

MAINTAINING THE “ACHIEVEMENT GAP”: HOW THE DISCOURSES OF  
WIDE-SCALE ASSESSMENTS MARGINALIZE STUDENTS AND PRESERVE THE  
EDUCATIONAL STATUS QUO

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## ABSTRACT

Using Critical Discourse Analysis and Foucaultian Discourse Analysis, this study applies postcolonial theory to an examination of the discourses of wide-scale reading and writing assessments in Saskatchewan. The study provides answers to three questions examining how the discourses of wide scale assessments in reading and writing construct disadvantages for First Nations and Métis students and simultaneously construct advantages for white settler students. The research data includes the publicly available *Assessment for Learning* instruments, handbooks, pre-assessment materials, scoring guides and reporting documents for 2005 through 2010, a total of 177 documents. The analysis indicates that there are at least four distinct discourses within the *Assessment for Learning* materials that are made available for colonial knowledge production and power relations. These discourses can be identified as: linking reading and writing proficiency to becoming a successful and productive member of society; valuing the possession of a particular set of reading and writing strategies as indicative of reading and writing proficiency; espousing a set of common experiences and knowledge among all students at a grade level; and placing white settler English above all other varieties of English as the norm against which student work is measured, reinforcing the dominance of white settler language and culture over all other languages and cultures in Saskatchewan. The discourses of the provincial Assessments for Learning privilege students who come from white settler backgrounds while First Nations and Métis student interests are marginalized as are the interests of other linguistic minorities including Hutterian students and new Canadian students who do not speak the same variety of English as do

the local white settler students. There are ways in which each of the four discourses can be troubled and countered and a set of 13 recommendations has been made to disrupt these discourses and put in their place new discourses that do not marginalize minority students. These recommendations include developing a set of shared beliefs around what the goals of education are and how achievement of those goals should be measured at a provincial level; arriving at a set of indicators and measures, acceptable to all stakeholders, to use in reporting on student achievement in reading and writing in Saskatchewan; constructing assessments that connect to curricular content common to all Saskatchewan students; providing student choice in assessment items; the development of a tool or set of tools for examining the discourses of all parts of the assessment materials for colonial knowledge production and power relations; and the review and revision of Saskatchewan curricula with a view to countering and troubling discourses found within the PreK-12 curriculum documents that are similar to those identified in the assessment materials.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Student achievement is a hot topic in the world of education, possibly more so now than at any point in history, given the importance placed on test scores and proof of student achievement by governments, by the media and by the private sector (BCTF, 2011; Fioriello, 2011; NCTE, 2009; US Dept. of Education, 2011; UFT, 2011). In Saskatchewan, from January 2008 until January 2010, the Provincial Panel on Student Achievement spent two years researching, reporting and making recommendations as to how to improve student achievement in the province. Across North America, political focus on student test scores as indicators of the effectiveness of school systems has driven an assessment and accountability movement of gargantuan proportions. In particular, much has been made of the differences in achievement between groups of students – black and white students, Latino and Caucasian students, male and female students – and in Saskatchewan it has been no different. In the June 29, 2010 Minister’s Mandate Letter from Premier Brad Wall to Education Minister Donna Harpauer, Premier Wall charged the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education with the task of developing targets for and measuring progress in the area of minority student achievement. Specifically the letter directs the minister to “develop and implement a provincial strategy for First Nations and Métis learners that focuses on attendance, literacy and student performance, bridges the gap in graduation rates at the secondary and post-secondary levels, and expands workforce participation” (Wall, 2010, p. 2). It is the reference to the “gap” in Premier Wall’s letter that causes me concern.

*Achievement gap* is the term commonly used to describe the differences in academic performance between minority students and their non-minority counterparts. In Saskatchewan, First Nations and Métis students are increasing in number in the provincial education system and are representative of a higher proportion of that system than ever before (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2010l). These students “experience lower levels of academic achievement measured by high school marks and credits earned, and provincial assessments of math, reading and writing; as well as rates of transition from Grade 8 to Grade 10, and high school graduation rates” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2008q) than their non-aboriginal peers and the province as a whole. Fleur Harris (2008) asserts that terminology such as *achievement gap* is deficit terminology, undermining the very students for whom justice and equity are being sought. It is important to note that I use that term intentionally, given that an achievement gap continues to validate the dominance of the white settler majority in Saskatchewan. Based on experiences and observations made in my past role with a provincial school division recording and reporting on student achievement data, I have developed serious misgivings about the nature of these reported achievement gaps and the ways in which they are being addressed.

Although the differences in scores are factual and are accurately reported based on the evidence gathered, it is my contention that First Nations and Métis student achievement is low in Saskatchewan, in part because of the narrow white settler lens through which assessors look when grading wide-scale provincial, system and classroom assessments. I maintain that the discourses surrounding the tools used to assess and report

on student learning have significant impact on the perceived achievement levels of the students involved. If the power relations in the discourse around assessment of student achievement are examined and work is done to acknowledge and trouble these discourses and revise the assessments and how they are scored, I believe First Nations and Métis students will be able to more accurately demonstrate their learning and the results of the assessments could have legitimate value to teachers in guiding further instruction. This is not to say that individual students would necessarily score any better or worse on specific assessments, only that those assessments would be able to give more accurate feedback as to the nature of the factors leading to any achievement gaps and potentially lead to changes in the education system to narrow those gaps.

#### 1.1 The use of the terms *postcolonial* and *white settler*

Before proceeding any further I feel it is necessary to clarify the use of two of the terms that appear throughout this document, *postcolonial* and *white settler*. The theoretical framework for this study is postcolonial. Postcolonial is a term that is commonly used to talk about time following the colonial encounter and arguably, since Saskatchewan is no longer part of a British colony, that term would apply. Within the postcolonial context, for the purposes of this study, the dominant group is characterized as white, Christian, middle class, western-educated, and urban or semi-urban individuals. As the researcher and writer of this document I count myself as being a member of the dominant group in Saskatchewan. This self-identification is informed by my Anglo Saxon heritage and my early experiences being raised and educated in a suburban area of one of Saskatchewan's two largest centers.

In the literature, the term is sometimes hyphenated as post-colonial which Julian Go (2006) sees as indicating an end to colonialism. Go acknowledges that inequalities between imperial powers and formerly colonized societies have not been erased once colonization is officially over but contends that *postcolonialism*, written as an unhyphenated term, represents continuation of colonialism's effects after formal decolonization and following the colonial discourse (Barker, 2004; Go, 2006; Rattansi, 2010). Others, in particular George Sefa Dei (2009) and Mary Louise Pratt (2004), posit an alternative view, especially in those situations where the colonizers remain in the physical space of the colonized although colonialism has officially ended. The situation of First Nations people in Saskatchewan is a good example of this phenomenon and, to describe it, Dei proposes a framework he calls *anticolonialism*.

Dei defines anticolonialism as a discursive framework that “articulates that the study of colonialisms, racism, and oppressions must be preoccupied with the experiences and knowledge of the oppressed, while simultaneously focusing on the benefits and privileges that accrue to the dominant/colonizer from their oppression” (Dei, 2009, p. 251). He also acknowledges that decolonization is an ongoing process but proposes that questions must be raised about anticolonial politics and about taking responsibility for the knowledges being produced.

Pratt talks about the idea of “diffusionism, the often unarticulated assumption that universal civilization naturally but at the same time mysteriously arose in Europe and spread to the rest of the world” (Pratt, 2004, p. 444). Dei advocates that a “culturally grounded perspective that centers oppressed peoples' worldviews/perspectives helps

resist the dominance of Eurocentric perspectives and can create counter-hegemonic knowings which challenge mainstream media and culture” (2009, p. 253). This anticolonial perspective is important in understanding how colonial power relations continue to exist and be maintained to this day by practices within our educational systems. Ashcroft, Tiffin and Griffiths (1989) propose a similar view to Dei’s although unlike Dei, they focus on colonization in Africa and India where the colonizers have not remained among the colonized. Although there are similarities between the colonized peoples of Africa and India and those of North America and Australia, it is also true that for the most part, the colonizers left Africa and India when the colonial era ended.

In the Canadian instance, as well as in some other parts of the world such as Australia, New Zealand, Mexico and South Africa, the colonizers remain physically in the colonized space to this day as white settlers, and the colonized indigenous peoples remain as marginalized groups within the dominant *white settler* society. Razack (2002) describes white settler societies as being created when Europeans dispossess and attempt to exterminate indigenous populations in order to create their own replicas of their ancestral European societies on non-European soil. The white settlers (re)create themselves as the original inhabitants of the land and create national mythologies and racial hierarchies to support their beliefs while denying any violence, slavery or exploitation of local indigenous populations, instead writing a history of peaceful settlement of largely unpopulated lands (Kelen, 2005; Razack, 2002). In the context of this research, I will reference postcolonialism in its ongoing sense including links to anticolonial theory as a subset of postcolonialism.

In the context of this thesis I focus specifically on First Nations and Métis students as a marginalized population within Saskatchewan. I recognize that there are many non-aboriginal linguistic minority student groups within the province including students in Hutterian schools, new Canadian students and those students who have a first language other than English and/or who speak a language other than English in their homes and communities. Because of the linguistic diversity in Saskatchewan it might seem that a multicultural focus would be more appropriate to this research than specific concentration on First Nations and Métis students, but “aboriginal groups suggest that multiculturalism is a form of colonialism and works to distract from the recognition and redress of Indigenous rights” (St. Denis, 2011, p. 308). To ensure that focus remains on the issue of First Nations and Métis student achievement I reference those student groups specifically throughout this paper.

Although I reference groups of individuals with collective nouns throughout this dissertation, the intention is not to essentialize the groups as being somehow homogeneous and two-dimensional. Rather the purpose is to provide clarity to the reader so as to maintain focus on the critical issues that I am exploring – namely those of power relations and identity construction as influenced by wide scale assessments. Certainly First Nations students, Métis students, white settler students and white settler teachers are all collectives which can lure the reader into believing that all members of a particular group are the same. While members of each group share some common experiences and backgrounds, the diversity within the groups is very complex and could provide the content for another entire set of research. I have focused my work on the differences

between white settler populations and minority populations, in particular First Nations and Métis populations; a focus that tends to revolve around race which is often cloaked in the terms culture and background. Layered in with the ideas of culture, background and race are also complexities of poverty which shape student identities and power relations within the education system and society. Poverty is not restricted to a particular race but “in Saskatchewan, 15% of non-aboriginal children under the age of 6 were in a low income family, compared to over half (51%) the aboriginal children under 6” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2010). Certainly white settlers are not excluded from poverty, nor is poverty synonymous with being a member of a cultural or racial minority. Still, in Saskatchewan, there is a strong correlation between socioeconomic status and racial status. Again, a full exploration of these interrelationships and the impact of the discourses of wide scale assessments on the full diversity of the population is another research topic, beyond the scope of what can be covered within this thesis.

## 1.2 A word about culture, class and race

In the course of writing this document I have struggled with the words *background*, *culture*, *class* and *race*. Initially my tendency was to rely heavily on *background* and I used it to capture a wide range of ideas. *Background* is a word that is often seen as a euphemism for race; a euphemism that is more palatable than the term race to white settlers such as myself. Instead of trying to be specific and find language that accurately described the class and race related effects that I have been discovering, I took refuge in the ambiguous term background. At the same time I used *race* as a form of collective identification of First Nations or Métis people. I used this term race reluctantly

at times and this reluctance is likely a direct result of my own white settler education and upbringing in Saskatchewan. I recognize that I was taught to pretend that racial differences did not exist and that mentioning race was vulgar or even taboo. In my white settler world I was taught to be colour-blind, not recognizing that “color-blindness is the shell of post-race thinking, while its kernel fully endorses racial perpetuity through its denial of race’s daily effects as a structuring principle of society” (Leonardo, 2011, p. 676). At the same time, I was indoctrinated into a set of white settler beliefs that solidified identification of those same racial differences as reasons to maintain white settler dominance and I grew up comfortable with and dependent upon my own white privilege. Recognizing this I have tried to stay away from using background when I mean race and restrict the use of background to situations such as “background knowledge”.

*Race*, as it is referenced in this document, is not a static state but rather is fluid and produced through language. “Racist acts depend on language in order to signify self and other, therefore rationalizing the disparagement of racialized minorities and valorization of whiteness” (Leonardo, 2010 p. 677) and race does not exist without language to perform it through discourse. Denzin (2001) affirms that “race is not a biological truth. It is a speech act that is imbued with meaning and made ‘real’ in practice” (p. 243). In this way race is performed through the discourses of the *Assessment for Learning* materials and race must be an integral part of how those discourses marginalize students who are not members of the white settler majority.

Similarly *class* is fluid and represents social and economic status shared by a group of individuals. Groups of students, regardless of whether or not they share racial or

cultural backgrounds, can often be marginalized on the basis of class. In the Saskatchewan context there is a definite and direct correlation between class and race with the lowest socio-economic groups in the province being predominantly composed of First Nations and Métis families and, in that respect, references to the marginalization of lower socio-economic classes can equate to marginalization of a large majority of the First Nations and Métis people in the province. White settler students from low socio-economic classes are also marginalized to a degree but they do not experience the combined race- and class-based marginalization that is pervasive in the lives of First Nations and Métis students.

*Culture*, as referenced poststructurally, is performed through language and text. Bordieu, Giddens and Elias all viewed culture operating to create a bridge between the social structures within which individuals exist and the individuals constructing themselves within those social structures (Smith & Riley, 2008). I feel that culture, in this sense, is well suited to describing what is shared by groups of students marginalized on the basis of religion, geographic location, ethnicity, social class and language traditions that they bring with them when they come to school. In referencing culture in this writing it may appear that I am trying to take a colour blind approach to what is quite obviously a race-based issue in Saskatchewan. I want to acknowledge that not all First Nations or Métis students share the same cultural backgrounds, nor do all white settler students share the same cultural backgrounds and to write as if that were the case would be wrong. In Saskatchewan, white settler cultures are generally not marginalized because the white settler beliefs and behaviours are the norms against which all other cultures are measured.

Those cultures, in particular First Nations and Métis cultures, that are markedly different from the white settler cultural norm are classified as deviant from the norm and that deviance is then used to justify the continuation of white settler dominance. While individuals may share some of the same experiences, behaviours and beliefs as a result of culture, race and class, they are still each unique and each individual's knowledge and experience at any point in time is a combination of all of those factors taken together.

With these terms clarified, I will take time in the remainder of this chapter to give a brief overview of the research itself and in particular, some background as to where the impetus for this research comes from and its importance to understanding the impact of assessments and assessment results on minority student populations. I will also provide some insight into my own background as an educator and how I, a white settler myself, come to feel the need to speak to this topic, and work to disrupt some of the binaries inherent in the education system that produced me as a white settler educator. Finally I will provide some rationale for looking at wide scale assessments rather than other facets of education that, at first glance, might appear to be more relevant and more influential than assessment tools and in doing so identify some of the limitations of the study.

