather than thinking, has been operative in obtaining it.

Hirst is mistaken to think that knowledge in itself conveys powers of rationality. The key is how the knowledge is learned, not the knowledge learned.

The Chant Commission had confused intellectual development with a mastery of knowledge based on the traditional disciplines. As such, it could justify the use of external examinations. But the public, as documented in the Commission's report, wanted education to encourage critical thinking which can not be gained through mere recitation of form or argument. By stressing examination use and by acknowledging the importance of critical thinking, the Commission had unwittingly exposed a major contradiction in B.C. educational policy.
This contradiction was noted by Graham Campbell, a teacher who wrote in the *B.C. Teacher* in 1960 that

Government examinations in the Social Studies do not fulfill their main purpose... They encourage rote-learning, not understanding... Our chief aim is the development of a good citizen; [who] is defined by his ability to think critically and his willingness to respect the opinions of others than by his capacity to store up odd bits of information.  

During the 1960s a lot more people would note and react to this contradiction.

Summary

External examinations were instituted in British Columbia primarily for administrative reasons. Hindle's 1918 criticism was insightful but largely ignored. Putman and Weir's 1925 Survey had much to say on external examinations, condemning Departmentals and praising standardized achievement tests. Their thrust was for progressive education, scientifically managed. Although they acknowledged Dewey's position they preferred Bobbitt's procedures. The Chant Commission was formed in response to a public perception that standards had dropped during the progressive era. The Commission recognized that thinking must be an aim of education and indirectly endorsed Dewey. However their concern for intellectual development was undermined by their assumption that such development was synonymous with mastery of the traditional disciplines.

In review, the pre-1960s debate over external examinations in British Columbia had been sparse, confused and preoccupied with whether the disciplines should form the basis for these tests. In one sense, it has been a debate over productive versus reproductive knowledge. Yet both sides – the progressives and the traditionalists – ignored what effect these examinations had on learning, particularly the encouragement of critical thinking. Although this concept was endorsed by both Putman-Weir and Chant, neither really considered how such thinking might be tested, promoted or disrupted by external examinations. Ironically the Chant *Report* notes that it was the public rather than professional educators who asked for critical thinking to be elevated in status, to be considered as a primary aim of education. Long submerged by other issues, critical thinking was finally surfacing in the early 1960s as an issue in the external examination debate.
This chapter has shown that the arguments against external examinations articulated by Dewey and Whitehead have been acknowledged in a confused manner by those who have influenced policy decisions in British Columbia. Although these educators have been concerned about the encouragement of rationality and intellectual excellence in theory, in practice their policies have been shaped by scientific management concepts or a view of knowledge that suppresses critical thinking.

Was the 1971 decision to abandon external examinations for Grade 12 graduation influenced by a clearer understanding of Dewey's argument? That is the central question to be considered in Chapter Four.
Footnotes

1See Neil Sutherland, "The triumph of 'formalism': the 'new' education in Canada in the 1920s and the 1930s," to appear in K.A. McLeod, ed., The New Education in Canada.


5ARPS., 1872, p. 13.

6For a discussion of the character traits that the British social elite, i.e., Lord Dufferin, expected of their sons see Edward Byron McLean, "Missing in Style: Public School Elites and the Victorian Economy" (M.A. Thesis, University of British Columbia, 1984).

7ARPS., 1877, p. 93.


9John Calam discusses this issue in "Teaching the Teachers: Establishment and Early Years of the B.C. Provincial Normal Schools," B.C. Studies 61 (Spring, 1984): 30–32.

10ARPS., 1898, p. 1266. The two following quotations are found in ARPS., 1901, p. 238.


13George Hindle, The Educational System of British Columbia, (Trail: Trail Printing and Publishing Co. Ltd., 1918). The following quotations are located on pages 88, 95, 96 and 94–95 respectively.


15David W. Swift, Ideology and Change in the Public Schools: Latent functions of Progressive Education (Columbus, Ohio: Merrill Publishing, 1971) discusses the
progressive equation of grade retardation with financial inefficiency on p. 86 and p. 87.

16One question they wanted answered was "Is British Columbia recruiting her staff of elementary school teachers from a comparatively low intellectual grade?"


18In practice, the University of British Columbia would not admit students unless they wrote the Departmental Examinations. This policy was in effect until 1949. Therefore if one wanted to go onto university, one had to write the examinations.


20Mann, p. 159.

21see Sutherland.

22Mann, p. 153.


24ARPS, 1947, Y.30. It is interesting to note that Major King retired the year before this committee was formed.


29The B.C.T.F. were in agreement with this. In their brief presented in April 1959, they did not recommend that the Departmental Examinations be abolished. On the contrary they said, "Those members of the federation who were in a position to note the change in attitude and application of pupils who realized that they were faced with the challenge of final examinations are heartily in favour of final examinations for all high school grades," p. 23. The following quotations are located on pages 224, 393, 357, 390, 258, 358, 351, 352, 362, 15, 19, 54, 59 and 93
respectively, of the 1960 Royal Commission.


34Mary Warnock, Schools of Thought, (London: Faber and Faber, 1977), p. 96. The following quote is found on page 40.

35Putman and Weir, p. 41.

36Hirst, p. 129.

37John Dewey, How We Think, (Lexington,: D.C. Heath, 1933), p. 63. The following quotations are located on pages 46-47 and 64 respectively.

38Graham Campbell, "What should the Social Studies Teach?," The B.C. Teacher (Jan., 1960): 196. His position was supported by Ethel Miller. "Are we leaving the 'Educe' out of Education?" The B.C. Teacher (May-June, 1960): 391-394.

Chapter Four

The 1972 Decision

The Chant Commission has caused all of us to look more critically at what we were doing and to consider new proposals.

J.R. Meredith, 1963

The period 1963–1973 was a turbulent, exciting time for education in British Columbia and Canada. George Tomkins comments that "the 1960s proved to be the decade in which mass education came into its own in Canada."¹ In 1961–62 Grade 12 enrolment was 36.4% of total Grade 2 enrolment. A decade later that proportion had grown to 71%.² In British Columbia, the comparable figures soared from 57% in 1959 to 94.8% in 1971.³ Elaborate government grant, loan, scholarship and bursary schemes as well as new community colleges and technical schools encouraged students to pursue higher education.

The effect was dramatic. For instance while only 4% of the 20–24 age group had enrolled at University in 1939, in 1969 the figure was 25.5%. In their 1976 report, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (O.E.C.D.) took the view that the achievements were equal in size and difficulty to those of Canada's glory days in railway construction. This rapid educational development seemed the fulfillment of a Second National Dream.⁴

E.A. Killough, who served as Assistant Registrar (Examinations) and as Registrar and Director of Examinations and Teacher Certification from 1964 to 1975 for the B.C. Ministry of Education, saw this period as a "time of tremendous optimism, enthusiasm and confidence."⁵ This feeling, Killough contends, was reinforced by the B.C. government's decision in 1971 to discontinue Departmental Examinations. The decision implied that educators had finally "come of age" and were professionally capable of making good judgements regarding student graduation. Killough, and presumably many more educators, considered this 'a vote of confidence in teachers' professional competence and integrity.

Yet this was also a turbulent time. In March 1972 the BCTF President, Adam Robertson, issued a special bulletin, "Crisis! 3", which noted the traditional lack of government sympathy toward education, and the Social Credit government's recent
full scale attack on education, on teachers, and on their organization. The bulletin listed ten issues of confrontation dating back to 1966, including the removal of automatic BCTF membership in 1971. It urged the membership to vote against the Social Credit Party in the upcoming provincial election.

Why should the Social Credit government give teachers a "vote of confidence" while simultaneously attacking teachers? Bill Allester commented in 1972 that the problem was financial in character. The government would not commit "adequate" funds for new policies agreed to in principle. As Allester noted, "school districts could not afford to exercise the freedom they were given." The government, though, had been spending increasing amounts on a rapidly expanding public school system. In less than ten years, 1962 to 1971, the number of public school teachers jumped from 12 thousand to 22 thousand. Per-pupil costs had grown at a 14.8 percent annual compound rate during the period 1958 to 1968. Moreover, the BCTF executive knew, from a June, 1972, opinion poll, that a majority of voters (54%) believed the quality of education had not improved through increased expenditures. James Daly, a historian at McMaster University, had warned educators in 1969 of the discrepancy between people's expectations and what they were willing to pay. Everyone wanted more from government, but fewer and fewer people were willing to pay for it. As people's expectations were not met, they would become subtly but massively resentful and less confident in public education. The warning foretold a backlash against educational innovation and expense. A decade later, in the baby boom shadow, a disillusioned and recession-bound public would prove Daly truly a Casandra. Unfortunately the BCTF leaders dismissed such cautions and instead pursued a course that lead to more spending and more promises.

It is in this context of optimism, teacher militancy, and a rapidly expanding public school system, that the 1971 decision was made to discontinue Departmental Examinations for Grade 12 graduation. Was the 1971 decision based on a recognition and endorsement of the Deweyan argument that external examinations interfered with the encouragement of critical thinking and the growth of intellectual excellence? Was it a political decision made to appease or to derail teacher militancy? Was it a vote of confidence?

To answer these questions it is necessary to review the period 1963–1973 in greater detail, concentrating on the arguments examined and used by the
Provincial Advisory Committee on the Senior Secondary School Curriculum for British Columbia. First, however, the influence of the Chant Report must be noted for it provided the stimulus which resulted in a reconstructed secondary school system and the establishment of the advisory committee.

Aftermath of the Chant Report, 1961-1966

In 1963, J.R. Meredith, director of the Curriculum Division, presented a paper on curriculum change to a symposium on Canadian Education held at U.B.C. He argued that educational change in B.C. since 1960 had been primarily a result of the Chant Royal Commission Report and that it had been both substantial and wide-ranging. The secondary school curriculum had been influenced by the Chant Report in three ways. First, intellectual development - although undefined - was given top priority. Second, a clearly-structured secondary curriculum - thematic and pragmatic - was created. Third, Meredith noted a change from highly centralized curriculum administration to more "local curriculum autonomy and curriculum decision-making within a broad provincial framework." Meredith thought that decentralization brought new problems, but believed it would also tap new and larger sources of educational talent. In 1961, for instance, Meredith directed the formation of professional committees to assist with curriculum development. These included representatives of the BCTF, the Principals' Association, the Superintendents' Association, and the University of British Columbia with additional representation from the College of Education.

The school years 1965/66 and 1966/67 saw the phasing-out of former University Programme Departmental Examinations at the Grades 11-12 level and the introduction of new Academic-Technical Programme requirements characterized by fewer examinations. Education Minister L.R. Peterson announced the new departmental examination procedures at the B.C. School Trustees' Association convention in Penticton, in October, 1966. School accreditation would continue but in addition, 50 percent of the final mark secured by each candidate would be assigned by the school. Scholarship students were required to write only two examinations and awards were based on these marks alone.

These were significant changes. They allocated increased responsibility to high schools and decentralized some of the Department's control over Grade 12 graduation. Further, they reduced the examination ordeal faced by those students
wishing to write for scholarships. Most importantly they recognized that if scholarship examinations were to test intellectual excellence, a different approach was required than that generally used in past Departmental Examinations.

In the past, to take a case in point, the typical History examination had two major parts. The first usually consisted of questions requiring matching, true-false, selecting the best answer and the recall of isolated facts. Although the subjects tested had changed over the years, the format of the questions did not. For example in 1890 the Canadian History examination asked candidates to "Name with dates the first town founded in Acadia, and in Canada" as well as to "Give name of founder of each"[sic]. It also asked candidates "What is meant by the following, and who appoints them: 1. Governor-General...5. Premier." In 1967 the regular Grade XII History asked students to explain the difference between two terms, "Prime minister and Governor-general" [sic] as well as to identify who established the city of Quebec. Perhaps the only advance had been the "best-answer" type of question, not found on the Departmental Examinations until the progressive era. For example, in 1937 the History examination asked students to select the best answer for the following:

41. Nazis –
   (a) machine guns
   (b) Fascist Boy Scouts
   (c) Spanish dance
   (d) A German political party.

This type of question appears on the 1967 examination. The difficulty with these questions is that there is no means to justify a particular answer so the "right answer" is sought rather than the answer that reflects thought. This can lead to an attitude where critical thinking is discouraged and even penalized. Yet not all questions have one best answer or one that is clearly provided. For example in 1967 students were asked:

Zionism is best described as –
   (a) A Jewish national movement
   (b) An American Jewish movement set up to support Israel
   (c) A religious-political movement in power in Israel
(d) A modern form of the Jewish religion

This type of testing reinforces the concept that there is a clear, simple and right answer which a well-educated person should know. Such formalism can easily lead to intellectual mediocrity. In place of critical thinking that questions the authority or appropriateness of a particular line of reasoning, students are taught intellectual obedience to a superior, right answer. The resultant knowledge lacks the introspective foundations which enable an educated person to discriminate between conflicting data, to identify potential problems and trends, or to establish an independent and ethically sound point of view. Instead students learn to memorize ready-made opinions which are government approved. External, multiple-choice, "objective" examinations discourage critical thinking.

The second part of the examination usually consisted of paragraph and essay writing. The 1937 examination told students to "Write on the resources of Canada under the headings: a) Water Power, b) Minerals, c) Fisheries." In 1967 the question was on the Saint Lawrence Lowlands. History questions required students to provide the accepted interpretation of events. In 1937 the students were to note "some outstanding achievements and at least two outstanding failures of the League of Nations." In 1967 students were "to explain how World War II and the resulting post-war conditions brought about the withdrawal of the Western Powers from Asia." Did the examiners not realize the U.S.A. was heavily involved in South-East Asia?

The Scholarship Examination introduced in 1967 was far more thought provoking. Essay questions required students "to discuss the validity of the statement." One paragraph asked students "to explain the significance of the Reform Act of 1832 as it would have seemed to Karl Marx, looking at it as he would from his own view of historical process." Other paragraphs provoked students "to take and defend a position." The regular examination required mere rote memory. The scholarship utilized critical thinking as well. In 1969 the difference between the two was further emphasized by the decision to make all regular Departmental Examinations entirely objective in format so that they could be computer-scored.

Did the advisory committee set up by Meredith in 1961 influence the 1966 changes? The evidence is difficult evidence is difficult to obtain. We do know that
the BCTF Curriculum Directors serving on the committee circulated to Federation members during the school year 1965–66 "A Proposal for Abolishing Departmental Examinations." Among the arguments used to support the proposal were that examinations were used for a myriad of purposes, sometimes conflicting; they dictated the nature of instruction; they were not appropriate "to achieve the objectives of open-ended kinds of courses"; and they "create additional financial and physical problems for a busy Department."\textsuperscript{11} J.S. Church later wrote (1972) that two important changes resulted from the BCTF brief. The first was the 1966 BCTF Annual General Meeting approval of a new policy statement that "Departmental secondary school leaving examinations should be abolished\textsuperscript{10,A,01}." The second was that the Department changed its policy in order "to decrease the detrimental effects of external examinations on curriculum-instruction." These changes permitted classroom teachers to assign 50 percent of the final mark, eliminated Departmental Examinations in English XII, and reduced the number of scholarship examinations to two from five or more. According to Church, the advisory committee had a significant influence on the 1966 decision.

T.M. Chalmers, past chairman, BCTF Curriculum Directors, said in 1966, "The first and the great step toward abolition has now been taken,"\textsuperscript{13} but the general BCTF position was less sanguine. The BCTF's November 1966 Newsletter noted that supporters of the movement to remove Departmental Examinations would find the new policy a frustrating compromise. The critics of the new policy wondered what had happened to "the brave new world to promote inquiring, probing, imaginative and creative students?"

The Chant \textit{Report} had opened the door to examination reform. Now the reformers, seeking a "brave new world of education," wanted more radical changes that would give teachers and school boards greater local control. However, as Chalmers cautioned his colleagues,

Principals and teachers have requested professional freedom to make the final decisions concerning their own students. It is now up to us as principals and teachers to prove to the public that we are worthy of complete, not just added, responsibility.

This advice was sometimes forgotten in the excitement of reform and political confrontation.
"Thinking people, not robots and puppets", 1967–1970

At the height of the educational reform movement in the 1960s, any radicalism seemed chic to someone somewhere. The question was no longer how to provide quality education but rather how to free schools from materialistic, corporate, mind-destroying tyranny. The most radical alternative of all was proposed by the Jesuit thinker and educator, Ivan Illich – namely, to abolish schools altogether. A Canadian voice for this type of radicalism was This Magazine is about Schools, started in 1966 and published every two months in Ontario by teachers at the Everdale Place free school. In a 1967 edition they satirized Departmental Examinations in an article entitled, "Alice in Examination land." With such questions as "Is atheism a threat to organized bingo?" the writers mocked a concept of knowledge which saw learning as merely the accumulation of facts. Finally, Alice sets the examination paper on fire and "following her lead, the students all did the same thing, the whole building vanished in smoke..."

Less radical perhaps, but typical of the times, the 1968 Hall–Dennis Report, Living and Learning, also condemned the use of formal examinations. "Such arbitrary measures of achievement and the concepts of promotion and failure should be removed from the schools – not to reduce standards but to improve the quality of learning." The Committee recommended that children be "taught to think for themselves, to form opinions on what they learn... In a learning program which stresses individual growth, mass produced, multiple-choice tests should be handled with extreme caution." As expected, the 1968 BCTF Report, Involvement: The Key to Better Schools, recommended that all Department of Education Grade 12 and 13 examinations be eliminated at once. The June 1969 issue of Education Canada reported a general trend away from external examinations. The concern for examination reform was not confined to Canada. The 1969 World Yearbook of Education's theme was examinations. Among the editors' concerns was the detection of any movement towards "modification, reform, or even elimination of the examination system."

In Canada, Grade 12 Departmental Examinations were discontinued in Ontario (1967), Prince Edward Island (1970) and Manitoba (1970). It is in this atmosphere of radical challenge and changing policies in other provinces that the BCTF Curriculum Directors submitted a brief in July, 1970 entitled "External Examinations Re-examined" to the Department of Education.
This brief pressed for the elimination of regular Grade 12 Departmental Examinations on the grounds that they focused more on lower levels of the cognitive domain than did essay questions. The brief also sought discontinuance of the scholarship examinations because they caused some students "to equate the search for marks and money with the attainment of a sound educational program." The brief's most sustained argument was that examinations tended to reward convergent thinking, non-creative pupils. Carl R. Rogers was quoted in support of this position. Thinking people, not robots and puppets were to be the goals of education. In conclusion, the brief recommended that secondary schools provide meaningful and relevant education for all students rather than act as sorting agencies.

This attack on formalism lacked substance. Certainly it portrayed the spirit of the times, the "optimism, enthusiasm and confidence" mentioned earlier. However, it left unanswered many important questions. Why should divergent thinking (if that is what was being recommended) replace convergent thinking? What are the qualities of divergent thinking? Do these qualities include critical thinking as developed by Dewey, Ennis and others? How are these qualities to be taught? Can these qualities be evaluated? Did the BCTF reformers have a naïve, and simplistic belief that by removing examinations, "thinking" would be magically released from its prison? This nativist view had been advocated by both Rogers and A.S. Neill. In 1960, Neill wrote, "My view is that a child is innately wise and realistic. If left to himself without adult suggestion of any kind, he will develop as far as he is capable of developing." 20

This is an appropriate moment to contemplate the logical and practical force of such ideas. Fortunately, an able philosopher has recently begun just such an analysis. Kenneth Strike has argued against the Rogers–Neill view. He believes that autonomy – the capacity to make and act on independent reason judgements – is an achievement requiring understanding and self-control. He suggested that Rogers and Neill were advocating "authenticity," which is a matter of choosing or acting consistently with one's self, not being phony. Although Strike considers both to be worthwhile, autonomy is a fundamental value as "it is a requirement of being a moral agent and being responsible for one's self and one's conduct. Authenticity is not similarly fundamental." 21 Strike warns that the pursuit of authenticity can lead to narcissism if autonomy is not also encouraged.
In review, the 1970 BCTF brief gives value-arguments for discontinuing Grade 12 external examinations. They argue in favour of a humanistic, romantic approach to education and criticize the old system for reinforcing competitive, conservative values. The BCTF argument would prove to be especially vulnerable and weak when conservative values regained pre-eminence a decade later.

The Advisory Committee, 1970–1972

At the 20 November 1970 Advisory committee meeting the Department presented a "confidential" white paper in response to the BCTF brief and to a study undertaken by the Subcommittee on Evaluation. The rationale for the proposed changes included "that the non-academic programs are too highly structured and lack appeal" and "there is an apparent lack of flexibility within the organization." In a note regarding Departmental Examinations, the paper remarked that under the proposed scheme, Departmental Examinations would no longer be a basis for withholding of graduation.23

The December 18th meeting agreed to endorse the intent of the "White Paper" and to forward copies of it to officers of the BCTF Specialist-Associations with a request for feedback prior to January 29, 1971. Church, a member of the Committee, noted that "the proposals are very similar to existing Federation policy."24

On 30 April 1971, the Committee met to decide the fate of Departmental Examinations. The Department had prepared a discussion paper that outlined the problem and proposed three solutions.

The immediate problem stemmed from a decision by the Council of Public Instruction in August 1970 not to appoint new members to the Provincial Board of Examiners. This Board advised the Department in the conduct of examinations, eg, approving subjects to be examined, approving failure rates, etc. No appointments were made for the following reasons:24

a. The functions of the external examinations themselves are less clear. E.g., are they to select students for university admission? Are they to assess the effectiveness of secondary schools? Are they to determine if school graduation should be awarded? Are they to do all of these?
b. The original value of external examinations is less clear as a result of major changes in procedures and requirements...

c. The controversy surrounding external examinations, e.g., the BCTF opposition, the universities' concern over standards, the abolition of examinations in other provinces...

The old Board members were receiving so many conflicting messages that they called on the Department to "determine what it wants to do in examining and then, if necessary, appoint a Board to assist in doing it." The April 30th meeting was to make that determination and to advise the Department of its decision.

The first solution was to discontinue all Grade 12 external examinations and to establish a University Admissions Advisory Board to advise on admission policies.