### 1.3 Overview of the research

Informed by both postcolonial theory and by the work of Michel Foucault, this research is an analysis of the discourses within the Saskatchewan wide-scale provincial assessments in reading and writing. Looking specifically at the differences (or gap) in student performance between white settler students and First Nations and Métis students,

I focus on the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education *Assessment for Learning* documents which are made available to the public and to educators in an effort to provide opportunities for using the assessments to improve teaching and learning. Given the security around assessment tools, my attempts to look at examples of the same type of assessments in use in other provinces and states with demographics similar to those of Saskatchewan were unsuccessful. In the context of the Saskatchewan assessments I was able to examine 1) the text of the assessments, 2) the associated scoring tools and exemplars, 3) the text of perceptual data questionnaires and rubrics, and 4) the reporting documents publishing the assessment results with a view to identifying those discourses within the texts that serve to maintain the dominance of the white settler majority in the province. Because the analysis focuses on how the discourses of the assessments privilege the dominant population while marginalizing all other groups, I believe that the findings of my research are applicable in other similar white settler contexts regardless of the make-up of the specific population groups involved.

#### 1.4 Background to the research

Language is at the heart of this study. As highlighted by Prado (1995), Michel Foucault postulated that language is the site where reality is created and constructed. Even the language around language itself is problematic. Traditionally, the English learned in school in white settler societies, especially in the context of writing, has been known as standard English or formal English (Heit & Blair, 1993; Lee, 2006; McNeil, 2006; Purcell-Gates, 2002, Sterzuk, 2008, 2011). Spoken varieties of English, whose patterns differ from those of written work, vary across the English-speaking world and in

fact there is no spoken English that can be considered standard English (Wolfram, 2000). The naming of standard and other varieties of English constructs a false hierarchy that implies the dominance of formal written English over that being spoken and subsequently written by students in school. This hierarchy is also largely reflective of dominant populations in that members of the dominant group generally form the bulk of the educators in any given system (Au, 2009; Lipman, 2004; Smith, 2004). The variety of English spoken and written by that group then becomes the norm by which all other forms of English are measured (Au, 2009; Labov, 1972b; Oakland, 1973). Students coming from communities and cultures whose spoken language reflects their own community and cultural background rather than that of the dominant group are viewed not only as different but also as deviant from the language norms of the school and of the dominant group (Berry, 1969; Deyhle & Swisher, 1997; Heit & Blair, 1993; McNeil, 2006; Purcell-Gates, 2002; Sterzuk, 2011).

A second but closely related focus of this study is that of linguistic differences between the creators and scorers of assessment items and the students writing the assessments. Working in a diverse rural school division I noticed that students who speak differently from the teacher are often considered linguistically deficient rather than different. Difference implies equality of terms – two ways of speaking can be different without one being qualitatively better than the other (Miriam Webster Dictionary, 2011) while if one way of speaking is considered qualitatively less than another, the individual using that lesser way of speaking would be considered deficient in language skills (ibid). This evaluation of oral language deficiency is evidenced through the high demand for

speech-language pathologists (SLPs) in white settler schools with high populations of students speaking forms of English that are closely tied to their First Nations and Métis cultures and communities. Over the four year period from 2007-2010, the number of SLPs in the Saskatchewan provincial school system increased by over 20% from 92 to 111 (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2010).

One example from my own experience, while not definitive, supports the research in terms of SLPs treating difference as deficiency. The school serves a population of about 300 students from pre-kindergarten through to grade seven. The population is split with approximately 65% of students coming from three First Nations in the area while the remaining 35% are students from the area whose white settler backgrounds have generally British and German origins. The First Nations students often speak with accents and speech patterns different from those of their white settler teachers which often results in their being screened for SLP support and frequently diagnosed with language deficiencies that may not be deficiencies at all (Sterzuk, 2008, 2011). In this particular school, a full-time SLP was regularly assigned to the school for the first three to four months of the school year to respond to the perceived language needs of the incoming students. In comparison, most other schools in the same school division, of similar size but with a very low percentage of First Nations students, would see an SLP one or possibly two days a week. Taken further, differences in speaking also appear in student writing as word choices and as sentence structures used in written work mimicking speech patterns. Since the written work of the First Nations and Métis students does not match the written English the white settler teachers are accustomed to and expect from

white settler students, the First Nations and Métis students score lower on written assignments than the white settler students who speak and write the form of English taught and used by the teachers in the school. When the *Assessment for Learning* results in reading and writing in Saskatchewan identify a gap between white settler student and First Nations and Métis student performance, we need to ask ourselves whether this is truly a gap in achievement or is it evidence of linguistic differences between two population groups?

These two areas of focus have led to the three research questions addressed in this study:

- 1) What are the discourses of wide-scale provincial assessments that are made available for colonial knowledge production and power relations?
- 2) Whose interests are served by the discourses of wide-scale provincial assessments, and whose interests are marginalized?
- 3) How can we trouble and counter the discourses of wide-scale assessments that marginalize minority students?

### 1.5 Researcher's background

I bring to this research prior experience in studying how the way in which high school mathematics courses are taught affects First Nations and Métis students. During that research the teachers and consultants involved in the study made several observations about the students and their connections to the material being presented. It was assumed that connecting mathematics to real world situations would be engaging for students, result in improved interest in the tasks and subsequently improvement in achievement. The unexpected observation was how deeply my own cultural norms were embedded in

what I and my colleagues considered real world situations that would be engaging to students.

In one instance a group of students in a consumer mathematics unit were learning how to write cheques, how to balance a chequebook, how to use banking procedures and how to be judicious about choosing credit options. These so-called real world skills were considered important by the teachers and we assumed they would be important to students getting ready to transition from high school into the world of work. It surprised us when the students did not seem at all interested in the subject matter. On probing more deeply we began to realize that these supposedly every-day considerations were not part of the every-day world of the students. In part because of the socioeconomic situation of the school population in general and in part because of issues of racial discrimination, banking and credit were not readily available to these students and their families. As a result the subject matter was not common nor was it necessarily of interest to them. Perhaps students would have been engaged, interested and have had more success if we had found connections based in their background and experiences and applicable to the reality in which they lived every day (Belisle, 2004).

If student engagement with the topic is as important in the area of mathematics as was indicated in my previous research (Belisle, 2004), perhaps it is also true in the areas of reading and writing. In many respects, this study explores whether or not the assessment instruments being used to measure student achievement are connecting to the reality of the students being assessed. My work in education over the past 25 years has given me the opportunity to look at student achievement from a variety of perspectives

and my graduate studies work at the Masters level and now at the doctoral level has allowed me to re-examine those perspectives, as well as how I see student achievement. I self-identify as a member of the dominant white settler, western-educated, able-bodied, heterosexual, Christian, middle-class, urban majority in Saskatchewan. It is easy for me to fall into the rhetoric around student achievement that draws on colonial values of assimilation and meritocracy as pathways to success as defined by societal norms. Similarly, my white settler background impacts my recontextualization of events even as I analyze the discourses surrounding wide scale assessment in Saskatchewan. It is likely that my preference for the terms *culture* and *background* over *race* and *class* are direct products of my white settler background and culture. I am aware of my own whiteness on an intellectual level but recognize that there are facets to that whiteness that are always with me; I cannot escape them and I cannot bracket them out of my analysis. As a result, this research cannot help but come from a white settler perspective. My experiences however, working in both urban and rural settings, working in partnership with several First Nations to provide education services for federally funded students in provincial schools, and in being charged with accurately reporting on student achievement to students, to their families, to their communities and to the school board have caused me to question the assumptions I have been immersed in and have considered true throughout my career and indeed, my entire life.

As a teacher, I taught students and assessed their learning in much the same way I had always been taught. It wasn't until much later in my career that I realized many of my practices blindly assumed that my students shared a common class and race with me

as I had shared a common class and race with most of my own teachers growing up. It was at that point in my career that I also realized those assumptions about my students' lived curriculum disadvantaged those students whose class and race were different from my own. Moving from the role of a classroom teacher to that of a curriculum consultant ten years ago, I was charged with assessing, reporting on and acting on student achievement levels in both mathematics and science. Developing tools that tried to be equitable for all students proved to be much more challenging than I ever expected and when results were reported, the sense that only those results that stakeholders expected to see would be considered valid was very disturbing to me.

As I moved out of teaching and consulting roles in education and into a senior administration role in 2006, I became more acutely aware of the pitfalls of the generalizations made around student achievement and of the seductive nature of numbers reported publicly as holding unarguable truths. The way in which many senior administrators, board members and members of the public frequently (mis)interpreted accurately reported results and emphasized or de-emphasized information based on their own underlying assumptions and motives surprised me. I had assumed that superintendents and directors of education would share a common basic understanding of what achievement data represents. I had also assumed that, having reached such senior positions, these same individuals would be careful not to make sweeping generalizations by taking test scores and statistics as unarguable truths, especially when those scores were based on small samples and untested assessment tools. In terms of board members, I expected that members of the senior administration would provide guidance to board

members as to what test scores and other data could and could not say about student achievement. I know in my own case, I felt obligated to explain results very carefully when presenting them to the board, to the staff and to the public. It was even more surprising to me to realize that the entire system of accountability and assessment was structured to be a self-fulfilling prophecy from teacher-based classroom assessment through to wide-scale national and international assessments. That is to say, that the closer students are to sharing the same race, class, perspectives and characteristics of the dominant group that most teachers are members of, the better those students will do in school and the greater the differences in culture, beliefs and worldview between students and dominant group teachers, the more those students will struggle to achieve in school.

At this point in my career, in a role that deals with student records, transcripts and the provincial examination system, I feel more strongly than ever I need to be aware of the ways in which the colonial history of Saskatchewan is still working to marginalize First Nations and Métis students in the twenty-first century and, simultaneously, how it is working to elevate white settler students through the reproduction of colonial identities and relationships. I believe that by analyzing the language which works to construct power relations in the current system of assessment of student achievement, I can begin to disrupt the status-quo of minority achievement gaps as well as identify other perceived gaps that appear to exist in achievement levels between white settler and First Nations and Métis students rather than the gaps in attendance, student performance and graduation rates that Premier Wall references, since these are tied to much broader and more insidious issues than differences in students' knowledge, skills and academic

abilities. To accomplish this, I am focusing on wide scale assessments and the role those assessments and the subsequent reporting of results play in maintaining the current privileged status enjoyed by white settler students.

#### 1.6 Rationale for examining wide scale assessments

To understand why I have focussed on wide scale assessments in this study, a bit of background around assessment in general is needed. Assessment has been a part of education for as long as education has been formalized. Because language and literacy are critical components of communication, and assessment cannot occur without communication, assessment can never be separate from language and literacy either. As a result, assessment is never neutral just as language and literacy are never neutral (Norton Peirce, 1995). Beliefs and practices around language, literacy and assessment all contribute to the subjugation of certain groups and members of those groups experience long-lasting, often devastating consequences as a result of the inequality accomplished through assessment practices.

The Miriam-Webster online dictionary (2010) indicates that the verb “assess” is likely derived from a Latin word, *assessus* which is the past participle of *assidēre*; one meaning of which is to “assist in the office of a judge”. This link between assessing students and the idea of passing judgement is a key point in how assessment is perceived by teachers, by students and by the general public. Regardless of what form assessment takes in the world of education, it comes back to this ultimate practice of making judgments—judgments about students, about teachers, about schools and about school systems. It is the fact that human beings are making such judgments that ensures that

assessment cannot be neutral. Assessments are made on the basis of the information the assessor has available to him or her and in the case of modern-day educational assessment, information generally comes in the form of test scores.

"Our society believes test scores are fair, impartial, and precise. Using tests to make important judgments about students, teachers, schools, or the educational system as a whole, creates the impression that these judgments are objective and therefore fair" (Madaus, Russell, & Higgins, 2009, p.22). It is this trust in the validity of quantitative data, regardless of its source, that gives assessment results such a powerful role in education today. The most publicly visible test scores are those gained through the use of wide scale assessments where thousands of students with diverse backgrounds and experiences, coming from a variety of races and classes, are all evaluated using the same tools and against the same standards. In many instances, important decisions for students' futures including whether or not they pass a grade, their ability to graduate and the educational opportunities that are available to them within school systems are based on the results of these assessments, making the stakes very high for the students being assessed.

The rationale for high-stakes testing is that the promise of rewards and the threat of punishments will cause teachers to work more effectively, students to be more motivated, and schools to run more smoothly—all of which will result in greater academic achievement for all students, but especially those from poverty and minority backgrounds. (Nichols & Berliner, 2008, p. 41)

It is this belief in extrinsic motivation that has, in part, been behind the increase in assessment for the purposes of accountability across the United States, Canada and much of Europe over the past 20 years.

Throughout the history of education reform, the belief that assessment will somehow cure the ills of the educational world has caused assessment to move from being a means of acquiring information about student learning and education systems to a strategy to effect change in teaching and learning practices. On the other hand,

there is reason to believe that high-stakes testing at any level may sometimes be used in ways that have unintended harmful effects on students at particular risk for academic failure because of poverty, lack of proficiency in English, disability, and membership in population subgroups that have been educationally disadvantaged. (Beatty, Neisser, Trent & Heubert, 2001, p. 7)

There is also a strong belief among policy makers and, by virtue of what they have been told by policy makers, among the public in general, that a system of assessments to measure and show student achievement guarantees value for the public funds expended in education (Madaus et al, 2009).

The idea is that a program or service that does not seem to be producing measurable results should be discontinued or at least receive less funding. Unfortunately, the question then becomes one of whether or not the assessments implemented are providing information about indicators that align with the desired outcomes. For example, the American education report *A Nation at Risk* identifies that

The teaching of English in high school should equip graduates to: (a) comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and use what they read; (b) write well-organized, effective papers; (c) listen effectively and discuss ideas intelligently; and (d) know our literary heritage and how it enhances imagination and ethical understanding, and how it relates to the customs, ideas, and values of today's life and culture. (United States National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983)

Assessments currently in place to provide information about student proficiency in high school English are not able to assess many of the criteria identified in *A Nation at Risk*,

since a paper and pencil test is not adequate to access information about many of these higher order skills. Still, the existence of exit exams in English would indicate to the public in general that if students are able to pass the exit exams, the stated purposes of teaching English in high school have been achieved. It remains that the nature of the examinations, in the form of selected response items rather than constructed response items, prevents getting a sense of student learning with respect to the very skills and knowledge identified as being important.

Another very important reason for examining wide scale assessments is the relationship between assessment and education in general. In a nutshell, we attempt to measure what we value and, correspondingly we teach what we value and want to measure. If the assessments reflect inequalities and discrimination then in turn we can expect that the curriculum, the resources and the teaching practices used in the education systems that are being monitored through those assessments also produce those same inequalities. Although changing assessments alone will not likely have a significant impact on how power relations are formed through the discourses of the education system, changing our perspectives about what we assess and how we assess it can have far reaching effects on both the stated and hidden curricula of our schools.

### 1.7 Need for the research

There has been considerable research done over the past two decades with respect to high-stakes testing. Researchers have explored the validity and reliability of testing instruments and trends in assessment results for particular groups of students based on gender, ethnicity, race, cultural background and socio-economic status (Amrein &

Berliner, 2008; Au, 2007; Haertel, 2005; Smith & Fey, 2000). There has also been considerable attention paid to the role of high-stakes assessment in perpetuating achievement gaps between the dominant white majority and marginalized minority populations (Au, 2009; Beatty et al, 2001; Hanson, 2000; Lipman, 2004; Maddeus et al, 2009). This is in direct contradiction to one of the previously stated reasons for conducting high-stakes assessments, “that the promise of rewards and the threat of punishments ... will result in greater academic achievement for all students, but especially those from poverty and minority backgrounds” (Nichols & Berliner, 2008, p. 41).

What has not been explored in the research is the impact of low-stakes wide scale assessments such as the assessments currently in place in Saskatchewan, even though low-stakes assessments also affect the students and teachers who are participants in those assessments. The Saskatchewan *Assessment for Learning* program gathers information about student performance in the areas of reading, writing and mathematics once at the elementary level in grades four and five, once at the middle level in grades seven and eight, and once at the secondary level in grades ten and eleven. Not all students are assessed in each area at each level since the assessments are conducted every second year in each subject area. At the time of this writing results have remained anonymous with no student-level results being recorded or reported as no identifying information has been gathered during the assessment process (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009k). The fact that individual student results are not available so decisions about individual students cannot be made based on *Assessment for Learning* results means that the

*Assessment for Learning* is considered a low-stakes assessment, at least from a student perspective. The current focus on accountability in the form of the *Continuous Improvement Framework* makes the *Assessment for Learning* program a somewhat higher-stakes assessment from the perspective of school divisions and individual schools who are held accountable for their aggregate results. It is because of this attention to results that it is important to examine the impacts of these assessments on the student populations that are being examined and reported on using these tools.

Premier Wall's mandate to the Education Minister around developing targets for and measuring progress in the area of First Nations and Métis student achievement provides an opportunity to educators in Saskatchewan. Within the scope of this mandate, there is room, and perhaps even a compulsion, to bring to light some of the currently invisible white settler dominance that values white settler English varieties over other varieties including indigenous English varieties within the provincial education system. Looking at the discourses of the provincial assessments, identifying the power relations inherent in those discourses, and challenging the assumptions and norms that are perpetuated through those discourses has the potential to disrupt the status quo of student achievement in Saskatchewan as assessed and reported through wide-scale assessments. Looking at the advantages afforded white settler students alongside the challenges faced by First Nations and Métis students through the construction of the assessments, the ways in which the assessments are scored and in how the results are reported has the potential of disrupting many of the binaries of student success/student failure, good English/poor English, reader/non-reader and achievement/non-achievement that are entrenched in our

current education system. This research does not pretend to offer a magic bullet that will eradicate the issues faced by Indigenous peoples living in a white settler society, nor does it claim to have discovered the right way or the best way to assess student achievement. The results of this study are only able to offer insight into the current state and propose ways in which to alter that state to a more equitable way of providing information about student achievement that does not afford privilege to one group over another on the basis of race and class alone. The decolonization of Saskatchewan is an on-going process that will not be accomplished overnight or through something as simple as changing the way in which students are assessed and student achievement is defined. Still, given the significance of language and literacy in the colonization process, one can only hope that it will have a similar impact on the decolonization process as well.

### 1.8 Summary

In this first chapter I have identified the key terms *achievement gap*, *postcolonial*, *anti-colonial* and *white settler* to provide an understanding of how these terms are used in this document. I have also discussed some of my struggles with my own white settler upbringing as far as using the terms culture, background, class and race when referencing the commonalities among students in marginalized groups. I have identified the scope of this research as being an examination of the discourses of the Saskatchewan Assessments for Learning in Reading and Writing from 2005-2010 and have situated myself as being a part of the dominant white settler majority in the province.

Key areas of background information that lead to this study include a poststructuralist view of reality as being constructed through language, a postcolonial

view of dominant (colonizer) language forms as tools of control over marginalized (colonized) groups, and the ways in which First Nations and Métis people have been marginalized by white settler society throughout Saskatchewan since colonization began in the area.

Finally, I provide a rationale for the examination of wide-scale assessments as opposed to examining other parts of the education system in Saskatchewan. This is based on the current political climate across North America that places emphasis on improving student achievement through educational reform, looking to wide-scale assessments to provide evidence of the success of reform initiatives put into practice.

In the next chapter I will explore the theoretical perspectives that inform this research and how they bring together the (post)colonial power relations entrenched in Saskatchewan society with the way in which individuals construct their own identities in relation to that society. Following that, the third chapter takes an in-depth look at assessment practices both in general and specifically with respect to Saskatchewan and the assessment of reading. It also outlines how assessment practices and beliefs about assessment have worked to accomplish inequality within education systems and have impacted on the construction of reality for students and student identity. The fourth chapter outlines the research questions that provide the foundation for this study as well as the specifics of the discourse analysis methodology applied in the research process. Chapters five through seven contain the analysis and interpretation of the data and the eighth chapter summarizes the findings of the research as well as providing recommendations for further study and further action.

## 2. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

In proposing this research, I was looking for a theoretical perspective that would bring together the colonial aspects of power retained by the dominant group with the idea of individuals being constructed; their own truth and reality, on the basis of their experiences. Student experiences that reinforce colonial values and power relations stabilize colonial discourses that privilege white settler students and marginalize First Nations and Métis<sup>1</sup> students as they are constructed as learners. I have combined the two ideas by taking a postcolonial perspective and then applying Michel Foucault's work around truth and reality to the analysis. Postcolonial theory and research are concerned with power relations and subjectivity, especially as they are evidenced by the discursive formation of the Self and the Other (Mesthrie & Tabouret-Keller, 2001). In drawing attention to encounters between groups of people, in particular those encounters that involve conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and conflict (Pratt, 1992), postcolonial theory disrupts the dominant culture's construction of the colonized Other. Several postcolonial theorists including Frantz Fanon, Homi K. Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, Edward Said and Bill Ashcroft, maintain that language is the most important tool of the colonizer in maintaining the power imbalance of the colonizer over the colonized. Power relations

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<sup>1</sup> References to First Nations students, First Nations and Métis students, and white settler students occur throughout this document. While not meant to essentialize any group on the basis of race, class or culture, these terms are used to reference specific groups while acknowledging that not every student with aboriginal ancestry shares the same background and culture although they may identify with that group on racial terms. In the same way, not every white settler student shares the same background and culture since they may be descendants of many different western European groups that colonized Saskatchewan.

within our society shape how we communicate with one another as well as shaping the way we create knowledge within our societal context (Barsky, no date).

Specifically, educational systems operate within hierarchical structures of power and control. Michel Foucault, over the course of his lifetime as a scholar and philosopher, examined and developed his views on the relationship between power and knowledge. To his examination of the question of power and knowledge, Foucault brought the idea of truth, forming a power/knowledge/truth triangle. This chapter provides background regarding postcolonial theory and the role of language in power relationships followed by a summary of some of Foucault's views on power, knowledge and truth. In the last part of the chapter I bring together the Foucaultian power/knowledge theory and postcolonial views on language use as a theoretical perspective through which to relate to the substance of my own research into the discourses of wide scale assessments in reading and writing in Saskatchewan. To begin the discussion it is necessary to understand the importance of language in postcolonial theory.

## 2.1 Postcolonial theory and language

Language has long been recognized as a powerful tool in gaining power over colonized peoples. Over half a millennium ago, in 1492, the Bishop of Avila told Queen Isabella of Spain that, "language is the perfect instrument of empire" and so began 300 years of Spanish attempts "to repress and replace indigenous languages in the New World" (Crawford, 2000, p. 64). Similarly, in his 1835 Minute on Education, Lord Thomas Babington Macaulay advocated for English-only instruction in Indian schools to "produce a class of persons, Indians in blood and color, English in taste, in opinion, in

morals and in intellect” (Phillipson, 2008, p. 3). In North America just over 50 years later, the U.S. Commissioner of Indian Affairs in 1887 wrote “No unity or community of feeling can be established among different peoples unless they are brought to speak the same language, and thus become imbued with like ideas of duty” (Crawford, 2000, p. 65). In Canada, the federal government actively pursued assimilation of the colonized First Nations people into Canadian culture through various means including the imposition of Indian residential schools. English (and French) language education was used as a tool to separate First Nations children from their own cultures and communities in an attempt to dominate the First Nations people. (Canadiana.org, 2005)

This use of language as a tool to maintain power has been a cornerstone of colonialism for centuries. Power is asserted through the dominant culture and “the colonial mother tongue became the benchmark against which the relative cultural standards of the colonized were measured” (Rassool, 2007, p. 16). Bourdieu (1991) sees colonial languages used as tools to maintain domination through education policies that ensure their hold on power by the transmission of culture through colonial language education. Today, the continued use of language to maintain existing power relations within white settler societies has become so entrenched in many parts of the world that it is accepted as common sense and natural practice and generally goes unquestioned.

Frantz Fanon writes that "a man who possesses a language possesses as an indirect consequence the world expressed and implied by this language" (Fanon, 1952, p. 2). Fanon elaborates further saying, "all colonized people—in other words, people in whom an inferiority complex has taken root, whose local cultural originality has been

committed to the grave—position themselves in relation to the civilizing language" (Fanon, 1952, p. 2). In Fanon's estimation and indeed in the estimation of many at the time and still today, the better the language acquisition of the colonized individual, the more like the colonizer that individual becomes. Since Fanon's experience was that of a black man in an area colonized by white Europeans, becoming like the colonizer was, in his estimation, becoming "white"; the same concept Macaulay referenced in 1835 with respect to producing English Indians and, the goal of assimilation projects in colonial Canada.

To Fanon's way of thinking, language is the key to that whitening process, the way in which an individual initially identified as the exotic Other, can take on the language and thus the character and traits of the colonizer, even to the extent that the individual can become figuratively white. Fanon explores this phenomenon from two angles. He first postulates that the Other who leaves his ancestral home and travels to the home of the colonizer returns as a changed individual, "[g]enetically speaking, his phenotype undergoes an absolute, definitive mutation" (Fanon, 1952, p. 3). In the eyes of his countrymen, this transformed individual is often revered as having accomplished something by acquiring some of the whiteness of the colonizer during his time away. It is also true, according to Fanon, that the same individual knows deep inside that it is his characteristic speech that marks him as the Other even more than the colour of his skin. The vernacular use of language sets the individual apart as somehow less than the colonizers, no matter how much effort he puts into removing any trace of difference.

If we picture Fanon as writing in western Canada rather than Algeria, his words could just as easily be used to describe the experiences of many First Nations people in Saskatchewan today. Deyhle and Swisher note that “in a very real sense, the schooling package that provided literacy for Indians also required becoming ‘White.’ While the structure has changed somewhat, this practice has changed very little in the past 100 years” (1997, p. 115). Individuals who have grown up and started school on their own First Nation and then moved to a predominantly white community to complete high school or to pursue higher education, find themselves changed just as Fanon’s Other was changed— not really a part of the colonizer’s world with their First Nations ways of speaking and knowing yet somehow changed through their acquired knowledge of white settler ways of speaking and knowing (M. McKay, personal communication, November 2009). There is an additional twist to this in the Saskatchewan context in that Fanon’s reference to the Other leaving the ancestral home to travel to the home of the colonizer is somewhat compressed. The ancestral home and the home of the colonizer in the modern sense may be almost one and the same place since the white settler group has not left following the colonial era, bringing anticolonial theory into the picture.

Homi K. Bhabha echoes some of Fanon’s thoughts around language and whiteness but from the side of resistance to colonization. Bhabha points to the use of African-American English by black American youth as a way of highlighting the distinction between black and white, not in the sense of the white speakers of the locally dominant form of English marginalizing the black speakers who don’t speak properly but rather as a way of black speakers of African-American English “establishing a kind of

cultural intimacy, even indigeneity (sic), for a minority group” (Bhabha, 1997, par. 10).

It is with the goal of understanding this indigeneity that George Sefa Dei proposes an anticolonial “approach to theorizing colonial and precolonial relations and the implications of imperial structures on the processes of knowledge production and validation” (Dei, 2009, p. 252).

Bhabha describes minority group differences in English speech as an adulterated form of the standard language of the colonizers; what Roland Barthes called an *ideodialect* that encompasses more than just syntax and intonation but rather encompasses the whole range of speech habits of a particular group (Bhabha, 1997). This variety of language that is separate from the language of the dominant group and closed to use and understanding by that dominant group, is used, in Fanon’s words, as a way of positioning the minority group “in relation to the civilizing language” but by way of resistance rather than by way of assimilation into the dominant group. The use of a non-dominant English variety “redraws the public/private distinction through the medium of language, making both audible and visible the ways in which minorities are positioned as, at once, insiders and outsiders within the society of their belonging” (Bhabha, 1997, par. 10). John Ogbu discusses the same type of phenomenon describing it as *cultural inversion*.

Cultural inversion is the tendency for involuntary minorities to regard certain forms of behavior, events, symbols, and meanings as inappropriate for them because these are characteristic of White Americans. At the same time the minorities value other forms of behavior, events, symbols and meanings, often the opposite, as more appropriate for themselves. (Ogbu, 1992, p. 360)

Language used in this way by minority groups allows the individuals to resist assimilation into the colonizing group but at the same time emphasizes the marginalization of minority language use in the education system, working to create achievement gaps in literacy as measured by the colonizers where perhaps the gaps are not in literacy and comprehension at all but rather are gaps in willingness to be assimilated into the colonizer's society and culture.

Gayatri Spivak (1988) references the use of language as a tool of colonization through identification of the ways in which there is no voice or way of hearing the economically dispossessed in postcolonial India. Spivak builds a compelling case to show how the dominant British colonizers have imposed language and western culture on Indian practices through inaccurate translations of both words and actions to fit the western norms of the dominant group. In doing so, the imposition of the English interpretations have effectively silenced the colonized Indian lower classes, removing not only their power to speak as subjective Others but also their ability to be understood in their own cultural context. It is Spivak's argument that even if the marginalized classes are able to speak and assert their own identities as cultural groups, by doing so, they provide the means for western postcolonial scholars to more clearly define those groups as Others in relation to the colonizers themselves (Graves, 1998, Spivak, 1988). This perspective is similar to Bhabha's concept of vernacularized English setting a group apart from the colonizers but in Spivak's assessment this is not necessarily the intent. Rather, it is the result of the marginalized groups not being able to assimilate and have voice in the colonizer's language but neither being able to have voice in their own form of that

language. Whether by choice or not, the result is the same with marginalized groups being defined as Other - different (and deviant) from the colonizers through their use of the colonizer's language - and the degree to which that language use mimics that of the dominant group.