Arguments for this solution included saving money, granting schools increased freedom and flexibility and recognizing the school as "the best judge of whether or not its students have met graduation requirements." The arguments against fall into two main categories. The first was that the Department would still be "held accountable by public and students" but it would "have no way of standing behind or backing any kind of record of student achievement." The second involved a scenario whereby schools became subject to pressure and discrimination by universities and other institutions. Both arguments against were based on concerns raised by the decentralization of authority – would standards be maintained and would autonomous schools adequately prepare students for higher learning?

The second solution was to institute external examinations for all students to determine graduation.

One argument for this solution was that the "Control of standards and courses would be provided to the authority responsible for them. This would probably receive public support." A second argument, reinforcing the first, was that "all students would be expected to meet a common set of standards." Arguments against were costs, "impracticality of attempting to examine in all fields in a valid, reliable manner," and "an undue reliance placed upon a single set of June examinations to determine or show the results of 12 years of education." This solution addressed concerns raised in Solution 1 about standards but it
brought to attention important questions regarding the validity and reliability of external examinations.

The third solution was a complex one. The Department would allow schools to determine graduation for all their students and would jointly, with other institutions, provide a series of "admission examination" papers which any student might write if he wished to receive a "statement of marks" or must write if he wished to attend an institution which required such a statement. This solution was clearly favoured by the authors of the discussion paper. They believed high schools were the proper authority to "certify that a student had accomplished the tasks of secondary education." Thus there would be no external examinations for graduation. However there would be specially constructed tests designed by high school and university instructors to select students on the basis of their intellectual merit, which presumably included reference to critical thinking dispositions and proficiencies.

No record could be found describing the deliberations of this meeting. We can only surmise what was decided in advance of later policy announcements.

On November 24, 1971, the lead story on the front page of the *Vancouver Sun* proclaimed, "B.C. relaxes school curriculum", subheading, "No gov't exams for graduation." The Minister of Education announced the changes with the comment, "I think the students will be much happier, because they'll have much more freedom in choosing courses and I wish now, 25 years too late, that I was back in school to take this program." The regular Departmental Examinations were to end in 1972 but the scholarship examinations were to continue "for the time being." Brothers' position regarding the universities was ambivalent.

"We're not sure what to do with the universities," he said.

"I would hope and recommend that the universities would agree to accept students on the basis of graduation from Grade 12 under government-approved courses, without any further entrance requirements from the university."

Brothers' position was thus an endorsement of solution 1. In the next paragraph though, J.R. Meredith, the Education Department's curriculum head, said "the
department [sic] is studying the possibility of developing a standard scholastic achievement test which would be accepted by the three provincial universities. This test was to be administered to university applicants to give the universities a further indication of each pupil's academic ability. Meredith, who attended the April 30th meeting, clearly endorsed solution 3. Yet the standard achievement test was never developed.

Why would Brothers ignore the advice of Meredith and the Advisory Committee? Perhaps Brother's decision was affected by the political climate. Throughout 1970 and 1971, the BCTF had condemned Social Credit education policies. The December 1970 BCTF Newsletter warned that "88% Will Strike if Necessary" and in March 1971, the BCTF published a Special Edition with the headline "Gov't moves to destroy BCTF." In October, the BCTF President, Adam Robertson, wrote an Open Letter to Teachers which began "During the past three years, British Columbian teachers have witnessed a steady deterioration in the education climate." The front page headline of the November newsletter was "Minister disrupting system!" Was Brothers' endorsement of Solution 1 an attempt to calm an increasingly tense situation? We do know that the instructional services circular prepared in advance by the Department and released on 25 November 1971 said, "Principals are asked to note that the matter of Departmental Examinations is still under study." Was Brothers' decision to end examinations, which was announced on Nov. 24th, made without conferring with his Department or suddenly at the last minute when it was too late to change the circular? The evidence suggests this may well have been the case.

Brothers' decision was welcomed by the BCTF and for the first time in years, positive words were said about Social Credit policies. In the January 1972 Newsletter, Adam Robertson said, "Mr. Brothers' action has resulted in a significant shift in responsibility by permitting the individual secondary school...to determine whether or not graduation requirements have been met... The BCTF commends the Department."

If Brother's endorsement of Solution 1 was an attempt to pacify teachers in anticipation of the soon-to-be announced provincial election, his efforts were ineffectual for two reasons. First, the differences between BCTF and Social Credit educational policies were too wide to be successfully bridged by the examinations concession. Secondly, many teachers did not agree with the elimination of
Departmental Examinations and did not support Brothers' decision. For example, John Hardy, writing in the December 1972 BCTF Newsletter, considered 294 teacher replies on this issue and concluded "eliminating Grade 12 exams splits the organization down the middle."

This division was symptomatic of a growing "right–left" split in the BCTF. Should the BCTF affiliate with labour? Charles Ovans, the BCTF General Secretary from 1944–1973, said no. "There is no magic in affiliation with labour. Labour is not going to solve our problems. Only we can do that." This view was challenged by younger BCTF members such as Jim MacFarlan who saw teachers as "intellectual workers" and the natural allies of labour. Actually the BCTF as a democratic forum for teachers' views had been characterized by "conflict, confrontation and compromise" since its incorporation in 1919. However in the early 1970s this confrontation had begun to be polarized around right–left views of teachers: teacher as professional versus teacher as worker. This dichotomy was misleading but the BCTF debate was often argued in this context. The self-styled "professionals," such as the eight chairmen of the marking committees who wrote the Minister in 1972 to protest the decision to eliminate the examinations, argued that Departmental Examinations "maintained standards." The "leftists" countered that the curriculum should not be examination-bound but should emphasize "critical thinking, dissent, the struggle for trade union rights and the struggle for social revolution against racism and sexism." No one clearly argued that Departmental Examinations lowered standards because they discouraged critical thinking.

The BCTF Curriculum Directors subscribed to the leftist view and were clearly in favour of Brothers' decision. They wanted to ensure that district wide external examinations did not arise to replace provincial tests. In March 1972, they suggested that Policy Statement 10.A.01, which condemned Departmental Examinations, be revised to read, "That the use of any kind of external secondary school leaving examination would be incompatible with the practice of the school accepting responsibility for determining, whether or not, its students have met graduation requirements." In support of this position they quoted Whitehead, "A common external examination is fatal to education." In May the Executive Committee gave their approval to the revision.

The rapprochement between the BCTF and Brothers did not last long. In March 1972, C.D. Ovans, General Secretary of the BCTF, wrote a scalding editorial
against the Minister of Education and the Social Credit government. Ovan's view was that the curriculum and graduation changes were a trick to manoeuvre teachers into a position where they were "left holding the accountability bag." He characterized the government's position as, "You the teachers may develop the curriculum - and suffer censure for any inadequacy. We the government will control the purse strings and win political favor by being concerned with the cost of education."

On March 27, 1972 the government passed Bill 3 which limited teachers' salary increases. In April the BCTF responded by a motion to levy one day's pay for political action. The government disallowed this motion but most teachers voluntarily contributed to the BCTF war chest. In all this excitement and turbulence, Chalmers' 1966 caution was forgotten.

Summary

There is little evidence to suggest that the 1971 decision to discontinue Departmental Examinations for Grade 12 graduation was made on sound educational grounds. The arguments by Dewey et al were largely ignored. Instead a more radical argument based on Rogers was given by the BCTF to discredit examinations. As Strike showed, the inadequacy of Rogers and Neill was their presupposition that when students are given "freedom to learn" they will naturally develop their innate potential without formal instruction or criticism.

Strike was correct when he argued that encouraging students to become autonomous requires an initiation into cultural resources for understanding, appreciating and acting. Otherwise we deny children their intellectual and moral heritage. It is not reasonable to expect that every child is capable of somehow discovering for himself the principles inherent to intellectual excellence and moral behavior. Of course this heritage is best learned - and in some instances only learned - when we respect each child's individuality. Siegel argues this means "recognizing the student's right to question, to challenge, and to demand reasons and justifications for what is being taught." However, respecting a child's individuality does not mean leaving him alone in the darkness of his ignorance.

Further, there is insufficient evidence to argue that the 1971 decision was made on any educational grounds, sound or other wise. Brothers appears to have
ignored Solution 3, advocated by his Superintendent of Instructional Services, J.R. Meredith. Although a *prima facie* case appears to indicate that Brothers was influenced more by political rather than educational considerations, this has not been proven here. What has been shown is that the 1971 decision caught Meredith by surprise, and that it helped to calm relations between the BCTF and the government, for a short time at least. For such a major shift in policy, it was surprising that it should be announced in such a casual fashion. Certainly the 1971 decision was consistent with policy changes in other provinces but there is little evidence to suggest that it was a well considered and publically approved policy change in British Columbia.

In conclusion, the Chant *Report* challenged educators and the public to reflect critically on the need for intellectual excellence as a primary goal of B.C. senior secondary education. In 1966 this challenge was translated into new policies regarding Departmental Examinations. A Scholarship Examination which really attempted to test critical thinking as well as rote memory was introduced. In 1971 a decision was made to eliminate regular Departmental Examinations for unrecommended students starting in 1973. The Department warned in their April 1971 discussion paper that this policy was politically dangerous for the public might become concerned about standards and accountability. They recommended that no external examinations be given for graduation but that a special academic test be constructed in consultation with the universities and the high school teachers which would be administered to students wishing to go on to further education. This recommendation was ignored by the Minister of Education, Donald Brothers. Departmental Examinations were discontinued not as a result of compelling and critical debate on educational issues concerning the encouragement of intellectual excellence. Rather they probably ended because they were incompatible with the *Zeitgeist* of late sixties educational reform and it was politically convenient for the Minister to accede to this change. Perhaps it was the right decision but it was made for weak and politically vulnerable reasons. It may well have been a "vote of confidence" but the motives behind the vote are questionable.

As foretold by Daly, a backlash against educational reform developed in the 1970s. Chapter Five will consider this backlash in detail and explore the rationale for the 1983 decision to reinstate Departmental Examinations.
Footnotes


2Ibid.


7British Columbia Ministry of Education, 100 Years (Victoria: Queen's Printer, 1972), p. 70.


12J.S. Church, Memorandum on External Examinations, 28 March 1972, BCTF Archives, Vancouver, British Columbia.


14"Alice in Examinationland (II)," This Magazine is about Schools I (Autumn, 1967): 47.


The Commission on Education by the British Columbia Teachers' Federation (Vancouver: BCTF, September 1968), p. 72.


22Division of Curriculum, Confidential proposal re Changes in the Senior Secondary School Curriculum Organization, 24 November 1970, BCTF Archives, Vancouver, British Columbia. Although the meeting occurred on November 20th, this proposal was possibly typed up by BCTF personnel on the 24th.


30J.S. Church, Memorandum, 28 March 1972, p. 3.

Chapter Five

The 1983 Decision.

Quality education is a priority. We have reintroduced grade 12 examinations that will provide a consistent standard.

The Hon. Jack Heinrich, Minister of Education, 1984

In August 1972, W.A.C. Bennett and his Social Credit Party were swept from office by what Bennett called "The Socialist Hordes," the N.D.P. led by social worker David Barrett. John Ellis contends that education issues were not prominent in the election campaign although "many individual teachers used their summer holidays to lick stamps, answer telephones, and ring doorbells - most, apparently, on behalf of the N.D.P."1

The new NDP Minister of Education, Eileen Dailly, inherited Brothers' decision to end Departmental Examinations after June, 1973 and it was a decision she endorsed. In the November 1973 edition of the B.C. Teacher she said "I believe very strongly that the abolition of these examinations can do nothing but improve the quality of teaching and give the individual teacher an opportunity to be more flexible, innovative and original in the teaching process."

As regular Departmental Examinations ended while the N.D.P. held office, many ordinary citizens incorrectly came to believe this decision was an N.D.P. innovation. This belief would further politicize and confuse the issue.

Many political changes, besides the defeat of the Social Credit government, occurred between the 1971 decision to abolish the examinations and June 1974, when the decision was finally put into practice. By 1972, Stevenson argues, public disillusionment with educational reform had set in. The public may have been put off by a generation who had been given many opportunities and yet responded by rejecting the society that had made it possible.2 British Columbians did not need to look to Columbia or Berkeley for evidence of student radicalism for their own Simon Fraser University provided them with sit-ins, demonstrations and strikes.

However, one must not overemphasize the impact of student radicalism on public views of education, although demonstrations received a great deal of media attention. In British Columbia, 1972 was probably not as important a year in
educational politics as 1975 when the Social Credit Party were returned to office after a three-year hiatus.

Yet sometime in the early 1970s, the North American public began to realize that increased spending on education did not necessarily result in a happier, more productive or more just society. Perhaps the disillusionment was a conservative reaction using "cost inefficiency" as a pretext to discredit liberal and radical innovations that threatened the established order. Leon Lessinger, former Associate Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education in the U.S. Office of Education, argues that

demands for accountability for the use of federal money resulted from poor academic performance of minority children, inconclusive results of federal compensatory programs and acceleratory increase of costs.¹

Thus, fiscal and instructional "accountability" entered educational jargon in the late '60s, just as President Nixon's Republicans reviewed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965) which had come from the Johnson Administration.² The need for fiscal accountability in education greatly intensified in 1973 when the effects of the Arab oil embargo forced Americans, in particular, to question whether they could afford an ever expanding system.

1973 also saw the popular beginnings of the "Back-to-the-basics" movement. Widespread publicity was given to declining scores on standardized tests, the most notable being the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) used by 50% of American students intending to go to university.³ The College Entrance Examination Board released a study in 1977, On Further Examination, which "explained" this phenomenon. It showed that the drop resulted from complex reasons. These included the impact of television, changes in the family, a decade of distraction, elective school courses without a solid knowledge base and lowered expectations. The two-year, $60,000 study ruled out such possible causes as the influence of "new math" or the influence of the "soft pedagogical left." However, the Back-to-the-basics movement proposed other reasons for the decline. Their argument, as outlined by David Savage, was that a general lowering of standards had occurred and cited the following evidence: greater absenteeism; grade inflation that sapped the meaning of an 'A' or a 'B'; automatic grade promotion; homework cut in half; open admission at university; fewer basic courses required.⁴
The "Back-to-basics" solution was a simple one – legislate standards that had to be met and the schools would be forced to stop wasting taxpayers' money on frivolous activities that didn't promote learning. To ensure that schools were accountable, examinations would be set to test that these standards were being met. Oregon was the first to legislate such "minimal competency" laws in 1974 but soon most states passed laws attempting to make schools more accountable to the public's concern about standards. This concern was inflamed in 1976 when the valedictorian of Western High School, D.C., could not gain admission to George Washington University because his SAT scores were too low. American parents who had children in the public schools no longer felt that the system was working well – in 1974, 64% of such parents had given public schools an A or B, but in 1976 this had fallen to 50% and by 1983 it would fall to a low of 42% (Gallup for Phi Delta Kappan).

The 1970s can be characterized as a decade of disillusionment. Watergate and the failures in Vietnam had opened many minds to the imperfection of the American Way. British Columbians – particularly those who saw this province as Canada's answer to California and who liked to import West Coast American ideas – were susceptible to this disillusionment. The N.D.P. were not defeated in 1975 by the Social Credit Old Guard. They were defeated by new recruits brought to the Social Credit party by Bill Bennett who promised them the good life for the lowest tax dollar. This offer attracted Liberals, Conservatives and young, non-political professionals and business entrepreneurs. The latter group, often referred to as "Yuppies," had a particular effect on the politics of education in B.C. Many decided to delay raising a family and resented school taxes that drained funds from their lifestyle pursuits.

In a sense, Eileen Dailly was left holding the bag for Brothers' 1971 decision. As this chapter will show, the "new" Socreds used Departmental Examinations as a political weapon against NDP educational policies which were characterized as too costly and leading to mediocrity. Ironically, the NDP educational policies consisted, for the most part, in merely providing the funding needed for earlier Social Credit policies. The issue of how schools could encourage intellectual excellence was forgotten in the quest for accountability and political popularity.
Linking "Standards" to Examination Policy

In 1973, Jerry Mussio, working in the Research and Standards Branch, Department of Education, drafted a background paper entitled, "The move away from examinations: What happens now?" Mussio asked the key question, "Now that Regular Departmental Examinations are eliminated... what happens to the quality or standard of education in the province?" Mussio argued that a Learning Assessment Programme should be implemented that "can help detect strengths and weaknesses and in turn provide important information for corrective action". Mussio appeared to be in favour of the move away from regular Departmental Examinations for he says:

Changing from a less formal, infrequent system of examinations to a more informal, less strainful, but more frequently applied assessment routing is likely to result in greater sensitivity to the needs of our students. In this way, the quality and standard of education become daily concerns and not just annual events.

One of the activities proposed by Mussio for 1974 was to begin evaluation at the Provincial level. "With continued moves to modify the curriculum, it would appear important to assess the effectiveness of any such changes, particularly with respect to basic skills."

Thus, during Dailly's turn as Minister of Education, a policy for monitoring education standards was initiated. As well, the idea of a provincial core curriculum was considered. In May, 1975, the British Columbia School Trustees' Association (BCSTA) asked to "be represented on any Provincial Core Curriculum Development Committee." The core curriculum clearly was not a Social Credit conservative reaction to radical NDP education policies. However the trustees were skeptical that increased spending had led to increased quality in the schools. They passed a resolution which urged the Department "to evaluate the educational benefit that has accrued to the pupils of the Province as a result of lowering the pupil/teacher ratio before further reductions are made."

Whether or not Dailly responded to this request before the NDP government was defeated on 11 December 1975, is still an unanswered question. Yet the prudent policies initiated by Dailly - assessment and core curriculum - do not fit the popular image of NDP educational policies, at least the image successfully sold to British Columbians by the Social Credit Party. This latter image made large the
controversy surrounding John Bremer and Stanley Knight. Fleming suggests that Dailly's appointment of Bremer, a noted educational reformer, as a special commissioner-at-large "neutralized much of the power and influence John Meredith and other senior managers had long enjoyed." Bremer's unconventional style attracted media attention and by 1974 he had become a political liability. He was fired that year. Knight was fired in 1975. The Social Credit party highlighted these events and used them to persuade the public that the NDP were experimenting dangerously with radical ideas. This image haunted the NDP during the 1975 election. The Socreds did not debate educational policies for this would have given the NDP an opportunity to correct negative and false public impressions. They preferred instead to let the NDP stew in their own juices.

Three months after winning the election, the ex-Liberal and now Social Credit Minister of Education, Patrick McGeer, announced a Provincial Learning Assessment Program (P.L.A.P.). McGeer knew what he was doing.

We had a very large survey done about general attitudes towards Education... whether people wanted an improvement in general standards in the school system. There was absolutely no question about the results. *Strongly* in favour of examinations and the 3 R's (Italics are Giles's). By capturing the political buzzword "standards" and capitalizing on public uneasiness over education innovations such as open-area classrooms and greater curriculum choice, McGeer could present P.L.A.P. as a decisive action made by a new government intent on improving standards and stabilizing education.

Why didn't McGeer also announce the return of Departmental Examinations, the old symbol of stability, tradition and standards? Perhaps it would have been politically awkward for the 1975 Socreds, particularly new Socreds like ex-Liberal McGeer, to directly criticize previous education policies initiated while W.A.C. Bennett was Premier. Although W.A.C. Bennett was gone, his presence was still very much felt by those in Victoria, especially as his son had become the new Social Credit premier.

Even so, why did McGeer decide to not bring back the examinations in 1976 or 1977 or 1978? As the next section will show, McGeer used the "standards" issue to further not a return to quality education but a return to a centralized authority which controlled curriculum and budgets. Consider this for a moment.
If the Social Credit government was truly concerned about standards, and believed that Departmental Examinations helped to bring about these standards, why did they delay for eight years before reinstating the examinations?

The next section will provide a possible answer to this question.

Teaching the "Basics" – the Core Curriculum Controversy

At a press conference on 1 November 1976, McGeer revealed "A Program for Performance in the Educational System of British Columbia." He introduced this program with the remark, "The citizens of this Province expect the Government to take a more positive role in defining what should be taught in our schools and ensuring that students have an opportunity to master it." He then announced that a core curriculum would be put into place for the 1977–78 school year. McGeer told reporters that this core curriculum was in response to the results obtained by the Spring 1976 Language Assessment.

This report indicates that many of our secondary school students have good ideas, and can express themselves well in written form. But weaknesses are revealed in the way students deal with the mechanics of writing, including punctuation, sentence structure and spelling... The schools of the Province must give renewed emphasis to teaching the basic skills.14

Speaking on the Jack Webster, CJOR radio show, the next day, McGeer put the need for a core curriculum into historical context from his perspective.

The Ministry, over the last ten or fifteen years, gave up its responsibilities to direct the education system. First of all, the Department of Education gave up specifying what teachers should be taught in order to go out into the school system. Then they gave up specifying a definite curriculum to be taught everywhere in B.C. Third, and this was the move that really made it possible for the walls to crumble, they dispensed with provincial examinations... from that point on the system was adrift... the ship is now being steered.15

Asked by a listener if there should be exams at every grade level, McGeer replied, "I'm all for it! Every school and every class should be giving them. Learning can be quantitative like a golf score." McGeer stressed that examinations were useful for the mental discipline which was needed in the marketplace. He stepped back though from advocating a return to regular Departmental Examinations. Instead he wanted a system which would help educators identify
weaknesses not of particular students but "school by school, district by district." Webster wasn't satisfied. He argued that Departmental Examinations
gave us a handle on the teachers. We knew at the Grade 12 exams if the average student was being taught well enough to go to the other fields of education. Now we don't know.

Did Grade 12 exams, in fact, ensure that students were properly taught in the past? The evidence suggests that such examinations were ineffective in ensuring quality education. For example, H.L. Campbell, Assistant Superintendent of British Columbia Schools wrote in his 1944-45 Annual Report:

It has been said that practically all the university freshman are illiterate, cannot write a decent essay nor even a decent letter. This sad state is attributed to what some people choose to call the "new curriculum"...