The work of Edward Said helps to explain the Self/Other binary so prevalent in colonialism and colonial societies. Said does this using the example of the Orient and how western societies have constructed their own understanding of the Orient. Over the past two centuries, westerners have assumed that everything about the Orient “was, if not patently inferior to, then in need of corrective study by the West” (Said, 1979, p. 41). Referencing Michel Foucault's concept of a discourse, Said contends “that without examining Orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage – and even produce – the Orient” (Said, 1979, p. 3). The languages of Europe as the colonizing cultures were essential in the discourses that ultimately produced the Orient. Since what is commonly understood about cultures through discourse is not truth but rather, representations, the language used to produce those representations “is directly indebted to various Western techniques of representation that make the Orient visible, clear, ‘there’ in discourse about it” (p. 22). Said cites the work of Renan in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as indicative of the role of language in producing Orientalism. “IndoEuropean [language] is taken as the living *organic* norm, and Semitic Oriental languages are seen comparatively to be *inorganic*” (p. 143). It is this normalization of the IndoEuropean culture that allows Orientalists to

construct the Oriental culture and through that construction, confirm the normalization of the dominating culture (Said, 1979).

The ways in which white settlers in Canada construct the First Nations and Métis Other is very close to what Said observes about Europeans constructing the Oriental Other. There is a colonial discourse that has evolved into a white settler discourse that has used white settler English to represent and ultimately produce the First Nations Other. This similarity carries on to the marginalization of First Nations language with English (and French in Quebec) being taken as the “living organic norm” while indigenous languages have been treated as inorganic, static and unchanging, and suppressed to the degree that in some instances they have become exactly that, confirming the normalization of the dominating white settler culture.

Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (1989) affirm the role of language in dominating colonized people. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin identify that “profound linguistic alienation” occurs “for those whose language has been rendered unprivileged by the imposition of the language of a colonizing power” (p. 10). The authors maintain that the English language is a tool used to construct the “world” of the individual and it can construct, among other things, difference and separation from the norm of the dominant group for the colonized. In a second edition of *The Empire Writes Back*, the authors also clarify that their use of the term postcolonial encompasses “all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day” (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 2002, p. 2), noting that the historical process that was begun by European imperial aggression continues to this day. The Canadian white settler

context of colonizers remaining in the land of the colonized certainly exemplifies this continuity of process and supports the relevance of anticolonial theory to this research.

## 2.2 English language use against the other

Given these perspectives on the role of language as a tool of colonization, one might ask how, exactly, English is used against the Other. Ashcroft maintains that the study of English by colonized peoples has led “to the naturalizing of constructed values (e.g. civilization, humanity, etc.)” (Ashcroft et al, 2002, p. 3). Rassool (2007) points to the linguistic and cultural imperialism practiced by European colonizers in Africa as validating their own languages while at the same time silencing “African languages and subjugat[ing] indigenous cultures, supplanting them with European ‘knowledges’ and cultural ways of knowing, imbuing them thus with the colonial worldview” (p. 45). By imposing the colonizer’s European Christian values on the colonized through the enforced use of English, an identity is constructed for the Other that construes their own values as inferior to the constructed English value system. In particular, “the teaching of English literature abetted Christianization, since structural congruences were perceived and established between Christianity and English literature” (Aikant, 2000, p. 340). Imperialistic linguistic policies systematically eroded the cultural base of the colonized indigenous peoples and resulted in cultural alienation that is still felt today, particularly in the case of First Nations people in Saskatchewan experiencing the ongoing effects of colonization. It is no accident that the effects of colonization are still being felt by First Nations and Métis people in Saskatchewan when the school system that most First Nations and Métis children are compelled to participate in maintains and strengthens

those same imperialistic linguistic policies. Resources used in schools across the province mirror the value system of the white settler majority, perpetuating the construction of the indigenous Other as inferior to white settler populations in terms of language, values, worldviews and ways of knowing.

Michel Foucault expands on this idea in two lectures delivered in early January 1976. In the first of those lectures, Foucault brings up the idea of what he calls *subjugated knowledges*. To Foucault, subjugated knowledges are “historical contents that have been buried and disguised in a functionalist coherence or formal systemization” (Foucault, 1976b, p. 81), as well as “knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to the task” (Foucault, 1976b, p. 81). Foucault is talking about local knowledge that comes from the subjects of discourse rather than the dominant normalized knowledge. He gives examples of the discourse of the mental patient as a subjugated knowledge when held against the dominant normalized knowledge of the doctor and nurse, or the discourse of the prisoner as a subjugated knowledge when held against that of the justice system. Through colonization, colonizers have subjugated indigenous knowledges and normalized our naïve assumption that the absence of Western European knowledge signifies absence of any knowledge. Dei’s anticolonial view of the experiences and knowledge of the oppressed would position the knowledge of First Nations people in Saskatchewan as a subjugated knowledge in relation to that of the dominant white settler group.

In the second of the two lectures, Foucault references a triangle of relations he calls the Power-Right-Truth triangle. Relations of power require a discourse and power

requires discourses of truth in order to be exercised. “We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth” (Foucault, 1976b, p. 93). The theory of right, since medieval times, has been to fix the legitimacy of power. The divine right of kings fixed the legitimacy of the power of monarchs in the Middle Ages. That divine right came from the understanding of truth at the time, most of which was heavily influenced by the teachings of the church. Colonial power was initially held based on those same rights and truths and remains the basis for continued dominance to this day; we have replaced divinity with science and base right within our societies upon the commonly held truth of the day, that truth being borne out by scientific evidence. It is interesting however, that much of the scientific evidence which is commonly accepted as normalized truth has been constructed from a decidedly western European perspective based upon the assumed dominance of western science. Power is assumed by the dominant group rather than allowing for perspectives supported by indigenous knowledge provided by the Other in any given society.

In the case of educational achievement the scientific evidence that is commonly accepted as normalized truth is provided through the factors that Premier Wall references in his directions to the Minister of Education – attendance at school, literacy, student performance, graduation rates and workforce participation. These factors are indicators of success from a white settler perspective and deny the validity of any other perspectives that might include indicators of success that are not part of the white settler norm of what constitutes success in school and in society.

Norman Fairclough comments that “language has become perhaps the primary medium of social control and power” (1989, p. 3). He includes in his discussion of language and power the idea that ideologies, “the common-sense assumptions which are implicit in the conventions according to which people interact linguistically” (Fairclough, 1989, p. 2), legitimize power differences and social relations by taking the common behaviours that entrench these ideologies for granted. Power is often exercised through coercion, especially in the process of colonization. Coercion can happen through physical violence but it can also happen when consent to the exercise of power is manufactured, and “ideology is the prime means of manufacturing consent” (Fairclough, 1989, p. 4).

Fairclough sees individuals as being “caught up in, constrained by, and indeed deriv[ing] their individual identities from social conventions” (1989, p. 9). In a colonial environment, the social conventions imposed by the dominant colonizers then begin to re-identify the colonized Other with respect to the norms of the colonizers. Fairclough’s work brings to mind Edward Said’s commentary on Orientalism as an “exercise of cultural strength” (Said, 1979, p. 40) in which “the Oriental is contained and represented by dominating frameworks” for “scrutiny, study, judgment, discipline, or governing” (p. 41). Fairclough explains this phenomenon as being a case of social structures functioning ideologically. Ideological practices are characterized by people drawing upon assumptions which legitimize power relations that have originated in the dominant group and have become “naturalized”. In many cases these practices serve to sustain unequal power relations in favour of that dominant group. (Fairclough, 1989). The importance of this is that Fairclough sees ideological power as being exercised in discourse.

Judith Butler, in conversation with Gayatri Spivak (2007), talks about power and the exercise of freedom as it relates to dominant power. Butler cites the example of the American national anthem being sung in Spanish by those who do not necessarily hold the power of the legal entity of the United States as citizens. She notes that it “involves a deformation of dominant language, and reworking of power, since those who sing are without entitlement” (p. 67). Viewing the nation-state as the dominant power, it has been a long-standing exercise of power through nationalism by the dominant group to insist on exclusive use of the dominant language in all things related to the nation-state. As recently as 2007, American president George W. Bush insisted that “the national anthem can only be sung in English” (Butler & Spivak, 2007, p. 69). There is a fear among the dominant group that allowing minorities to express a form of nationalism by using their own languages to express that nationalism will ultimately erode the nation-state as the sovereign territory of the dominant group. Gayatri Spivak identifies a similar situation in which the national anthem of India must be sung in Hindi, the national language, even though it was written in Bengali. Although the anthem itself acknowledges many different Indian languages and religions within its lyrics, the exercise of dominant Hindi power is clear in the insistence that Hindi is the only language suitable for the actual singing of the anthem (Butler & Spivak, 2007).

Although we are not a nation and there is no Saskatchewan anthem to sing in any language, is it possible that we hold the same assumptions around language use and educational achievement? Consider for a moment the implications of First Nations and Métis students using varieties of English different from standard (white settler) English as

I paraphrase Judith Butler. We might characterize these students as without power since the norms in white settler Saskatchewan include speaking and writing in white settler English. If such students are able to achieve academically while using varieties of English that are not part of the norm, this would constitute a “deformation of dominant language and reworking of power” similar to that discussed by Butler. As such it is no surprise that the white settler majority insists on “exclusive use of the dominant language in all things related” to educational achievement. It appears that there is a fear then, of allowing First Nations and Métis students to demonstrate their knowledge, skills and abilities using varieties of English other than white settler English, perhaps because this will ultimately erode educational achievement as the sovereign territory of white settlers and white settler English becomes a tool by which to maintain colonial power forged through imperialism.

Digging deeper into the concept of imperialism, we can characterize it as essentially a seizing of power from one group by the colonizing group and colonialism then works to maintain that seized power (Sterzuk, 2011). It stands to reason then, that “language is both a site of and a stake in class struggle, and those who exercise power through language must constantly be involved in struggle with others to defend (or lose) their power” (Fairclough, 1989, p. 35). In terms of the English language and its role as a tool by which colonizers maintain power,

...it can be argued that the study of English and the growth of Empire proceeded from a single ideological climate and that the development of the one is intrinsically bound up with the development of the other, both at the level of simple utility (as propaganda for instance) and at the unconscious level, where it leads to the naturalizing of constructed values (e.g. civilization, humanity, etc.)

which, conversely, established ‘savagery’, ‘native’, ‘primitive’, as their antitheses and as the object of a reforming zeal. (Ashcroft et al, 1989, p. 3)

Simply put, the establishment of English as a norm in the colonized society sets up the criteria by which all citizens are to be measured and, by virtue of how closely each matches (or becomes) the colonizing group, again coming back to Fanon’s idea of becoming white.

Catherine Prendergast (2003) argues that “throughout American history, literacy has been managed and controlled in myriad ways to rationalize and ensure White domination” (p. 2). Prendergast describes the restriction of access to literacy for African-Americans in particular but for other southern European, Jewish and Middle Eastern immigrant groups as well – those considered to be of “ambiguous racial stock” (Prendergast, 2003, p. 6). Prendergast argues that the restricting of literacy, which is based in language and specifically the dominant white settler English form of language, was used to challenge white supremacy through the civil rights movement. But literacy remains a form of white property today, produced as white through the various ways in which access to literacy and success are measured.

Language, and in the case of western Canada, English, has long been acknowledged as a means to subjugate and control colonized peoples. Imperialism in North America, while involving many methods of seizing control from indigenous peoples, was more than just coercion or economic domination. Discourse and the forms of knowledge and representation associated with that discourse are also an important part of imperialism (Go, 2006) and played a significant role in how imperialism and later colonization occurred in the North American context. In fact, “physical acts of conquest

and aggression constitute only one aspect of colonial domination. Much more devastating is cultural invasion through language and educational practices” (Aikant, 2000, p. 338). Lord Macaulay recognized language as “an instrument for disseminating 'the same thoughts' throughout the British Empire” (Phillipson, 2008, p. 3) in 1835. It was this recognition of the power of language in the colonial process that led to the development of the Canadian education system for First Nations students that resulted in the establishment of residential schools and still impacts multiple generations of First Nations people today.

One of the ways in which English has been used against the Other is not only as a tool for communication, but as a way of valuing individuals and their discourse as Fanon pointed out (although Fanon was referencing French as the colonizer’s language). If an individual is able to carry out discourse both socially and in business in the dominant form of English, that individual holds higher value than an individual who uses a variant form of English in his or her discourse (Phillipson, 2008). “There is a widespread belief that political and economic conditions in entire societies would be improved if only individuals could 'become more literate,' 'spell more correctly,' or 'speak better English’” (Smith, 1993, p. 1). As a direct response to the absence of that ability to speak better English, lands and resources have been exploited, civil rights have been abrogated and whole societies have been denied self-government (Crawford, 2006). Currently in Saskatchewan, as in other English-speaking Canadian provinces, First Nations students, the colonized Other, are subject to this devaluation through reported achievement gaps between First Nations students and their peers in the white settler majority.

Language is essential to ideological control and works to maintain colonial-style dominance into the present day (Phillipson, 2008). English-only policies have been adopted by dominant groups to ensure social control (not social integration) of Indigenous peoples and, in the case of North American natives, to enable “military conquest, expropriation of Indian lands, and removal of unwanted peoples” (Crawford, 2000, p. 16). It is this continuation of colonial dominance through language that allows dominant groups to maintain their power over colonized peoples long after colonization is supposedly over.

The development of language and thought could not proceed without concessions of power—and that the emphasis on English language competence could maintain the disempowerment of the people; it was supposed to assist. A focus on English in education could hold back educational and social advancement. Empowerment does not come with language; rather language reflects power (Smith, 1993, p. 1)

By using the English language to ensure social control under the guise of assisting the colonized First Nations people to succeed in the new society, the newcomers were able to re-create their own version of Britain in the new land through the establishment of white settler societies (Stasiulis & Yuval-Davis, 1995).

Having outlined the ways in which language works as a tool of colonialism and, in postcolonial societies, as a tool to maintain the power and privilege of the dominant group following the end of the colonial era, the next section outlines the ways in which Foucault’s work around the relationship between power and knowledge can be used to view the power relations inherent in white settler Saskatchewan. In the next section, I examine Foucault’s views on power both historically and in the modern context and some of the techniques he describes as being used to maintain power within the knowledge

economy that is prevalent in today's world. To do this, it is important to begin with some background as to how power has traditionally been exercised within societies and how power is exercised in the present.

### 2.3 Foucault on power and knowledge

A traditional view of power, as articulated by Foucault in his various works, involves the idea of power as a concrete entity that can be treated as a right. In this form, power is not only possessed by individuals, it can be transacted – transferred to another, taken forcibly from an individual and used in the establishment of political power (Foucault, 1976a). This sets up a “contract-oppression schema” (p. 89) for the analysis of power and such an analysis is centered around the negative effects of power on those who are being oppressed by it.

In contrast to the traditional view, Foucault sees power as something that is exhibited rather than possessed. Foucault's view gives rise to the idea that “power is neither given, nor exchanged, nor recovered, but rather exercised, and that it only exists in action” (Foucault, 1976a, p. 89). Through this understanding, power can be analysed as an “organ of repression” (p. 89). “Power represses nature, the instincts, a class, individuals” (Foucault, 1976a, p. 90). The idea of power repressing nature opens up an alternate way of looking at power and its effects on individuals, what Foucault refers to as a domination-repression schema that shifts the analysis from the difference between that which is legitimate and illegitimate, as is the case with the contract-oppression

schema, to the analysis of the difference between struggle and submission (Foucault, 1976a).