Ten, twenty, thirty, forty or fifty years from now the same complaint will be made of the quality of the students leaving the secondary schools, and the students in these coming decades will be compared unfavourably with the students of today.16

Moreover is it fair to equate the mechanics of writing – which certainly should be mastered – with quality education at the Grade 12 level? From an instructional point of view, such basic mastery is expected by Grade 10, if not earlier. Quality education results when students are provided with models and opportunities for intellectual inquiry and critical reflection. Dewey and others have provided good arguments which strongly suggest that quality education does not result from rote memorization of form or facts. Since, as Chapters Three and Four have shown, these arguments were generally not influential in British Columbia, Webster's position was probably quite typical of those who had a formalistic education. There was a right answer that should be learned and teachers were paid to teach those answers. This view was heartily supported by the radio listeners who called in.

In fact, McGeer wanted to use public support for the core curriculum idea as a rationale for stopping the decentralization of power begun while Brothers was Minister. McGeer argued that:

There has to be more direction in an academic sense coming from the central source because standards have eroded too far in the school system and they have got to be recaptured. It is hard for that
recapture to take place if one has to depend upon the individual school districts to do that.\(^\text{17}\)

Had the standards actually eroded or was his position based on political expediency?

According to available evidence, the public perceived a drop in standards between 1972 and 1978. In 1979, the Canadian Education Association (C.E.A.) commissioned a Gallup Poll to examine public opinion concerning education. In answer to the question, "Comparing primary and secondary schools of today, in general to schools in your day (whether in Canada or elsewhere) would you say that standards have improved, not changed, worsened, or don't know?" The Canada-wide response was 36.3% improved, 40% worsened, 11.8% not changed and 11.9% don't know.\(^\text{19}\) However, in British Columbia 53.9% thought that it had worsened. In other matters such as teacher competence, school management and school curriculum, British Columbians rated schools far worse than their Canadian counterparts. This negative attitude may have been due to a lack of familiarity with what was really going on in schools. B.C. parents were the least likely to attend parent-teacher meetings and most reluctant to serve on a school board advisory committee or become school trustees. Seen from the outside, British Columbia's schools had a poor image.

Was the public correct to perceive that standards were falling? In 1978, C.E.A. reviewed Canadian research projects which had examined standards over varying periods of time. The research studies showed mixed findings - some standards of achievement had increased while others had decreased.\(^\text{19}\) C.E.A. then contacted 123 chief education officers, representative of urban, non-urban, Western, Central and Atlantic Canada. Overall, they were...

"...of the opinion that achievement standards definitely have risen in the biological sciences, physical sciences, and second language; that standards in social studies and mathematics are about the same or perhaps better; and that standards in literature and language have declined. This optimism was not shared by chief education officers in Western Canada. They significantly differed from the Canadian averages in their belief that social studies, math and second language had also declined during the past ten years. Thus, the insiders' view may not have been so different from those on the outside.

Although the debate concerning standards in B.C. was heavily influenced by political considerations in the period 1972–78, one should not dismiss the concern
as being merely a product of political rhetoric or media influence.

The BCTF mounted a campaign against McGeer's core curriculum plan in January 1977. In the BCTF paper, "Essential Educational Experiences," their position was clearly stated. "The BCTF favours quality teaching and learning but opposes centrally imposed standards which deny differences in children, teachers and situations." However, the public did not seem to understand or appreciate this position. An editorial in the Vancouver Sun on March 7, 1977 commented:

Ontario parents and B.C. parents have shown botheration about the rich curriculum smorgasbord of secondary school education whipped up by the progressive educators of the '60s and served free choice to the young - designed to expand their minds to the wonders of the world about them but raising dark concerns from their parents about whether they have the maturity to choose... the milk along with the champagne.

The editorial pointedly criticized the Ministry and the BCTF for "waging a war over the core curriculum" and asked why they couldn't follow the Ontario example where consultation and harmony supposedly prevailed. The editor may not have realized the political agenda behind McGeer's core curriculum proposal but the BCTF certainly did. It would be another year before the BCSTA also realized that by supporting the core curriculum idea they were allowing decision making power to become centralized in the Ministry.

In March 1977, meanwhile, the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies held a conference on "Assessing Curriculum in the 1970s: What are our core concerns?" Dan Birch, Dean of Education at S.F.U., was the key-note speaker and he told his audience:

We must find the core and recognize that it is just that, that it is not the whole apple. We then must find the means for recognizing, blessing, funding, supporting and encouraging the distinctions, the diversity, which must, indeed, blossom if we are to release the maximum potential of both student and teacher through the school system.

He also examined the reasons behind the 'Back to Basics' movement and commented

...among the trends contributing to the search or drive for finding a core curriculum is uncertainty amid social change and economic pressure... As parents and taxpayers we are saying, "Where is the money going?" One of the obvious targets is education. Our natural tendencies, as citizens, is to say "cut down, there must be unnecessaries, we must limit education expenditures,"
Birch warned that this pressure would result not only in cuts to the "fat" in the system but cuts in worthy, excellent programs, services and staff. His message was that such cuts might be minimized if educators built up public perception that standards were being maintained or improved. Birch accepted the basic assumption that the public had a right to expect quality education for their children, and that educators had a responsibility to ensure the public's taxes went to a quality education system. If the system refused to be accountable to public desires for higher standards, then it would face fiscal accountability. Taken to an extreme, if the public system failed to respond, then McGeer thought it should be challenged by private, independent schools.

I thought the independent schools should be there as a disciplining force to the public schools. Because then, if necessary, you can certainly prop up the support for the independent schools if you felt that it was really going to be required to bring greater accountability to the public schools system.

To this end McGeer sponsored Bill 33, The Independent Schools Act, in 1977 which gave private schools public funding.

This theme that a concern for instructional accountability was to be enforced by fiscal accountability was repeated by the keynote speaker at the 1977 BCSTA AGM. A. Graham Down, the executive director of The Council of Basic Education, discussed declining achievement (SAT scores) and then got to the heart of the matter. "The public is beginning to ask why it is that, at the same time student enrolments are either only holding their own or more frequently declining, costs are escalating far in excess of the general rate of inflation". His solution for rising costs and declining standards was to scrap the "open door" policies of the '60s and to return to high school education based on academic elitism.

Some subjects are more important than others. English, mathematics, foreign languages, sciences, history, geography, government and the arts all fall within this central core of essentiality. When this job is done, it is not inappropriate to provide quality vocational education for some students.

By August 1977, the core curriculum which was to be implemented in September had become a non-issue. Pat Brady, president of the BCTF, felt that the campaign to modify the proposed core curriculum had been successful and he commented, "I see nothing in the so-called core curriculum that is significantly different from what teachers are doing now." The lead education stories in
1977–78 concerned declining enrollments, rising costs and pot-smoking teachers. Had standards suddenly improved drastically? Or was the issue no longer useful as a means of concentrating policy decision making in Victoria?

Certainly the BCSTA was no longer fully supportive of the government's plans for a core curriculum. At the BCSTA 1978 AGM, President Cliff Atkins told the membership that, "Partly as a result of BCSTA reaction, the more rigid prescriptive aspects of the core curriculum have been eased to preserve some local autonomy." Moreover, trustees were beginning to question the ideological tendencies of the "Back-to-basics" movement as promoted by A. Graham Down. At the National Seminar of the Canadian Education Association in September 1978, North Vancouver school trustee Dorothy Lynas astutely commented, "Our education system is still university-bound. There is a medieval elitism at the root of our schools ...Ironically, I see more pressure in this [elitism] through the Back-to-the-basics movement."

Coincidentally, this story was reported the same day McGeer told reporters that education had improved since the Social Credit Party had come to power. He made no criticism of standards.

Had students improved or had the public's perception changed? When challenged by reporters, McGeer admitted the findings were based on a public opinion poll which was probably out-dated. Throughout his tenure as Minister of Education, McGeer appears to have relied on polls to give him guidance in making policy decisions. This is an astute and pragmatic political strategy. However, the common, generally uninformed, opinion should be seasoned by the informed opinions of experts who know the situation well and who can point out hidden landmines not seen by others pre-occupied by day-to-day obligations at home and at work. When these two perceptions are blended – a difficult political task – the experts' acumen encourages policy decisions that are rationally thought out as well as popular. Did McGeer consult the BCTF, the BCSTA, or the education departments at the province's three universities in order to balance opinion polls with professional insight and experience? The evidence suggests not.

Brian Smith, who became the Minister of Education on November 23, 1978, ignored the issue of standards as well. *Education: A Report from the Minister*, 1981, refers to this issue only obliquely with the comment, "Although province-wide
government examinations will not be reintroduced at this time, their potential usefulness may easily make them necessary in the future."\(^{29}\)

Why were government examinations potentially useful? As we shall see in the next section, they enabled the Social Credit Party to display a concern for quality education. Although this position has no substantial theoretical or empirical foundation – for external examinations do not promote quality – it sounds good and is easily digested by a public ill-informed about educational issues. Besides, if it didn't work, the teachers could always be blamed.

In review, the core curriculum controversy over standards occurred as predicted by the authors of Solution 1 in April 1971. By removing Grade 12 regular Departmental Examinations and allowing greater curriculum freedom to occur at the same time, the education system became open to abuse. Although the abuse was not proven, the public perceived that standards were falling. At the same time costs were escalating through inflation, new programs and reduced pupil teacher ratios. Declining enrolments meant fewer taxpayers had personal contact with the school system and they were often not sympathetic to these rising costs.\(^{30}\) Instead of defending the prevailing standards or working to carefully identify and overcome weaknesses, McGeer used the controversy as a means to reverse the decentralization trend. Overall, the issue of standards in British Columbia has not been primarily a debate about achievement levels but a struggle over who was to control the power in educational politics: the Social Credit government, the BCSTA or the BCTF.

The Examinations Reinstated

Bill Vander Zalm reactivated the issue of standards after he became Minister of Education in August 1982. When questioned why he did this, Vander Zalm replied, "I wanted to return to the early McGeer–Hardwick (Deputy Minister) approach because I had four children in the school system and I was worried about the standards right in my own community."\(^{31}\)

This is a legitimate concern of every parent. Their children should receive the best possible education for the tax dollar spent. If teachers are lazy or mediocre in the performance of this responsibility, then the public has a right to call for improvement. But what happens when the system itself is mediocre?
Consider how easy it is to obfuscate the concern over mediocrity by labeling it as a problem of declining standards. The attention is diverted from instructional practices, such as external examinations, whose rationale is administrative efficiency and cost effectiveness. These practices do not lead to intellectual excellence, or compassionate individualism, or artistic self-expression. Instead attention is focussed on teacher efficiency as measured by external examination results. Do standards decline when teachers seek goals that can not be easily measured in scientific or mathematical terms? One is reminded to heed E.G. Holmes's 1911 comment

"in proportion, as we tend to value the results of education for their measurableness, so we tend to undervalue and at last to ignore those results which are too intrinsically valuable to be measured.

Parents have a right to be dissatisfied with an education system that does not encourage critical thinking and intellectual excellence. But is this a problem caused by declining standards or by a misguided concept of public education?

What did Vander Zalm mean by standards? For that matter what did McGeer or Mussio or the Ministry of Education mean when they used this label? No evidence could be found that a well thought out concept was ever presented to the public for their consideration and response. We shall return to this question in the next section.

In November 1982, Vander Zalm revealed at a Social Credit Convention that province-wide examinations would be given in the spring. Why did he announce a policy change which had a tremendous impact on education at a political party convention? He told his audience that these examinations would test not only students but would measure the "effectiveness of their teachers and schools."