Power is not concrete or static, but circulating, unable to be isolated or possessed solely by an individual or even a group of individuals. Power “is employed and exercised through a net-like organisation. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power” (Foucault, 1976a, p. 98). In terms of the power wielded by the dominant class, this means that the strategic position of the dominant class allows the members of that group to exhibit power and utilize it more readily than those who are being dominated. Ready access to power by the dominant group does not, however, mean that power is only available to the dominant group. Those who are dominated are also a part of the exhibition of power, even as that power exerts pressure on them (Foucault, 1975).

Foucault also rejects the traditional adage that “knowledge is power” or more specifically that knowledge is an instrument of power that allows the holder of knowledge to possess and exert power over those without knowledge (Gutting, 2008). Instead Foucault sees knowledge and power as far more closely connected, inseparable in “that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations” (Foucault, 1975, p. 27).

Looking back in history, Foucault (1977a) describes the power relations of the past, of kings and judges over their subjects, as classic power, and contrasts it with the modern power relation of disciplinary power. The difference between the two lies in the

way in which the individual is controlled. In classic power relations, the individual is subject to punishment as a method of control by way of making the individual pay for their actions. These relations would frequently include torture and public displays of punishment as a spectacle to both demonstrate the power of the king as well as to deter others from committing similar crimes against the state. In the classical age, the body was “object and target of power” (Foucault, 1977a, p. 136). In the case of disciplinary power, the goal is not so much to punish as to reform. The public spectacle is removed as is the aspect of punishment. The body is no longer object but instead “subjected, used, transformed and improved” (Foucault, 1977a, p. 136); the idea is to correct deviant behaviour by imposing societal norms. In doing so, individuals are classified using a normal/abnormal binary and control is exerted on individuals to conform to the normal behaviour of the day (Gutting, 2008).

Disciplinary power is based on the application of “simple instruments; hierarchical observation, normalizing judgement and their combination in a procedure that is specific to it, the examination” (Foucault, 1975, p. 170). The first of these instruments, surveillance, is frequently described using Bentham’s Panopticon model; an architectural design for a prison. Under Bentham’s design prisoners were observed without their knowledge, or more precisely, they knew they were being observed but not exactly when that observation was occurring. The design was such that the warden was able to observe the prisoners from the center of the structure because the cells were built in a circular arrangement around the outside of the building and backlit, allowing the observer in the center to see in without the prisoners in each cell knowing that the

observer was watching at that exact moment. As well, the prisoners were separated from one another, unable to see into the adjoining cells and thus isolated from other prisoners. Since the prisoners did not know exactly when they were or were not being observed, their perception was that of being observed continuously, day and night (Foucault, 1975; Gutting, 2008).

Surveillance, however, is more than just a single central observer creating the impression of constant observation. In a complex model, a single observer cannot possibly see all of the individuals; therefore a hierarchical system of observers is needed to pass information about what has been observed through the system. The hierarchical nature of such a system means that a network of surveillance is formed with the individuals at each level doing the supervision and feeding the information into the overall whole. “This network ‘holds’ the whole together and traverses it in its entirety with effects of power that derive from one another: supervisors, perpetually supervised” (Foucault, 1975, p. 177).

Although power, in the form of control over individuals, can be gained through simply observing those individuals, a second instrument increases the exercise of power when used in conjunction with observation. That second instrument of power is normalization. “A distinctive feature of modern power (disciplinary control) is its concern with what people have not done (nonobservance), with, that is, a person's failure to reach required standards” (Gutting, 2008). Not only were observers using surveillance to find out what prisoners were or were not doing in their cells, those same observers were also comparing prisoners to one another, classifying and ranking them according to

particular criteria (Foucault, 1975). In moving from the classical exercise of sovereign power toward a new era of disciplinary power, surveillance and normalization were key techniques for exhibiting power over individuals and groups within society.

Like surveillance and with it, normalization becomes one of the great instruments of power at the end of the classical age. For the marks that once indicated status, privilege and affiliation were increasingly replaced – or at least supplemented – by a whole range of degrees of normality indicating membership of a homogenous social body but also playing a part in classification, hierarchization and the distribution of rank. In a sense, the power of normalization imposes homogeneity; but it individualizes by making it possible to measure gaps, to determine levels, to fix specialities and to render the differences useful by fitting them one to another. (Foucault, 1975, p. 184)

Normalization pervades our society through a thirst for standards whether those be standards for student achievement, standards of health care or standards for goods and services within the economy (Gutting, 2008). Foucault defines normalization as a “perpetual penalty that traverses all points and supervises every instant in the disciplinary institutions compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes, excludes” (Foucault 1975, p. 183). These same processes of comparison, differentiation, hierarchization, homogenization and exclusion are fundamental to the K-12 education system prevalent across North America.

The combination of surveillance and normalization that Foucault calls *examination* exemplifies the way these two simple techniques of power work together to allow power systems to exert control over individuals. The examination provides the documentation or, as we prefer to look at it in the education field, the data that support the formation of categories and norms that form a basis for knowledge in the field (Gutting, 2008). Foucault postulates that “discipline is an art of rank, a technique for the

transformation of arrangements. It individualizes bodies by a location that does not give them a fixed position, but distributes them and circulates them in a network of relations” (Foucault, 1975, pp. 145-146). The examination, in the form of student assessment, with its dual approach of both observation and comparison of individuals provides the education system the means by which to control those individuals.

While disciplinary power is essentially unseen as compared to the very visible nature of traditional power which was seen – both shown and manifested – it imposes “compulsory visibility” on the individuals being subjected. The disciplined individual is held in subjection by the idea of always being observed or at least always able to be observed. The move to continuous evaluation as a form of educational reform has set up the educational equivalent of Bentham’s Panopticon. The examination, in the form of standardized assessment, is used to objectify the individuals being disciplined by the education system. “In this space of domination, disciplinary power manifests its potency, essentially, by arranging objects. The examination is, as it were, the ceremony of this objectification” (Foucault, 1975, p. 187).

The application of the examination as a technique of power allows the individual to retain his individual characteristics by describing him as an analysable object but at the same time place that individual within the population. The written nature of the examination opens the door to looking at whole populations and describing groups within those populations. It also allows for the measurement and calculation of gaps between individuals (Foucault, 1975). The description of an individual through examination provides a way in which to dominate and control that individual.

Finally, the examination is at the centre of the procedures that constitute the individual as effect and object of power, as effect and object of knowledge. It is the examination which, by combining hierarchical surveillance and normalizing judgement, assures the great disciplinary functions of distribution and classification, maximum extraction of forces and time, continuous genetic accumulation, optimum combination of aptitudes and, thereby, the fabrication of cellular, organic, genetic and combinatory individuality. (Foucault, 1975, p. 191)

Foucault observed that the more anonymous and functional power became as it moved away from traditional power to disciplinary power, the more individualized those on whom power was being exercised became. Surveillance in the form of continual observation coupled with the articulation of norms and the gaps between individuals and those norms ensures that those deviating from the norms and therefore in need of more disciplinary control are most clearly individualized. For example, the mental patient becomes more individualized and described than the doctor; the prisoner is more individualized and described than the prison warden; and the student is more individualized and described than the teacher (Foucault, 1975). But Foucault also rejects the practice of viewing power negatively. Instead of seeing power as oppressive, exclusionary and censoring he maintains that “in fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production” (Foucault, 1975, p. 194).

In addition to his thoughts around discipline and its connection to power, Foucault also focused on the interrelated nature of power and knowledge. In Foucault’s words, “by being combined and generalized, [these techniques of power] attained a level at which the formation of knowledge and the increase of power regularly reinforce one another in a circular process” (Foucault, 1975, p. 224). Knowledge is created through the exercise of

power so that new bodies of information are constantly being produced by power being exercised. Not only is knowledge created through power, the effects of power are manifested through knowledge; and this integration is inevitable, knowledge and power cannot exist one in exclusion from the other (Foucault, 1977b, pp. 51-52).

Relating to this thesis are Foucault's thoughts around the construction of identity through the discourses that exercise power on the individual: "it's my hypothesis that the individual is not a pre-given entity which is seized on by the exercise of power. The individual, with his identity and characteristics, is the product of a relation of power exercised over bodies, multiplicities, movements, desires, forces" (Foucault, 1976b, p. 74). Based on this hypothesis my own questions around the impact of the discourses of wide-scale assessments on the identities of the learners being assessed bear examination through a lens of Foucaultian power/knowledge theory. By drawing on Foucault's ideas of identity construction through disciplinary power and connecting them to postcolonial theory around the use of language as a way of gaining and maintaining dominance over the Other, I am able to show how linguistic discipline serves as a tool to maintain white settler dominance and privilege in Saskatchewan.

#### 2.4 Exercising power through linguistic discipline

As colonizers exercise their domination over colonized peoples, they make use of language to subjugate those peoples. Through the provincial preK-12 education system, a single version of the dominant language is installed as the norm and all other varieties of the language are measured against that norm, marginalized as deviant and somehow "less" than the colonizer's standard. Heit and Blair (1993) note that "most speakers of

standard English in Saskatchewan perceive Indigenous English speakers as simply having a less developed or deviant command of the English language” (Sterzuk, 2008, p. 12). Every individual speaks English with his or her own nuances of language use but the more different the variety from that of the dominant group, the more likely the dominant group is to judge the intelligence, reasoning skill and character of colonized individuals based on their English as compared to standard English (Wolfram, 2000). “Language becomes the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated, and the medium through which conceptions of ‘truth’, ‘order’, and ‘reality’ become established” (Ashcroft et al, 2002, p. 7). Carrying the idea of linguistic deviance even further, in 1969, Wilson Riles (President’s Committee on Mental Retardation) stated, “If the child--black or white or brown—is not very tidy, clothes a little tattered, if he is inarticulate in the English language, many teachers’ first reaction is that the child must be mentally retarded” (Gerry, 1973, p. 307); a sentiment that is unfortunately just as true today as it was almost 40 years ago.

Hand in hand with language goes culture and “policy makers...have a shared understanding of, and belief in, the intrinsic superiority of British culture, and the importance of English language and literature to the civilizing mission of the colonial government”(Rassool, 2007, p. 20). Crawford (2000) maintains that conquered peoples have been demoralized by the assault on their culture through language and that linguistic domination has cultivated their dependency on the colonizers, further weakening their resistance to external domination. Ngugi, quoted by Margulis & Nowakoski posits that “language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature,

the entire body of values by which we perceive ourselves and our place in the world” (1996, par. 3). It is this construction of self through language and culture that makes language such an effective tool for domination.

Much has been said about the construction of the colonized as subjects through the use of the colonizer’s language, but we are all continually being constructed and construct ourselves in relation to the world around us. Thus, the identity of the colonizer is also being formed by the colonial encounter and those identities persist into the present day (Rattansi, 2010). While popularly held truths about colonized peoples are legitimized through colonial discourse, that same discourse “also provided the means by which ‘truths’ about the inherent cultural, social and military supremacy of the ‘mother country,’ were systematically constructed, regulated, and circulated within, and through, sociocultural practices and processes” (Foucault, 1980 as quoted in Rassool, 2007, p. 18).

Although the use of language to subjugate colonized peoples is common, the use of the English language for subjugation is widespread as compared to other languages. Due to the size and scope of the British Empire during the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, English has come to represent colonial power. English has also evolved in many forms around the globe (Barker, 2004). People not only describe the world around them using language; they use language to define and to understand themselves: “language and culture are inseparable, and...therefore the loss of the former results in the loss of the other” (Margulis & Nowakoski, 1996, par. 2). English can then be seen as “a ‘cultural bomb’ that continues a process of erasing memories of pre-colonial cultures and history and as a way of installing the dominance of new, more insidious forms of colonialism”

(Margulis & Nowakoski, 1996, par. 2). As well, “language and discourse played a significant role in securing colonial hegemony; it represented a potent expression of colonial power...colonized peoples were constructed in social discourse, giving rise to stereotypes that served as powerful rationale for domination and subjectification” (Rassool, 2007, p. 17). In India, “instituting English as the official medium of teaching and learning in government-funded schools, effectively, legitimized the Western knowledge paradigm aimed at instilling secular European values and beliefs as the basis for modernization” (Rassool, 2007, p. 24). At the same time, the use of English in the Indian education system served to set the hierarchy of cultural and linguistic difference and inferiority with English placed securely at the top and local variants of English and indigenous languages taking their places below it (Rassool, 2007).

Spivak’s question around the ability of the subaltern to speak is partially addressed by Martina Michel. Michel (1995) sees the subject as not speaking, but rather as “being spoken by language” (p. 90). As a result the subject, when studied through the language that constructs it, is a passive entity, “a mere cocoon, which, once opened, dissolves into a multiplicity of discursive facets” (Michel, 1995). As for the subject, the subaltern, being able to speak, Michel notes that “as agent the subject constantly acts out, reformulates, challenges, and potentially re-locates these constructs/discourses that assign to her or him a place from which to speak” (Michel, 1995, p. 91).

These methods then describe how English was used to subjugate native people in North America. “The Indian Peace Commission of 1868 concluded that inculcating the ways of 'civilization' was the only way to pacify the warlike Plains tribes. As one means

to that end, it recommended English-only schooling” (Crawford, 2000, p. 15). The use of English-only schooling has been viewed both as a positive and a negative in terms of the subjugation of colonized peoples. On one hand, educating students in the language of the colonizer is seen as a way of opening up opportunities within the dominant regime, viewing “instruction in the language of the former colonizer as an approach that will lead to greater proficiency in that language, representing a further step towards economic development and participation in the international global economy” (Mfum-Mensah, 2005, p. 72). This is certainly true in Saskatchewan today where First Nations students must be proficient in white settler English to attain secondary and post-secondary education.

On the other hand, English also serves to control the population, determining who gets access to what education, and to what degree that education allows individuals access to the political and economic infrastructures of the nation (Mfum-Mensah, 2005, Mishra, 2000). Instead of empowering students, English language requirements can hold students back, even be used against them if those students do “not have the power to say how language should be employed” (Smith, 1993, p. 171). “Requiring every child to learn English from an early age as part of the official curriculum...guarantees that many children acquire the label of failure who would otherwise not do so” (Smith, 1993, p. 60). It has also been claimed that policies supporting the instruction of African students in their own languages rather the language of the colonizers were prejudicial and assumed an intellectual inferiority on the part of the African students to even attempt to learn in the colonizer’s language (Mfum-Mensah, 2005).