The Social Credit delegates gave Vander Zalm a standing ovation at the conclusion of his speech. Once again, Departmental Examinations would be used for political convenience rather than serve educational goals.

Actually the Ministry of Education was prepared to administer Grade 12 examinations in only three courses: Algebra, Chemistry and English. However it was a first step toward making grade 11 and 12 courses more "rigorous." Vander Zalm believed that "the revitalized senior secondary curricula will increase the confidence of students, parents, and the general public in the status of high school
Despite his public image, Vander Zalm's view of education was fairly sophisticated.

"Students need to acquire a wider knowledge base than the 3 Rs... It is one achievement to acquire knowledge, but it is a separate achievement to apply knowledge or understand relationships between pieces of information. Students must be encouraged and trained to enhance their problem-solving capabilities."

The weakness in his position stems from an undue faith in external examinations. He referred to testing as a "very highly refined discipline" and was persuaded that they could be effectively used to test not only inert knowledge but thinking capabilities as well. The problems inherent to this position have been discussed in Chapter Two and will be reviewed in the next section.

The BCSTA, BCTF and B.C. Home and School Association reacted negatively to Vander Zalm's proposal to reintroduce provincial examinations. Home and School President Helene Minishka said, "There must be other ways to assess children, than a couple of exams. I don't think having provincial exams makes better students of our children." BCTF President Larry Kuehn criticised the Education Minister for using examinations as a "political football." "It is part of his attack on schools and teachers. His program is to say to the public that schools are terrible so that he can then say 'I've done something about it.' " B.C. School Trustees' Association President Gary Begin warned, "I have real reservations that Mr. Vander Zalm will use children's testing for political advantage, for example to justify budget cuts."

Vander Zalm ignored his critics and went ahead with plans for the June examinations. In April 1983, the Social Credit government announced a May provincial election, which they won. Vander Zalm, who decided not to run for re-election, was replaced as Minister of Education by Jack Heinrich. Heinrich reviewed plans for the June Grade 12 examinations and concluded that there were too many unresolved problems to include the results as part of the student's final grade. Instead the results were to be used to help schools and districts identify strengths and/or weaknesses in the curriculum areas tested. For a short time, a new spirit of co-operation seemed to be emerging between the principal actors in education politics.
This was shattered on 7 July 1983 when Heinrich announced his government's "School District Restraint" policy. "A return to pupil–teacher ratios of 1975–76 and more direct control of all portions of school district budgets by the Ministry of Education will result from legislative revisions announced today." Not only did the Socred government, confident with their re-election, attack education spending as predicted by Begin, but they moved to significantly reduce local decision-making by school boards. Even the conservative Association of British Columbia School Superintendents, which represented more than 180 senior school board officials, felt obliged to publicly condemn the government's actions. In "A Statement of Concern for Public Education in British Columbia," released in March 1984, the Association said, "Educators have seen recent government initiatives as clearly imputing incompetence and lack of integrity to their profession."

It is in this highly-charged atmosphere that Heinrich decided to officially announce the reinstatement of regular Grade 12 Departmental Examinations. In a news release issued on 31 August 1983, Heinrich said, "It is important that we return to centrally-marked Departmental Examinations to ensure that there is a consistent measurement of the quality of education in this province." Starting immediately, academic students would face examinations in English 12, English Literature 12, Algebra 12, Geography 12, History 12, Biology 12, Chemistry 12, Physics 12, Geology 12, French 12, German 12, Spanish 12, and Latin 12. No provisions for recommending students were given. Instead all students on the academic program would write these tests which would constitute 50 percent of their final mark in each course. As well, students wishing to obtain scholarships had to write additional tests in each subject except for English 12. In March 1984, the Ministry indicated it was considering the implementation of a similar testing program for Grade 11 students.

Heinrich has been very articulate in defending his decision to reintroduce examinations for Grade 12 graduation. He generally gives three reasons:

1. Our government believes strongly that students graduating from our high schools should be achieving challenging standards that are consistent across the province;

2. A graduate applying for admission to a college or university should be assured of being treated equitably in the admissions process and be assured
that high school marks will be taken at face value;

3. We introduce testing to reassure the public that we are serious about quality in our schools.  

These arguments should not be dismissed lightly as shallow political rationalizations. They embody concerns that first found expression in the nineteenth century debate in England over the use of external examinations. In British Columbia, as Chapters Three and Four have shown, these concerns have never been directly addressed although they have been present at least since Hindle's book was published in 1918. The decision to reinstate regular Grade 12 Departmental Examinations was certainly politically motivated but we are concerned here not with the propriety of the political act but with the soundness of the educational ideas upon which the act is based.

A Closer Look at Standards and Quality Education

Turning from a historical to a more philosophical method of inquiry, there are two basic views of standards. One says we are concerned with minimum competencies that all students who graduate from school should possess. The other is that we want our students to strive for standards of excellence. When the public refers to declining standards, they often mix the two. In one case it is argued that education's main purpose is to teach the mastery of basic academic skills, the 3 Rs. Often this position includes reference to the importance of teaching basic life skills designed to enable students to get jobs and to function as full social participants in society. In the other case, it is argued that students must be encouraged to think carefully, to develop their intellectual initiative and stamina.

The two views are not always compatible. In practice, the undue focus on basic skills has been found to be detrimental to intellectual development. David W. Gordon, Associate Superintendent of Public Instruction for the California Department of Education, says, "During the last 10 years, when the basic skills movement has been in full flower, higher-order thinking skills have fallen according to every measure." Gordon's views are substantiated in studies conducted by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (N.A.E.P.). While basic skills improved during the past decade, consistent declines have been measured in students' abilities to interpret reading passages, classify and solve
Christopher Jencks argues that "if we want to reverse this trend, we must find ways of motivating students to go beyond the basics. We must convince them that knowledge is really worth acquiring and that systematic, rigorous thought is superior to intuition. It is a matter of creating respect for 'maximum standards'." If Heinrich wants quality education surely he must be concerned about encouraging maximum rather than minimum standards in B.C. schools.

However, in January 1985, Heinrich circulated a discussion paper on B.C. schools entitled "Let's Talk About Schools" in which standards referred to "minimum competency levels in areas of basic instruction." The emphasis put on minimum standards by Heinrich is not an isolated B.C. phenomenon. It is an educational strategy, originating in the United States during the 1970s, which has come to be known as the Competency Testing Movement. Haney and Madaus suggest that the focus on testing stems in part from the fact that it is "reform from afar," a grand scheme based on fundamental unresolved problems, and "it is clearly being led, or pushed, by non-educators." These non-educators, who have not reflected on the limitations of minimum competency testing, consider such testing a straightforward solution to the perceived problem of declining standards. They are supported in their opinion by those educators who believe that a more systematic, scientific management of education will necessarily lead to better quality education. These educators believe that the objectives of education can be or should be precisely measured. In "Let's Talk...", the standards definition is coupled to a call for "greater accountability and for accurate measurement of what schooling achieves." Clearly Heinrich endorses the Competency Testing Movement's main strategies.

There are some serious limitations inherent to competency testing. Certainly knowledge which is replicative is easily measured but how does one measure knowledge which is used for critical or creative thinking? In their June 1984, presentation to the National Institute of Education, the NAEP warned that "measurement of higher-order thinking skills is difficult and therefore rare." They are requesting a major government grant to fund research into test designs which will be capable of distinguishing "intellectual power in action." The NAEP cites two studies, Bowman and Ping (1972) and Levine, McGuire and Nattress (1970),
which concluded that "multiple-choice items designed to measure higher-order skills tend to result in tests that elicit little more than recall and factual knowledge." A third major study, the five-year 1934 American Historical Association's report mentioned in Chapter Two, could also be cited in support. The NAEP plans to pilot an "open-ended and performance-based" format to determine "whether students know why they think particular things or in particular ways."

Since standardized, objective tests which are capable of measuring "intellectual power in action" do not, at present, exist do we ignore critical and creative thinking and teach only what can be readily measured? Such a practice would not appease those who wish for higher standards of excellence in our schools. For example, the 1982 O.I.S.E. survey on "Public Attitudes Towards Education in Ontario" revealed that the least satisfied, by occupation group, were corporate executives. Of the 134 executives polled, only 19% were satisfied with "value obtained for taxpayers' money" compared with an overall 40% satisfied."

Two striking contrasts between executives and other groups should be commented on. Eighty-two percent of corporate executives thought that creativity/critical thinking should be ranked as a 1st or 2nd priority for high school students, while only 33% of all others gave it a similar ranking. However, only 31% of executives gave job training in high schools a first or second priority, while 62% of all others gave it a 1st or 2nd priority. Obviously, one has to be careful about implying too much from this poll but it raises some interesting questions. Are the biggest critics of education, the corporate executives, dissatisfied because educators don't encourage students to become critical and autonomous thinkers, capable of rationally analysing problems as they unexpectedly occur, devising informal and imaginative hypotheses on which to act and then independently resolving the problem in a productive manner? Are corporate executives more attuned to the reality that technology is rapidly changing, that specific job skills learned in higher schools may be outdated by the time students enter the job market, and that as such, it is better to teach students how to learn and how to think than how to master a particular task?

Heinrich has given three reasons for bringing back regular Grade 12 Departmental Examinations. If he is serious about quality in our schools then he must recognize that quality in the pursuit of intellectual excellence. How do external examinations which test rote memory assist students to develop the capacity for critical thinking, innovation and sound judgement? Chu Hsi, Wang
Yang-ming, Whitehead, Russell and Dewey have all provided good arguments to show that external examinations are detrimental to quality education. These arguments have been ignored or misunderstood in British Columbia.

Heinrich says that "students graduating from our high schools should be achieving challenging standards..." If by this, he means standards that challenge students to develop fully their intellectual, social and creative potentials in an ethical manner, then his idea is worth serious consideration. Unfortunately this idea is coupled to a restrictive clause — "that are consistent across the province" — which undermines the original intent. By what "consistent" standard shall all Grade 12 students be measured? We might easily agree that the most basic skills and understandings should be taught in schools in order to equip students with the prerequisite abilities for independent learning but generally these standards are reached in elementary school. What kind of minimum standards can be imposed on secondary schools, particularly Grade 12 courses, and on what grounds can these standards be justified?

Perhaps Grade 12 students should be encouraged to achieve minimum competencies which will serve them well as adults and citizens in our society. Coombs argues that achievements basic to adequate functioning as an adult are those necessary to recognizing and fulfilling one's responsibilities and those which are necessary to recognizing and exercising one's rights. Surely these competencies would set a more challenging standard than that provided by external examinations which test stamina and recall.

On these grounds, Heinrich's first and third reasons are educationally unsound. External examinations do not lead to quality education nor do they promote challenging standards. Perhaps they can be useful in raising an ineffectual education system up to mediocrity. But let us not pretend they do more than this. External examinations reinforce the "school as factory" mentality that has plagued public education in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. If we want a good education system, not a factory, then we need schools staffed by well trained, properly supervised teachers who have the resources and the time to work creatively with our children.

This is not to depreciate the importance of standards. On the contrary, we should continuously demand that our students seek the highest possible standards.
Certainly in the pursuit of excellence, students will learn skills, facts and ideas. However we must not confuse excellence with the mere mastery of skills, facts or ideas. Mary Warnock puts this issue into perspective.

First, and obviously, children must be taught the skills which will enable them to acquire knowledge for themselves; and this means not only reading and writing but knowledge of how to frame questions, how to look things up, how to criticize what other people tell them. She also tells us "A teacher must always raise the question whether what the children are actually learning is what they need to enable them to think and feel and work more freely." Perhaps it is a question that our society should also raise if it is serious about quality education.

But the objections raised so far do not challenge the second reason provided by Heinrich. This reason states that external examinations are a good administrative device for ensuring equitable treatment in selecting students for admission to higher institutes of learning. It is a modern version of the nineteenth century liberal argument that external examinations provide equality of opportunity. The weakness in the liberal position was that these examinations discouraged autonomous thinking. However this weakness does not necessarily apply to Heinrich's position for there is no evidence that the encouragement of autonomous thinking is a specific goal of B.C. education.

Heinrich, apparently, endorses "developing the ability of individuals to analyze critically, to reason and think independently" as goals of education and schooling. It would appear this endorsement is in conflict with his ministry's Grade 12 examination policy. Yet the discussion paper, which bears his signature, does not oblige him to adopt any particular policy position.

The second reason he gives for reinstating Departmental Examinations is founded on the belief that they are a good administrative device. He is not arguing they are an educationally sound idea as he did in reasons one and three.

Yet is his argument administratively sound? If one reconsiders the issues raised in the 26 April 1971 paper prepared by the Department of Education for the Provincial Advisory Committee, then several important doubts arise. The paper raised the concern that graduation must be distinct from admission requirements. They carefully examined either abandoning examinations or instituting an
"across-the-board" system of examinations for graduation purposes and they recommended:

A compromise procedure which clearly recognizes two distinctly different responsibilities; one, certifying that a student has accomplished the tasks of secondary education and two, selecting and predicting success in subsequent studies, and assigns them to the authority best able to discharge these responsibilities, would appear to be the most effective solution.\(^{31}\)

They argued that this was the most sound administrative practice to be followed unless the hidden agenda was "to assess the effectiveness of secondary schools."

Are we once again ignoring Solution 3 for political reasons? Solution 3 is not without its faults. Grade 12 students wishing to go on to university would still need to write a series of external examinations which would seek to identify those who would do well in a university environment. The advantages, though, are that the exams could stress critical thinking capabilities, perhaps along the lines of the 1967 History scholarship questions noted in the last Chapter or on the model of the Ennis-Weir Critical Thinking Essay Test. These exams, prepared under the direction of the Ministry of Education in consultation with high school teachers and the universities, could serve to show the public that quality education and high standards were in fact concerns of the Minister. Learning Assessment Programs and high school accreditation processes now in place could ensure that minimum standards were also being maintained in the B.C. school system.

Solution 3 will have many detractors. Those who are opposed to external examinations on principle will not welcome it, even as a compromise solution. Those who distrust teachers will not welcome its provision to allow high schools to make judgements concerning Grade 12 graduation. Those who like to use Departmental examinations as a political weapon will not like to see them reduced to a mere administrative device for making sound educational decisions.

Perhaps though it is time for us to get on with the job of encouraging our children to develop their potential. Heinrich's three reasons for reintroducing regular Departmental examinations are administratively and educationally unsound. Heinrich's Departmental Examination policy is detrimental to the best interests of our children and our society. Solution 3, for all its weaknesses and detractors, may help us to establish an educational system that strives for excellence rather than
mediocrity. If quality education is a priority, then Solution 3 should be seriously reconsidered by the government.
Footnotes


8They were not alone in this attitude. Declining school enrolment – from over 525,000 in 1975 to 480,000 in 1983 – had eroded political support for education as fewer parents had children in the school system. In 1976, students in Grades 1–12 made up 23% of the Canadian population but they only accounted for 18% in B.C. By 1983 they would account for only 15% of the B.C. population, [based on Statistics Canada, 1976 and Economics Department, B.C. Central Credit Union, "B.C. Echo Baby Boom Rolls On: Records Set," Economic Analysis of British Columbia (Newsletter) 3 (January, 1984): 2]

The "Yuppie" group would also have an impact on educational politics in the 1980s. Having delayed starting their families until their careers were well-established, these parents now demanded better quality education for their children. As the public education system was in disarray through government imposed restraint, many in this group started advocating a tax voucher system which would allow them to send their children to private schools. To some extent these generalizations reflect the opinion of the author and are given in the absence of any systematic, sociological studies.

9Dr. Jerry Mussio, "The move away from examinations: What happens now?" Memorandum, Learning Assessment Programme, received by BCTF 15 November 1973. BCTF Archives, Vancouver, B.C. The following three quotes are found on pages 6, 10 and 12 respectively.

10BCSTA, Convention Reporter, 1975. Further evidence is provided by Rendina Hamilton, President of the BCSTA, in her address to the Canadian Association for
Curriculum Studies in March 1977. "The BCSTA has been supportive of both the present and the former [N.D.P.] government in their basic position that there must be a core curriculum defined at the provincial level with an assessment program tied to it."

Thomas Fleming, "From Provincial to Local Control: School Inspectors, Superintendents, and the Changing Character of School Leadership in British Columbia," Draft #1, University of British Columbia (April 1985), p. 41. My appreciation is given to Dr. Fleming for allowing me to use his current research as background material for this chapter.


That tension existed within and without the school system is evidenced by the BCSTA's 1976 AGM resolution that the problem of standards in education be discussed with the Ministry of Education. For a general overview of this period see J. Donald Wilson, "From the Swinging Sixties to the Sobering Seventies," pp. 21–36, in Hugh A. Stevenson and J. Donald Wilson, (eds.), Precepts, Policy and Process: Perspectives on Contemporary Canadian Education (London, Ont.: Alexander, Blake Association, 1977).

Giles, p. 86.


Giles, p. 109.


Verner R. Nyberg and Brigette Lee, Evaluating Academic Achievement in the Last Three Years of Secondary School in Canada (Toronto: The Canadian Education Association, 1978), p. 13. The following quotation is from p. 58.


It is worth noting that in 1972–73, the last year of examinations, 21,738 Grade 12 students enrolled in the Academic Technical program while only 325 students were in the undefined "other" category. However, in 1973–74 the first year of less restrictive course selection, only 15,580 selected Arts and Sciences while 9,964 selected "combined studies." In 1974–75, the Arts and Science majors had dropped to 12,385 while combined studies had soared to 15,155 students. Was the smorgasbord approach a better system or a bad temptation?

The Canadian Association for Curricular Studies, "Assessing Curriculum in the 1970s: What are our core concerns?" Report of the meeting held in Kelowna in March 1977, p. 15. The following quotation is found on pp. 5–6.
In a sense, the B.C.T.F., through its Professional Development Division, has responded to this pressure. In April 1978, the B.C.T.F. endorsed Project T.E.A.C.H. (Teacher Effectiveness and Classroom Handling). Over 3,500 people, mostly teachers but also including a few trustees, parents and student-teachers, have taken this course in B.C. since it was first offered in the 1978–79 school year. Both Project T.E.A.C.H. and P.R.I.D.E. (Professional Refinements in Developing Effectiveness), which was first offered in the 1982–83 school year, are recognized as credit courses by the University of Victoria. In the 1984–85 school year, a third course was offered, T.T.L.C. (Teaching Through Learning Channels) which attempts to further develop the expertise of the classroom teacher. These courses have been created by Performance Learning Systems, Inc., based in Emerson, New Jersey.

BCSTA, Convention Reporter, 1977, p. 41. The following quotation is from p. 39.

Giles, p. 86.
The Vancouver Sun, 31 August 1977, p. 16.


Interview with Bill Vander Zalm, former Minister of Education, 9 February 1985. After reviewing an earlier draft of this chapter, Mr. Vander Zalm commented "Frankly, I couldn't help thinking how much assistance this might have been to me when I initially assumed the role of Minister of Education." Letter, 1 March 1985.


Bill Vander Zalm, "Challenges have to be met," The Canadian School Executive (March 1983): 18. The following quotation is from p. 19.

Jo-Ann Kolmes, "Second debut for provincial examinations," The Canadian School Executive (March 1983): 5. The following quotations are found on pages 4 and 5 respectively.


40There is a third view which lies outside the present discussion which should be noted. The debate about standards as a concern over achievement could also examine whether "standards" is being used to mean "status." As more students graduate from High school the general status of graduation decreases and the graduate in 1975 lacks the status formerly associated with a graduate in 1945. To explain this decline some parents may be inclined to think it is due to contemporary standards rather than universal secondary education.


44"Haney and Madeus, p. 475.


49Mary Warnock, Schools of Thought (London: Faber and Faber, 1977), p. 125. The following quote is from p. 172.

50"Let's Talk...," p. 9.

Chapter Six

Summary

We are no more satisfied [today] than Whitehead was fifty years ago with the large-scale external examination for school graduation.


In November 1971 British Columbia's Minister of Education, Donald Brothers, announced that regular Grade 12 Departmental Examinations would be discontinued after 1973. Yet in June 1984 these examinations were reinstated.

This reversal in policy by the Social Credit government raised several questions which this thesis has explained. In order to address these questions from an informed perspective, Chapter Two presented an historical and epistemological review of external examinations in an attempt to establish the rationale B.C. education policy makers might have used to justify instituting, abandoning, or reinstating Departmental Examinations as a mechanism for high school graduation.

This review showed that external examinations were instituted in China as early as 622 AD. They were an administrative invention used to select candidates for advanced education at Imperial universities and regional colleges. Eventually successful students, who earned the equivalent of our M.A. or Ph.D. degrees, qualified to compete for civil service positions.

Two great Neo-Confucian Chinese educator/philosophers, Chu Hsi and Wang Yang-ming, seriously questioned the Chinese examinations system. They argued it negatively affected learning of the kind that required thought characterized by doubt, inquiry, clarification of ideas and the recognition of principles. In 1905, the Chinese examination system was abandoned on the grounds that it did not promote thinking.

Ironically, as the system was falling into disrepute in China, it was gaining popularity in the West. For example, many nineteenth century reformers, such as J.S. Mill, believed Britain should adopt external examinations as a means to promote equality of opportunity. In the United States of America, Horace Mann endorsed this view.
However, as early as the 1890s, a widespread social and intellectual reaction against using external examinations to ascertain educational achievement levels can be documented in Britain. The 1890 collection of essays, *Sacrifice of Education to Examinations*, the 1911 *Report of the Consultative Committee on Examinations in Secondary School*, as well as the writings of Whitehead and Russell, suggest that many British educators found secondary school external examinations to be a bad educational practice. Although these educators generally conceded that external examinations were useful as an administrative device to standardize expectations, they argued that these examinations could not assess educational merit. In place of critical thinking, students merely crammed.

This position was well articulated by John Dewey. He denounced external examinations on the grounds that they interfered with the encouragement of thinking characterized by doubt, inquiry and critical judgement. He believed external examinations lead to teaching practices that violated intellectual integrity and caused servility.

Chapter Three reviewed the extent to which the arguments for and against external examinations identified in Chapter Two were publically used to justify B.C. Departmental Examination policy prior to the 1960s.