Dominant groups control individuals through each individual's ability to use English and the degree to which that individual can use English effectively. Structuring the world order after colonization through communication networks and ideological elements that are based solely on English language and values leaves those who cannot function fluently in English at an extreme disadvantage (Phillipson, 2008). By using language as a tool for discrimination, groups with more proficiency in English can be privileged over those with less proficiency and the hegemony of the elite English ruling class can be preserved (Crawford, 2000). Mishra (2000) points out that the 95% of the Indian population who did not speak English were left "high and dry" because technology, government and economics used English exclusively to maintain the power of the dominant group. Mishra also talks about the use of language as a tool to produce subjectivities, noting that "the more powerful a language in terms of its imbrication in the institutional power structure, the more complicated becomes the process it generates through which subjectivity is produced" (2000, p. 389). English then, has been a most powerful tool in building a negative self-concept in colonized societies, a lasting legacy that remains long after the colonial period has ended (Rassool, 2007).

Delpit (1988) identifies five aspects of power that she uses to explain the "culture of power" that marginalizes individuals who do not belong to the dominant group. While Delpit presents these aspects of power as they pertain to Black students and students from poverty in general, they apply equally to the culture of power in white settler schools that marginalizes First Nations and Métis students. The first aspect is that "issues of power are enacted in classrooms" (p. 283) through the teacher, the white settler resources used,

the determination of what is normal and the relationship between success in school and the quality of job individuals are able to get when finished school. The second aspect of power is that there are rules for participating in the culture of power and those rules govern the way individuals speak and write. Third, in Delpit's view, the rules of the culture of power are the "rules of the culture of those who have power (p. 283)" – in Saskatchewan, the rules of white settler culture are effectively the rules of the culture of power. It is the fourth point that Delpit makes that is critical to how difficult it is for First Nations students who do not speak white settler English to succeed in school. "If you are not already a participant in the culture of power, being told explicitly the rules of that culture makes acquiring power easier (Delpit, 1988, p. 283). By not recognizing First Nations students as language learners acquiring white settler English and the associated dominant culture, the tools of power are effectively withheld or at least made far more difficult to attain for those students.

Using the idea of disciplinary power, colonizers, and specifically the white settler societies of North America, have leveraged the concepts of surveillance and normalization through examination to ensure the perpetuation of white settler English as dominant over all other English varieties. In the North American context, both in Canada and in the United States of America, regular standardized assessments of student achievement in reading and writing are conducted to measure the progress of students in relation to one another. With opportunities for further education and success in society at large impacted by how well or poorly a student performs on these assessments, the white settler majority is able to entrench white settler English as the norm against which all

students are measured. This serves the majority well as students will either assimilate into white settler culture and become a part of the normative group, allowing that group to maintain dominant power or, students will resist linguistic domination and by doing so be labelled as deficient in a linguistic sense, deviant from the norm and undeserving of power or deserving of marginalization. This effectively eliminates resistance to linguistic domination as a tool to disrupt white settler power as described in the next section.

## 2.5 Resistance to linguistic domination

The use of language as a tool of power is not entirely limited to the colonizers. English has also been used by the colonized to resist colonization and to fight back to regain some of the cultural capital lost through the colonization process. The field of postcolonial studies examines ways in which colonized peoples have responded to and fought back from colonization, mostly through literature. Rushdie commented that "to conquer English may be to complete the process of making ourselves free" (Rushdie quoted in Margulis & Nowakoski, 1996, par. 4). It is this resistance that John Ogbu refers to when he writes about cultural inversion and involuntary minorities, those groups who are marginalized through no choice of their own, in this case through colonization. By appropriating the English language and making it their own, marginalized groups at once show a dominance over the language of the dominant group and at the same time develop something that is uniquely their own, both culturally and linguistically, effectively disrupting the standard English/non-standard English binary.

As noted by Barker, there are a variety of forms of English in use around the globe. The ability of the subaltern to speak is restricted by the use of English, the colonizing language, until that language has been replaced or, as is the case in many areas, appropriated as English by the colonized. Only then will the subaltern be able to speak. Margulis and Nowakoski see working in “new” Englishes as a way of resisting, of remaking the colonial language to reflect the experiences and reality of the colonized (1996).

However much she might be caught in this web of dominant discourses, she can and must speak. She is using the dominant language (English) to be heard, but by doing so struggles to develop her own language/voice in order to be recognized in the First Place. (Michel, 1995, p. 91)

It is the view of Bill Ashcroft that one of the most successful ways for postcolonial societies to resist dominant discourses is “by engaging, appropriating, and transforming them” (Hannan, 2002, par. 1). To do this, the language of the colonizer is used by the colonized within the local space of the colonized to create elements in discourse that transform that discourse into one where the balance of power is held by the previously marginalized group (Ashcroft, 2001). It is this resistance that has made policies that have attempted to commit linguistic genocide in colonized societies largely ineffective. Although such policies have been useful to the colonizer in the near term, the use of language as a form of resistance has been well-documented in the last three hundred years whether it be the use of Gaelic in English-controlled Scotland in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the use of African languages by slaves in North America in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries or the use of indigenous languages by First Nations people in Canada throughout the late 19<sup>th</sup> and the majority of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

My own research into the discourses of the provincial *Assessment for Learning* instruments and reports reflects the postcolonial perspective through the Foucaultian lens of power/knowledge theory. The linguistic and cultural assumptions made in the creation of the assessments, in their administration, scoring and ultimately in the reporting of the results serve to preserve the hegemony of the dominant white middle class in Saskatchewan while marginalizing all other groups. The largest of these groups are the colonized First Nations and Métis people of the province. In Saskatchewan the English language, particularly the white settler English variety has been privileged in the economy, in government and in the education system. The prevalence of western Christian values as cultural norms in the education system has extended the colonial dominance to the current day even though a large percentage of the population has cultural and linguistic roots that do not share those cultural norms.

There is a whitening process à la Fanon that occurs insidiously as First Nations children leave their home communities to attend provincial schools and be compared academically and as individuals valued against the norms of the dominant group, through the application of normalized curriculum as taught by white settler teachers. When students use indigenized varieties of English in Saskatchewan schools it is not, for the most part, recognized as a postcolonial or anticolonial act, but rather it is still viewed as deviance from the norm, to be corrected through the application of appropriate (read white settler English) supports and interventions. In the present day it is very difficult for First Nations Others to speak and be heard. When they do, they are further positioned as the Other and still compared to the norms of the colonizers.

This analysis of the discourses of the provincial Assessments for Learning examines the power relations within those discourses and the ways in which those discourses construct the subjects of Self and Other. By articulating the assumptions and norms inherent in the assessments, there is a disruption of those unstated assumptions and a making visible of the essentially invisible norms of whiteness upon which the assumptions are based. It is also possible that by disrupting these assumptions and the norms of white settler society that the door will be opened for postcolonial Saskatchewan to resist the current dominant discourse and transform it to one where a balance of power is shifted to the previously marginalized group. A potential shift in the balance of power is a disconcerting thought for members of the white settler majority because it represents not only a sharing of power but a potential loss of power and definite loss of privilege by all members of that group. Without a First Nations and Métis student achievement gap, there is no justification for the retention of white settler domination. Without white settler privilege, the disciplinary power of achievement testing becomes refocused as white settler students are observed and compared against norms that are not stacked in their favour. It is possible that these can be the first steps to a truly postcolonial society in Saskatchewan.

## 2.6 Summary

In this chapter, I outlined the theoretical perspectives that frame the research by looking postcolonial views on language as well as Michel Foucault's views on the relationship between power and knowledge. In looking at postcolonial views on language I began with the use of language as a tool to maintain colonial power. I highlighted some insights from several prominent postcolonial theorists including Fanon, Bhabha, Spivak,

Said and Ashcroft, looking specifically at the parallels with the Saskatchewan situation. I also outlined ways in which English has been used to subjugate and control colonized people: placing hierarchical value on people based on their command of the language, instituting English-only policies to preserve power structures, and imposing white settler value systems through literature and language.

Moving to Foucault's work I outlined the shift from classic power to disciplinary power, moving away from punishment and the possession of power to discipline and using power networks to compare individuals to norms as a form of control. Specifically I looked at the roles of surveillance and normalization together through examination and how that set of power techniques pervades the education system in Saskatchewan today.

Next I focused on the use of language as a means of exercising disciplinary power. The naming of the dominant form of English as standard (or normal) English allows marginalization of all other forms of English, and, by association the speakers of those forms of English as deviant and therefore less valued than standard English and the individuals who speak it. The construction of identity as a subjugated individual follows for those who are in the marginalized groups. The traditional power structure is then governed through the education system based on English language proficiency in terms of who may access education, what levels or forms of education those individuals may access and ultimately how those individuals can then access the business and political infrastructure of the province. Finally, I looked at how language can be used to resist linguistic domination and how those acts position the previously subjugated Other in relation to the dominant majority.

In the next chapter, I will explore current and historical assessment practices and the impact of those practices on the Saskatchewan education system. In particular, I will look at criterion referenced testing, norm reference testing and standardized testing as well as the ways in which reading has been tested in Saskatchewan over the past several decades and how all of these together have worked to maintain white settler dominance across the province.

### 3. ASSESSMENT AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE SUBJECT OF READER

Throughout history various types of assessment have been used to help assessors determine whether or not desired outcomes have been achieved. The practice of using test results to make judgments about students is not new although critics of the American educational reforms of the last few decades might imply that it is. Tests have been used in various locations and situations around the world for at least 2000 years to determine which students, having met particular standards of performance and having acquired particular skills, should advance to higher levels of education; to determine which students should be rewarded for their efforts with acceptance into elite roles in society and, in some cases, to determine which teachers are to be rewarded or punished with respect to their success in teaching the students who write the tests (Madaus et al, 2009). Although the existence of assessment has remained constant, the ways in which that assessment is accomplished and how results of assessments have been evaluated and used have changed over time.

In the previous chapter I outlined the role of language in postcolonial theory and how it has been used to exercise power and marginalize colonized people. To set the context for my research around the discourses of wide scale assessments and their impact on marginalized student populations, some background around assessment practices in general and current assessment practices in Saskatchewan, is also necessary. In this chapter, I briefly examine the general history of assessment and the types of assessment in use in Saskatchewan both currently and in the recent past. I look at how popularly held beliefs about language and literacy inform our assessment practices, and how those

practices have worked and still work to accomplish inequality, including how assessment practices are used against individuals and what the consequences of that (ab)use are. Since this research deals specifically with reading and writing assessments and their impact on the construction of student identity, in the second part of the chapter I explore history of reading assessment in Saskatchewan schools and how those assessments impact the construction of the subject of reader. The construction of the subject of reader leads into my exploration of how the assessment discourses function through the techniques of surveillance, normalization, classification and exclusion to influence the construction of students as readers and writers within the power structures of white settler Saskatchewan.

### 3.1 Absolute proficiency versus normative standards in assessment

In centuries past, most assessments were criterion-referenced to determine whether students had mastered particular concepts or skills, based on the premise that all students could achieve mastery if properly taught (Madaus et al, 2009). A criterion-referenced test is used to evaluate how each student performs with respect to what is being to be measured, as opposed to being compared to what other students can or cannot do. “The goal of the criterion-referenced test is to obtain a description of the specific knowledge and skills each student can demonstrate” (Linn & Gronlund, 2000, p. 43). Stated another way, the criterion-referenced test is designed to show what students know and can do, not to get a particular distribution of results. Because of this focus on attempting to measure skills as opposed to rank-ordering students, there is no limit on the number of students who can show mastery on a criterion-referenced assessment. If all

students have successfully acquired the knowledge or skills being assessed, they can all achieve mastery. Although its roots stem from hundreds of years ago, this is not to say that criterion-referenced testing is only an historical concept. A prime example of criterion-referenced testing in Saskatchewan today is the driver's test. Success or failure is entirely dependent on whether the individual can demonstrate the requisite skills to safely and legally operate a motor vehicle and each individual's skills are compared only to the criteria on the assessment, never to how well other individuals have done on the assessment in the past.

It may seem logical that criterion-referenced tests be used to evaluate student achievement but this is not always the case. As previously stated, in the past there was a general assumption that all students could learn if properly taught. As such, the idea of all students achieving at high levels, assessed through the use of criterion-referenced tools, made sense. In some cases, such as in 17<sup>th</sup> century Ireland, the worth of the teacher was judged based on whether or not all students were successful on the assessments (Madaus et al, 2009). A shift in thinking came with the development of the Intelligence Quotient (IQ) test in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. This particular assessment and the research surrounding it was instrumental in convincing educators, politicians and the general public that perhaps not all students could achieve, even if properly taught.

In 1905, two French psychologists, Alfred Binet and Theodore Simon, developed tests to measure verbal ability, judgment, adaptation and self-criticism—tests that were later adapted for use in North America as a tool for placing students within the school systems according to scientific measures (Madaus et al, 2009). It became widely accepted

that the tests “could do more than assess what people learned: [they] could also measure their underlying mental abilities or intelligence” (Madaus et al, 2009, p. 123). Even though Binet and Simon developed their tests to identify students who needed specialized instruction and supports, the tests were quickly adopted and used to attempt to measure innate ability rather than developed ability as was originally intended. Upon its introduction in North America, researchers at Stanford University adapted the assessment for use in the general population and it became known as the Stanford-Binet assessment. The Stanford-Binet gained widespread popularity across North America as a norm-referenced assessment that could help educators identify the learning potential of students and assist them in making educational programming decisions accordingly.

Beginning in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, norm-referenced tests became common in describing student performance; a trend that continues to the present day. Norm-referenced scores show how students perform relative to a larger, normative group. Because norm-referenced testing relies on rank-ordering of students, rather than on demonstration of a particular set of skills, the opportunity for all students to succeed has been removed. In a norm-referenced test, the results are expressed in terms of where a particular student scores as compared to the overall group – in the top half or the bottom half of the group. Half of the students assessed in any group will be above the median value for the group while the other half will fall below that value. If the median score is used as the normative standard for the group it is guaranteed that large numbers of students will fail to meet that standard (Madaus et al, 2009).

The question then centers around what constitutes normal in assessments, both of achievement and of potential, and whose definition of normal is being used.

“Psychological tests, normed against a middle-class Anglo population, consistently revealed that American Indian children achieved less well than non-Native children on tests measuring intelligence and innate ability” (Deyhle & Swisher, 1997 p. 118). Deyhle and Swisher go on to point out that researchers have been questioning the validity of such standardized tests as far back as 1928 and have shown that visually based intelligence tests such as the Goodenough Draw-a-Man test give an entirely different picture of American Indian intelligence than do the more common verbal reasoning tests used in most schools.

Why weren't visually based intelligence tests then adopted for use in schools? I suggest that this is an example of normalization as a technique of power. The tests of the day and the associated wisdom around literacy and assessment had defined a set of norms around intelligence and achievement that suited the needs of the dominant white settler majority very nicely. For the most part, children of middle class white North American families scored well on these instruments and achieved accordingly at school. Those who did not were classified as deficit and excluded from the general student population; whisked away into remedial and special education classrooms where they could be further diagnosed and treated.