Jessop instituted these examinations in 1876 and a *prima facie* case can be made that he was influenced by prevalent educational practices in Britain and in Ontario. No evidence was found to suggest that the intellectual reaction against external examinations was acknowledged by B.C. educators until 1918 when Hindle published his *D.Paed.* dissertation, *The Educational System of British Columbia.* The influence of this book, published in Trail, B.C., is unknown, but probably it lacked a wide audience.

The 1925 Putman and Weir *Survey of the School System* provides the first influential discussion of B.C. Departmental Examination policy. Although they endorsed Dewey's position in theory, they preferred Bobbitt's administrative procedures, which utilized external examinations as an efficiency measurement. Paradoxically, Putman and Weir condemned the Departmental Examinations but praised "new-style" standardized, objective achievement tests. The 1960 Chant *Royal Commission Report* also recognized that critical thinking must be an aim of education. However, their concern for intellectual development was undermined by
the assumption that such development was synonymous with mastery of the traditional disciplines. This lead once again to an emphasis on external examinations which tested memory rather than "knowledge in action."

In review, the pre-1960s debate over external examinations in British Columbia had been sparse, confused and preoccupied with whether the traditional disciplines should form the basis for these tests. The more important issue – did these examinations encourage intellectual excellence – was not considered.

Chapter Four examined the rationale used by the B.C. policy makers who decided in 1971 to abandon regular Grade 12 Departmental Examinations. There is little evidence to suggest that this decision was made on sound educational grounds. The arguments by Dewey et al were largely ignored. Instead a more radical argument based on Rogers was given by the BCTF to discredit the Departmental Examinations.

Even so, the 1971 Curriculum Advisory Committee did not recommend that external examinations be abandoned entirely. Their "Solution 3" was a complex idea which recognized political and educational constraints that any new policy had to address. This solution was ignored by Brothers who opted, apparently at the last moment, for Solution 1, the abandoning of regular Grade 12 Departmental Examinations after 1973.

This thesis has not explored in depth whether Brothers's decision was influenced by an agenda more political than educational. Initial research, though, suggests it was politically convenient for him to accede to Solution 1.

Chapter Five revealed that the decision to reinstate regular Grade 12 Departmental Examinations in British Columbia was also motivated by political considerations. McGeer concedes that he believed this policy change would be a popular political move, seemingly a reintroduction of traditional standards to counteract a perceived decline in academic achievement during the late 1960s and early 1970s.

In 1982 Vander Zalm announced the return of Departmental Examinations at a Social Credit Party convention. However it was not until Heinrich became Minister of Education that the examinations were actually used as a mechanism for Grade 12 graduation. Heinrich's argument is that external examinations encourage
"challenging, consistent standards," and "reassure the public, that quality education is a priority." Chapter Five considered these arguments and found them seriously lacking. Heinrich does not discriminate between minimal and maximum standards. He ignores substantial evidence provided by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (N.A.E.P.) that the "Back-to-the-basics" approach has actually hindered the encouragement of intellectual excellence. His argument that "quality" education will be generated by external examinations has no empirical or logical foundation if "quality" implies education characterized by critical thinking. Moreover, we know from the Chinese experience that although external examinations may be an effective administrative device for centralizing control of the curriculum, promoting students, and inspecting teachers, such examinations also reinforce a mediocre, formalistic education system because they lead to "superficial learning." On what educational grounds can Heinrich justify Departmental Examinations which reward superficial knowledge rather than intellectual excellence?

These examinations are defective for they test replicative knowledge, not critical thinking. Their multiple-choice format reinforces the formalistic belief that for every question there exists only one right answer that should be memorized and reproduced on cue. Certainly for a great many questions it would be foolish to waste time on speculation or reflection when the answer is obvious. When asked to name the capital of France or Iceland, we want our students to respond with the correct answer. But not all answers are obvious. In fact, many of the more interesting questions are often interesting because we have only tentative answers that still need to be tested. How should social services, such as medical care or education, be paid for? Why do people fight? What can a million bald tires be used for that generates a profit after expenses? These questions entice senior students to ponder, to participate in an intellectual activity which sharpens the mind's ability to think critically.¹

In fact, test researchers at the NAEP and the College Board now recognize that critical thinking activities must be incorporated into examinations if tests are to measure intellectual excellence. This is a difficult task. The NAEP in their 1984 proposal to the National Institute of Education state that the problem is not technical in nature but that "the real concerns have to do with the resources to stimulate the imagination, creativity and sheer genius necessary to dream up the measurement processes."² Have the test developers in Victoria independently been
able to create multiple-choice questions for B.C. Departmental Examinations that measure higher-level cognitive skills in a valid and reliable fashion?

The evidence suggests not. George Adams recently reviewed the January 1985 Grade 12 History examination and rightly condemned it for turning history into a game of *Trivial Pursuit*.

It would be inappropriate merely to condemn present policy and to leave the issue without some suggestion as to a possible remedy. The interdisciplinary approach used in this thesis could provide a solid basis for just such a remedy, leading an inquirer to make policy that could have a sound epistemological foundation as well as be responsive to the political pressures generated in a public education system.

As policy-making is inevitably normative in tone, this thesis must, then, depart momentarily from an objective to a more subjective approach.

The inquirer who wished to improve present policy concerning Grade 12 regular Departmental Examinations should have an attitude similar to that expressed by Ted Sizer, former Dean of the Harvard Graduate School of Education. "Secondary schools should be primarily places where young citizens learn to use their minds.... [with a].... curriculum that stresses ways of knowing and thinking." This attitude will probably be politically popular with corporate executives in B.C. as the 1982 O.I.S.E. survey revealed Ontario executives considered "critical/creative thinking" as the number one priority for secondary schools. Moreover, in light of the current popularity of "critical thinking" research in the United States, particularly by the California State Department of Education and the N.A.E.P., this attitude will be applauded by those who have heard about the innovations and wish B.C. schools to provide a more stimulating and intellectually challenging education.

In a society where all secondary teachers had the knowledge, the skill, the dispositions and the resources to stimulate intellectual development, external examinations would be unnecessary. But until that day arrives – and we should by definition be committed to its arrival – external examinations have a role to play in B.C. education. However, we have erred in B.C. by reinstating the old, mediocre Departmental Examinations. Instead we should accept the challenge of creating a new intellectually-stimulating type of standardized test.
These tests must test more than rote memory and stamina. Rather they must discern those persons disposed to examine the society and culture which incubated them, those who ask awkward questions, those who dream of a better world. We do not advance as a society if we do not allow our best young thinkers an opportunity to explore alternatives in an ethically sound and intellectually disciplined fashion.

Further, we should follow the advice of the 1971 B.C. Provincial Advisory Committee on Secondary School Curriculum. The Committee, after ten years of study, debate and reflection, recommended that external examinations be discontinued as a means for determining Grade 12 graduation. They reasoned, quite correctly, that the school was best able to decide whether a student had completed the necessary course requirements in a satisfactory fashion. However they recommended that a new type of external examination be established, in consultation with the BCTF and the universities, which could be used to select students for further education. To quote the 26 April 1971 memorandum

A compromise procedure which clearly recognizes two distinctly different responsibilities; one, certifying that a student has accomplished the tasks of secondary education, and two, selecting and predicting success in subsequent studies, and assigns them to the authority best able to discharge these responsibilities, would appear to be the most effective solution. For political convenience this solution was never enacted. Yet it warrants further consideration.

This thesis asks policy makers not only to reconsider attitudes and examination formats but as well to reflect on how present graduation examinations reinforce nineteenth century educational notions. The 1969 World Book of Education clearly identified this problem.

The whole of our social system, and education with it, belongs to an age when memory and not imagination or originality was thought most useful. The transformation through which Western Civilization is now passing will change the balance between tradition and originality and give some importance to the ability to face new issues. Our tests of competence, therefore, should have in view the need of civilized life for men and women with that ability.

It is time to make examination policies which recognize that we now live in a computer age, an "information" age. It is no longer appropriate merely to test a student's memory capacity. Rather, as Dewey said in 1933, "The real desideratum
is getting command of scholarship and skill under conditions that at the same time exercise thought.... information, merely as information, implies no special training of intellectual capacity." We must turn from formalism and consider how secondary education can encourage critical thinking. New external examination policies should be made to reflect a more sophisticated, twentieth century concept of education.

One last matter needs comment. This thesis employed a methodology not generally adopted in studies of educational policy. It needs a final evaluation: to what extent was this approach productive and to what extent was it limited?

The thesis assessed the 1971 and 1983 policy decisions not only to determine their stated and underlying rationales, but as well to sort out the logic of the rationales employed in policy arguments. This latter task required that key concepts be clarified. By first establishing, as best one can, where and how a concept originated and changed before and after it entered the argument, we can observe to what extent major policy actors use these terms appropriately. Three concepts were studied: external examinations, critical thinking and standards. Of the three, "standards" is most pertinent to our present policy review as it figures large in the 1983 decision to reinstate Departmental Examinations.

"Standards" has at least two meanings as used by major actors in the 1983 decision. McGeer, Vander Zalm and Heinrich appear to advocate maximum standards in order to generate a quality education system. However, Departmental Examinations do not encourage quality education characterized by critical thinking. Rather they ensure that minimal standards are being mastered. Is there a conscious double-think in operation here or is this discrepancy caused by a lack of conscious reflection?

The methodology used in this thesis has enabled us to identify this discrepancy. Yet this method has not answered several questions which are provocative and worth further study. Who benefits in a society where external examinations are used to determine educational opportunities? What effects do external examinations have on character traits such as honesty and co-operation? Why did Ontario and other provinces decide to abolish their Departmental Examinations? Why did Alberta decide to reinstate the examinations? Many questions arise that require other studies and perhaps a different methodology.
On balance the methodology employed by this thesis is useful but limited in its application.

In closing, this thesis will have accomplished its purpose if it has enabled inquirers to consider carefully whether present Grade 12 regular Departmental Examination policy sacrifices intellectual excellence to administrative and political convenience. If evidence and/or arguments which provide a contrary view have been missed or distorted, these should be made public so that this issue can be openly and rationally debated. However, if this thesis proves to be substantially correct, then we should seriously reconsider present policy.
Karl Popper makes this notion clearer. He suggests that a book is a material object that exists in World One. The message of the book is a product of thought and as such it exists in another world, World Three. When a student understands the message of the book, he is experiencing a process of thinking. Popper puts this mental activity in World Two. Educators need to entice students to seek, select, interpret and understand the ideas formed in other people's minds and now stored in World Three. Further, we want our students to add to these ideas or to reject them on relevant and sufficient grounds. In this manner we not only introduce students to intellectual World Three, but initiate them into World Two by making them self conscious of their thinking process, their "knowledge in action," or to coin a term, "acthinkion." By stressing conscious reasoning we encourage critical thinking.


Quoted by George H. Hanford, "Only Connect," Mimeographed paper presented at the First International Conference on Critical Thinking, Education and the Rational Person, Sonoma State University, Rohnert Park, California, August 1983.


Department of Education Examinations [sic], Memorandum for Provincial Advisory Committee, 26 April 1971, BCTF Archives, Vancouver, British Columbia, p. 4.


For a discussion of this approach see William A. Bruneau, "Informal Logic and the Teaching and Doing of History: The Pleasures and Perils of Inference," *History and Social Science Teacher*, (December 1985), forthcoming.
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