At the same time, members of minority populations who, on the whole performed less well on intelligence tests and reading assessments, were marginalized by the assessment process. The common wisdom had educators noting that children of these

minority groups – black, Hispanic, Native American or Métis – simply did not do as well as white children in academic areas such as reading. Even though some educators would allow that perhaps First Nations students did better in visual reasoning than verbal reasoning that did not refute the idea that middle class white children achieved better academically – why else would the use of traditional intelligence test prevail in the face of evidence to the contrary?

Lucy Calkins (1998) differentiates between standardized tests, in which the same instrument is used to test entire populations, and norm-referenced tests. Norm-referenced tests are designed to demonstrate how a student compares to other students in the population being tested. Although this may seem logical, it is important to understand how norming of an assessment occurs. A representative sample of the population is assessed with a variety of assessment items and the results are examined. The actual assessment is then constructed using those items that produce a normal curve. A normal curve, by definition, will see half of the population assessed falling below the mean and half above the mean. Over time if too many students are scoring above the mean that assessment is revised creating a new set of norms to result in a more normal distribution of scores.

Even more disturbing however, is Calkins' discussion of how norm-referenced tests are manipulated by the test designers to produce politically acceptable results. For example, she references 1994 work by Linda Darling-Hammond that indicates when early intelligence tests had women outperforming men in an era when this was socially and politically unacceptable, the tests were redesigned and re-normed until an appropriate

number of men scored in the upper ranks. Similarly, she quotes 1993 research by F. A. Hanson that shows tests being modified to ensure “appropriate” groups would have access to educational and job opportunities at points throughout American history while excluding ethnic minorities, immigrants or other subgroups of the population. The norming process as described by Calkins illustrates how, historically, normalization in assessment has been used to maintain the power of the dominant group. Taking the evidence of the (ab)use of assessment instruments and results to another level, Prendergast (2003) uses legal decisions around literacy and racial issues in the United States to support her contention that

the day a gap between Whites and racialized groups on literacy tests ceases to become apparent will be the day state and federal legislatures end their love affair with high-stakes standardized testing and look for a new and more efficient means to identify literacy as white property. (Prendergast, 2003, p. 167)

One of the interesting features of norm-referenced assessment results is that even though the number of correct answers a student has given does not change, that student’s ranking can change dramatically depending upon the normative group used to make the comparison. For example, consider the norm-referencing of scores (which is not true norm-referencing as previously explained but rather comparing a sub-group to the larger overall group) on the Saskatchewan provincial Assessments for Learning. A student may score quite well in a low-performing school division as compared to the rest of the students in that division but that same student may score much lower overall when compared to the provincial normative group. Since normative results can differ depending on the group to which the student is being compared, they are not fixed based

on test results. This becomes an issue when comparing results over time since the target keeps moving as the normative group changes.

### 3.2 Standardized testing and a need for objective data

Testing in its historical sense was based on an individualized process that saw students constructing their responses to test items in the form of written or oral responses provided to and assessed by an individual adjudicator. As testing became more popular in Western education in the early 1900s the use of the traditional essay question fell under criticism. Studies by Edward Elliot and Daniel Starch conducted in 1912 and 1913 showed that open-response, essay style item scores varied considerably depending on who scored the items.

In their study, Daniel Starch and Edward Charles Elliott showed that high school English teachers in different schools assigned widely varied percentage grades to two identical papers from students. For the first paper the scores ranged from 64 to 98, and the second from 50 to 97. Some teachers focused on elements of grammar and style, neatness, spelling, and punctuation, while others considered only how well the message of the paper was communicated. The following year Starch and Elliot repeated their study using geometry papers submitted to math teachers and found even greater variation in math grades. Scores on one of the math papers ranged from 28 to 95—a 67-point difference. While some teachers deducted points only for a wrong answer, many others took neatness, form, and spelling into consideration. (Guskey, no date, par. 7)

To counter the obvious subjectivity encountered in open-response items, test makers turned to short answer items to increase objectivity through answers that scorers could mark as simply right or wrong without any analysis as to the quality of the response. As testing grew to be more widely used after the First World War, a move to selected response or multiple choice items made it even easier to quickly score tests and

get objective results efficiently. In an attempt to ensure complete objectivity, the concept of standardized testing was introduced.

Standardized tests are designed with the goal of ensuring all aspects of testing are the same, thus eliminating advantages or disadvantages that could affect student performance on the tests. It is assumed that if all students have the same testing experience – the physical classroom, the time of day, the time of year, the same scripted instructions –there will be no environmental differences that might factor into differences in scores among students. If all such factors have been removed, the logic is that differences in scores will be entirely caused by differences in what students know and can do. But "the assumed validity of objective measurement provided by standardized tests rests upon...denial of individual differences: The tests are considered objective because they supposedly measure all individuals equally and outside of any potential extenuating circumstances" (Au, 2009, p. 40). This assumption denies the reality of students bringing their own experiences and understandings to their learning and constructing their learning within that individualized scaffolding. Rather than eliminating the effect of differences, standardized tests can often emphasize those effects. Since there is no room for interpretation of responses and no way to assess the line of thinking that has gone into the response, students' background in terms of beliefs, experiences, language and general knowledge cannot be taken into consideration when scoring the responses. Put in even stronger terms, standardized tests "may be understood as hegemonic devices that are used by dominant elites to determine who is and who is not a part of their dominant Discourse" (Au, 2009, p. 93).

Whether wide-scale assessments are criterion-referenced or norm-referenced; standardized or not, they are a significant part of the world of K-12 education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In many parts of the world, including most of the American states and many Canadian provinces, wide-scale assessments are often used to make critical decisions that affect students not only in an immediate sense but in a longer term sense as those students, their teachers and their families make choices that shape their futures. In Saskatchewan, the stakes associated with wide-scale assessments have traditionally not been particularly high, but the impact of the assessments is still felt widely among the province's population as is described in the next section.

### 3.3 Some history of reading assessment in Saskatchewan

To get a sense of how reading and writing are assessed in Saskatchewan today and how that state has come about, it is necessary to look at the general history of assessment in the province. In exploring that history, I focus on the assessment of reading as it exemplifies how assessment has been conducted in this province in the recent past. I begin by reviewing three types of wide-scale assessment that are currently in use: 1) the provincial *Assessment for Learning* program, 2) commercial standardized tests and 3) locally developed assessment programs. I then move on to looking at three types of reading assessment that have been used in Saskatchewan over the past 40 years to explore how those assessments have come to define the subject of reader in our K-12 education system: 1) the standardized norm-referenced assessments of the late 1960s and 1970s, 2) the authentic performance assessments of the 1980s and 1990s and 3) the most recent assessments of strategies being utilized in the first decade 21<sup>st</sup> century. Although each

assessment provides a slightly different construction of what it means to be a reader based on the dominant philosophy of the day around literacy, all share the same characteristics in terms of their being influenced by the social, political and economic interests of the dominant white settler majority and collectively reveal the power/knowledge networks in the discourses around reading assessment that delineate the subject of reader that in turn impact on how students are constructed by those discourses.

### *3.3.1 The Assessment for Learning program*

In Saskatchewan there has been a move in recent years to provincial testing with the stated intent of improving student learning. According to the Ministry of Education's Accountability, Assessment and Record's Branch website, the provincial *Assessment for Learning* program "is intended to... raise the level of student learning and achievement for all students" (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2010b). The website goes on to list other intentions of the program including strengthening the capacity of stakeholders to use data to inform decision making, and strengthening the reporting ability of school divisions to demonstrate accountability to the public.

The Saskatchewan *Assessment for Learning* program assesses students in the areas of reading, writing and mathematics once at the elementary level in grades 4 and 5, once at the middle level in grades 7 and 8, and once at the secondary level in grades 10 and 11. Not all students are assessed in each area at each level since the assessments are conducted every second year in each subject area. At the time of this writing, results have remained anonymous with no student-level results being recorded or reported as no

identifying information has been gathered during the assessment process. The fact that individual student results are not available (so decisions about individual students cannot be made based on *Assessment for Learning* results) means that the *Assessment for Learning* is considered a low-stakes assessment, at least from a student perspective. The current focus on accountability in the form of the Saskatchewan *Continuous Improvement Framework* makes the *Assessment for Learning* program a somewhat higher-stakes assessment from the perspective of school divisions and individual schools who are held accountable for their results by board members and members of the community.

According to the Assessment for Learning Unit's documentation, the *Assessment for Learning* tools provide criterion-referenced results, norm-referenced results and standards-based results. The documentation indicates that the assessments are criterion-referenced in that each assessment item is linked to a particular curricular objective or outcome. The results can give a sense as to the number of students who are able to correctly answer the items related to a particular objective or outcome and as such, guide teachers in areas for further investigation and future focus. The results do not, however, identify which students in a particular group have met the criteria for the outcome so the results are limited in terms of their ability to assist educators in targeting supports and interventions to the individual students who are not meeting the criteria. Since the assessments occur every second year, there is little value in comparing one set of results to the next to look for improvement in individual student achievement. Students who complete the reading assessment in grade 4 are in grade 6 at the time of the next reading assessment so are not assessed during that cycle since reading is assessed at grades 4, 7

and 10. That particular cohort of students is in grade 8 the next time reading is assessed so again are not a part of the target group of students. The next opportunity to gather information about reading with the *Assessment for Learning* in that particular cohort group is six years following the initial assessment, when the students are in grade 10. Since individual results are not tracked, there is no way to accurately identify the cohort group meaning that students who have left since the initial grade 4 assessment and those who have arrived in schools during the six year window are included in the group, potentially skewing any comparative results. This staggering of participation supports the premise that the *Assessment for Learning* program is designed to provide information to teachers that can support them in evaluating their own teaching based on the results from their school without providing sufficient specific information to make judgements about individual teachers or students.

The *Assessment for Learning* assessments are norm-referenced in that the results for individual school divisions can be compared to the results for the province and the results for an individual school can be compared to the results for the school division. This simplified form of norm-referencing involves a comparison to a larger group of students performing the same assessment in the same year. There is no on-going representative normative group of results for comparison since the assessment items are not secured and a complete set of new items are developed each time the assessment is administered. Using the school division as the normative group for the school and the province as the normative group for the school division, is an issue in that the two groups may not be particularly similar. For example, if the school being compared to the school

division is the only Hutterian school in the division, the make-up of the larger group is in no way similar to that of the smaller in terms of English language learning, cultural background or community. Similarly comparing a small rural school division's results to those of the province as a whole assumes that all students bring the same backgrounds, experiences and supports to their assessment experience.

Standards-referencing, according to the Saskatchewan *Assessment for Learning* documentation, compares student performance on the assessment to a set of standards developed by a standard-setting group. The group defines what the standards of adequacy and proficiency are for each item and section of the assessment and the results are then compared to those standards according to cut-scores that are determined through the standard-setting process. This type of referencing works well with large groups of results because it generalizes the results to identify overall trends. It is not particularly effective when applied to small groups of results since generalizations made on the basis of only a few students are not generally considered valid in either logical or statistical terms. Unfortunately, the school divisions who use the standards-referenced results often do so to report the achievement levels of individual grade groups within single schools; groups that can be as small as five students. School Community Councils, parents, board members and school division administration can be tempted to make administrative and programming decisions based on those standards-referenced results. For example, a school division may set a target that 85% of students will score at a level of Adequate or better in overall reading comprehension as defined by performance on the *Assessment for Learning*. If there are only five students in grade 4 at the school, each student represents

20% of the population. Therefore, if even one student scores below the adequate standard, the school has failed to meet the division target. Given that all students are expected to participate in the assessments, there is a great deal of pressure placed on schools who are trying to meet the needs of individual students, provide inclusionary educational situations and still work toward meeting student achievement targets.

### *3.3.2 Commercial standardized tests*

In many parts of Saskatchewan, commercially available standardized tests have been used to collect data and make decisions about students over the years. In the past, the Canadian Test of Basic Skills (CTBS) was commonly used in elementary schools to get an annual picture of student achievement and to help determine where students would be placed in the upcoming school year. The CTBS “is a Canadian revision of the widely used U.S. Iowa Test of Basic Skills” (Psychtest.com, 2010). According to the distributor, Nelson Canada, the CTBS is reliable, having been normed on over 40 000 Canadian students. The literature does not detail whether or not the test is reliable within each of the many subpopulations found across Canada.

As already identified, norming a test involves assessing a representative sample of students before it is made widely available to the public. After the test is publicly available the scores of all students who have taken the test are compared to the original normative group. The issue with normative assessments as they apply to minority populations is the size of the representation of the minority population in that representative sample. For example, the population of Canada is currently just over 33 million people. Saskatchewan accounts for approximately 1 million people or about 3%

of the population. This would mean that in the case of the 40 000 students in the normative group, only about 1200 would be Saskatchewan students. The *2009 Saskatchewan Education Indicators Report* identifies that approximately 17% of Saskatchewan students self-declare as having Aboriginal ancestry. This proportion would translate to about 206 students out of the 40 000 student sample that was assessed to norm the test. To form judgements about all First Nations and Métis students in Saskatchewan and their scores on a standardized test using the test results of only 200 students spread across multiple grades seems tenuous at best if one is interested in providing truly normative comparators.

In recent years, the *Canadian Achievement Tests* (CAT) versions 3 and 4 have been used by many school divisions in an effort to collect baseline student achievement data and to show improvement in student achievement over time. According to the makers of the assessment, the CAT-3 and CAT-4 are able to assess essential learning outcomes in mathematics, reading, language and spelling. The assessments are “modeled to fit Canadian curricula” and claim as well to track learner abilities. The CAT-4 was normed with over 60 000 students from 300 schools across Canada who participated in the norming study in 2007. “The stratified random sample included students from kindergarten through 12, from every province, from rural and urban areas and from public, private and First Nations schools, ensuring a representative Canadian sample” (Canadian Test Center, 2010).

The CAT is currently administered in several school divisions in Saskatchewan and the results are used for a variety of purposes within those school divisions including

program development, identification of students in need of supports, the development of school learning improvement goals and reporting student achievement levels to local stakeholders. In most cases, individual student results are provided and are shared with parents. Student results can be customized according to the wishes of the school division. Some of the available results that can be included on the student reports are the student's percentile rank within the class or group, the student's grade-level equivalent score, the student's percentile rank as compared to the national norm and the student's stanine score. These student-level results may also be used within the school and school division to help determine programming for individual students. Group results for classrooms and schools are also provided and are frequently used by schools and school divisions in reporting student achievement for accountability purposes either through the school's learning improvement plan or the school division's Continuous Improvement Plan. Since the results of the CAT and CTBS tests can impact decisions about an individual student's education program, they can be considered high-stakes assessments in some respects.

### *3.3.3 Local assessments*

In recent years many school divisions in Saskatchewan have adopted their own internal system-wide assessments to attempt to measure indicators of student learning in a variety of areas. This trend has come about as a result of three factors: the increased focus on student achievement and accountability through the implementation of the *Continuous Improvement Framework* in 2006; concerns about the validity of commercial standardized tests within the Saskatchewan student population; and a perceived need for student-specific data on an annual basis not provided by the *Assessment for Learning*

program. These division assessments are generally benchmark assessments, designed to take stock of student learning and growth at regular intervals in core areas of study. School division benchmark assessments may be based on commercially available assessment tools such as leveled reading assessments that are widely available, or they may be based on locally developed tools as in the case of writing assessments where school divisions develop common prompts appropriate to the students in their schools and score them according to an agreed upon common rubric. This type of assessment hovers between being standardized, in that the same tools and assessment environment are provided for each student being assessed, and being individualized in that student differences and needs can be taken into consideration both in administering the assessment as well as in scoring the assessment.

Since 2006, the requirements of the *Continuous Improvement Framework* have led school divisions to implement a variety of supports to students and teachers to improve student achievement in the areas of reading, writing and mathematics. Many of the division-specific assessments in reading and writing have been developed to evaluate the success of the programs implemented to improve student achievement in those areas. It is when talking about student achievement that learners are discursively constructed as subjects, and this construction of the subject of reader in particular, is the focus of the next part of this chapter.

### 3.4 The subject of reader

Drawing on the Foucaultian concept that subjects are defined and identity is constructed through discourse, the assessments used within the education system define

the subject of reader in a way that privileges students who are members of the dominant white settler majority and those who aspire (willingly or reluctantly) to emulate that majority. At the same time, the power techniques of surveillance, normalization, individualization and exclusion associated with assessment of reading serve to marginalize minority populations and allow the white settler majority to retain the preponderance of power. The subject of reader is defined through discourse as per Carabine (2001) who encourages “thinking of discourse as the ways that an issue or topic is ‘spoken of’” (p. 268). In the field of education we speak of literacy in general and the subject of reader in particular in many ways. Teachers have, for many years, labeled students as good readers, poor readers or even non-readers. Parents have attended countless conferences during which they have been told what kind of reader their child is or even if their child is a reader, regardless of the adjective used to describe that reader. But exactly how do we speak of reading and reading achievement and who is it that decides what makes a reader?

Carabine (2001) proposed a way of thinking of discourse that is helpful here, “as consisting of groups of related statements which cohere in some way to produce both meanings and effects in the real world” (p. 268). Foucault also saw discourses as being productive in that the discourses produce the objects of which they speak. By this logic, assessments of reading are discourses that produce the subject of reader in the context of the particular assessment as used in a particular place at a particular time with a particular student or group of students. In this way discourses “define and establish what is ‘truth’

at particular moments” (ibid, p. 268) and at the same time they may in fact invalidate other accounts by identifying the truth of the moment.

But reader as subject is not a static definition. Hannah Tavares (1996) described her inquiry around classroom management as genealogical “in that it attempts to trace lines of transformation...in the practices of management” (p. 190). Has our conception of reader changed over time and if so, how and in what context? Have the changes to assessment practices over the years in turn impacted on the development of reader as subject? For this we can turn to what is produced through the discourses around reading achievement, and ask ourselves what power outcomes or effects are resulting from those discourses?

Foucault used genealogy as a methodology to examine discourses to discover the power/knowledge networks revealed by those discourses (Carabine, 2001). Michel Foucault defined genealogy as

a form of history which can account for the constitution of knowledges, discourses, domains of objects etc., without having to make reference to a subject which is either transcendental in relation to the field of events or runs in its empty sameness throughout the course of history. (Foucault, 1977c, p. 117)

So how is the subject reader constructed through the assessments in use in Saskatchewan over the past 40 years? In the next section I begin by looking at reading assessment in the 1960s and 1970s; a medical model that uses norms and identifies deviance from those norms. I then explore the authentic or performance assessment of reading popularized in the 1980s and 1990s; a judicial model that argues the presentation of evidence and judgment based on that evidence. Finally I turn to the recent trend of

assessing reading as a set of specific observable skills and strategies and standards around those skills and strategies that collectively define a reader.

#### *3.4.1 Reader as subject of norm-referenced testing (1960s and 1970s)*

How do the techniques of power work through the norm-referenced testing of the 1960s and 1970s to produce the subject of reader? On a macro level, the technique of normalization is evident. If a particular subpopulation does not score high on the normal curve as a group, that population is classified as less able to learn, perhaps even less intelligent than groups that collectively score higher on the curve and less intelligent than the population as a whole. In Saskatchewan, it is this process that saw schools with high populations of First Nations and Métis students offer a plethora of special programs in life skills and non-academic areas to students assumed by the dominant white settler majority to be well-served by the education system if they simply exited the system with a minimal standing.

Specifically with respect to reading, it was assumed by educators that these students were not able to read or to learn from the prescribed academic texts used in other schools with white settler students. The subject of reader as applied to First Nations and Métis students by the white settler majority was characterized by an inability to read and comprehend at what the dominant group considered grade appropriate levels as evidenced by performance on norm-referenced intelligence and reading tests. In this way, the classification of a whole subpopulation was used to exclude that population from expectations held for white settler students in terms of reading and overall academic achievement. This exclusion, in turn, justified the (lack of) resources expended on

supporting First Nations and Métis students in attempts to meet the higher expectations of the majority and solidified their place at the low end of the normal curve.

Similarly on a micro level, students were excluded by classifications applied through the use of the reading assessments. Grouping of students into ability reading groups is an example of this kind of classification that saw students in highest reading groups being constructed as excellent readers, capable of accessing all kinds of academic opportunities while students in the lowest groups internalized identities as poor readers that automatically closed many doors in terms of future academic and economic choices.

#### *3.4.2 Assessing reading in the 1980s and 1990s*

As the pressures of accountability mounted in the 1980s and 1990s, concerns around the validity of standardized norm-referenced testing led to a movement towards authentic reading assessment. “One fundamental criticism of standardized tests lies primarily with concern that their context and content fail to capture ‘authentic’ uses of literacy” (Valencia, Hiebert, & Afflerbach, 1994, p. 9). The editors suggested that instead reading should be assessed in contexts that closely resemble situations in which reading abilities are actually used. This type of reading assessment is what I will refer to from this point forward as authentic reading assessment. At the individual classroom level, authentic reading assessment was not necessarily a new concept. Much of the work teachers did with informal reading inventories, student home reading logs, miscue analysis and individual work with students over time was authentic in nature. Bringing authentic assessment practices to wide-scale assessments at system and provincial levels proved to be more difficult than at the classroom level. “Large numbers of students must

be assessed effectively and efficiently and issues of validity and reliability are crucial when results are to be used to determine educational accountability” (Valencia, Hiebert, & Afflerbach, 1994, p. 193).

Assessing reading on a wide scale using authentic assessment tasks was complicated since “group discussion and writing [are] natural accompaniments to authentic acts of reading” (Valencia, Hiebert, & Afflerbach, 1994, p. 194). Additionally, authentic reading assessment needed to be sensitive to the cultural backgrounds of the students being assessed since what was authentic for one group of students was not necessarily authentic for another group of students. In Saskatchewan, we have used assessment instruments that would produce evidence of reading in authentic situations to widely measure student reading achievement. In many school divisions, this took the form of oral reading records, also known as running records, to attempt to get a picture of student reading levels. The general format of this type of reading assessment had students reading books appropriate to their own age level and interests in one-on-one situations with the assessor, usually the classroom teacher. These tests were standardized in the sense that all students would read the same levelled books and be assessed using the same type of miscue analysis and oral comprehension questions. As a result, the levels achieved by each student could be reported as could aggregate reports of average level achieved, average number of levels of growth over a period of time and so on.

The use of authentic reading assessments brings the question of what constitutes authenticity and whose authenticity is it? The idea of reading levelled books that represent the interests and experiences of students (Scholastic Canada, no date) is based

on the assumption that all of the students in the group being assessed share a relatively common set of interests and experiences. Although the act of reading an actual book might be more authentic than a contrived passage and oral questioning around comprehension might also be more authentic than multiple choice comprehension questions, the issues of content and background experience of students negate most of the benefits of the authenticity of these tasks.

Similarly, wide-scale assessments that require written responses to open-ended comprehension questions are considered authentic in nature. These assessments were based on constructive or transactive views of language. In such a view language users construct – rather than passively receive – meaning of the texts that they read and write. Their meaning construction is influenced by the entire array of factors present in the learning environment: texts, knowledge, and values they bring to learning; the intentions of authors whose texts are being read or consulted; the views of other learners (teachers and peers) in the learning environment; and the very nature of the learning environment itself. (Pearson, 1994, p.219)

The discourses around this type of assessment defined what would be considered normal reading material in terms of student interest. If students related well with the text, were able to identify and connect with the symbolism and figurative language found in the text and write in ways that connected the text with their own experiences, those students scored well on the assessment and were considered good readers.

Given that the assessments for the most part were designed by teachers, the majority of whom are members of the white settler majority as previously described, the

identification of what texts, what figurative language and what symbolism should be present generally reflected the views and experiences of that majority. Students who were not members of that majority would read the texts and perhaps connect with them in different ways than the test developers anticipated. Their responses might have included figurative and symbolic language references that were unfamiliar to the test scorers and as such missed by those scorers. This would be recorded as an absence of connecting to the text and result in lower achievement scores for these minority groups of students, and in the Saskatchewan context this means for First Nations and Métis students.

Returning to Foucault's techniques of power, it appears then that authentic assessments also served to maintain the power of the dominant group. By normalizing the experiences and language of the dominant white settler group the differing experiences and language structures of minority First Nations and Métis groups became deviant. As a result First Nations and Métis students were classified as less able to read – perhaps poor readers or lacking in literacy skills – and as such excluded from certain academic programs and services based on that classification. As well the identification of students from these racial groups as being deficient in terms of vocabulary, language or reading ability resulted in the placement of many First Nations and Métis students in modified or special education programs based on those perceived deficiencies. The subject of reader then was delineated by the race, interests and language use of the individual – those who shared the interests, experiences and linguistic characteristics of the white settler group were good readers those who did not share those interests, experiences and linguistic

characteristics were less capable readers and therefore treated accordingly in the education system.

It is of particular interest that the move to authentic assessment may have had the potential to create assessment instruments that were relevant to the experiences of students outside of the dominant majority. However processes in place to confirm the validity and reliability of wide-scale assessment tools essentially negate those gains. One of the ways in which new assessment instruments are evaluated is through comparison of their results with those of previous assessments using known testing instruments. If the results of the existing test and the new test are similar “the new test is said to correlate with pre-existing tests, meaning that the same children have scored similarly on both tests” (Calkins, Montgomery & Santman, p. 27). It is this type of practice that maintains the status quo of tests privileging the dominant white settler majority while marginalizing First Nations and Métis minority groups by design.

#### *3.4.3 Assessing reading in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*

In the opening years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, reading assessment has evolved in attempts to answer the questions: 1) what do good readers do? and 2) how do teachers assess this? As a result the literature around reading and reading assessment has begun to include lists of pre-reading behaviours, during reading behaviours and post-reading behaviours that are exhibited by good readers. The wisdom of the day indicates that teaching strategies to promote these behaviours will in result in students who exhibit these behaviours and therefore are good readers.

Sharon Murphy (1998) characterizes this form of reading assessment as a judicial model whereby evidence is produced and judgments are made on the basis of that evidence. The question becomes, what constitutes evidence of reading? In Saskatchewan, the *Assessment for Learning in Reading* program that has been in place since 2005 draws upon this body of research and uses evidence of the use of particular reading strategies along with open responses to texts (as described in the previous section around authentic assessments) to gather evidence of reading ability and achievement. Again we return to the question of the dominant white settler majority and how this type of assessment solidifies that dominance. For example, JoAnne Schudt Caldwell (2008) presents a list of “good reader behaviours” that includes “pronounce words accurately...attach meaning to words...connect what they know with the information in the text...[and] make inferences and predictions” (p. 8) among others.

The question again goes back to who decides what meanings are appropriate, what pronunciations are accurate, what information should already be known and what inferences are expected in each text presented. As was the case with the norm-referenced tests of the '60s and '70s and the authentic assessments of the '80s and '90s, the white settler majority who set the test items still hold sway over what is deemed “correct” in terms of responses. They still define the norms with respect to the definition of a reader and maintain power through the exclusion of minority groups on the basis of those norms.

Over the past forty or more years the subject of reader in the province of Saskatchewan has not changed significantly. The discourses of reading assessment and

the results of those assessments have left us with a fairly unchanging subject of reader over the years. Regardless of the type of assessment used, it appears that the power/knowledge networks that uphold white settler dominance continue unchallenged over the course of time. Through the use of power techniques such as normalization, classification, exclusion and individualization, white settler society has entrenched itself firmly as the epitome of readership. It would also appear that to be considered readers, members of aboriginal minority groups would need to strive to be assimilated into the white majority, in effect rejecting their racial identities to achieve the status of reader. If not, they run the risk of exclusion and being marginalized and oppressed.

### 3.5 Beliefs about language and literacy with respect to assessment

The type of assessment used is not the only factor that impacts on how student achievement is measured and reported and how learner identities are constructed. In this section I outline four beliefs around language and literacy that I have gleaned from the literature that are directly tied to assessment and how those beliefs maintain inequities between groups of students: 1) that some varieties of English are inherently better or worse than other varieties; 2) that a person's sense of self is developed through language; 3) that the variety of English an individual speaks is reflective of that person's character and 4) that a student who does not speak white settler English is verbally deprived. These beliefs, whether based in fact or not, have lasting impact on how white settler teachers view their students and subsequently how they teach and assess those students, ultimately affecting the judgements and decisions they make affecting those students' futures.

In the field of linguistics, it is generally accepted that no language or language variety is more developed than another; no language or language variety promotes

better or more complex thinking than any other; there is no basis for the evaluative comparison of languages or language varieties. (Sterzuk, 2008, p. 13)

Unfortunately this is not a perception held by all educators in the field. Teachers are human, with all the frailties that accompany human behaviour and as a result, students who do not speak, write or act in the ways familiar to teachers tend to be viewed as deviant from the norm. Tests and curricula, designed to provide indications to teachers of when and how to intervene with language supports support these views as well. The issue of varieties of English versus English as taught in the school system is brought up by Victoria Purcell-Gates (2002) as grounds for bias on the part of educators and a block to learning to read and write for students who do not speak the variety of English favoured by the teacher. Purcell-Gates cites the example of a student sounding out words while learning to read. If the words are sounded out using a form of English other than the one the student is familiar with, the resulting words will not sound familiar and not be recognized by the student. As a result no link is being made between oral and print language for that student, a fact that is often noted as a deficit in terms of the student's ability to learn to read. This missing linkage is clearly apparent in the levelled reading assessments used by many schools at the grade 1 and 2 levels where a large part of the assessment depends on miscue analysis where, in the teacher's judgement, the student has not read a word "correctly" in an oral reading of the assessment text.

Assessments that rely on a student's ability to speak and write are heavily impacted by the beliefs teachers have around students' English varieties. Going back to JoAnne Schudt Caldwell's (2008) list of "good reader behaviours" and to who decides what meanings are appropriate, what pronunciations are accurate, what information

should already be known and what inferences are expected in each text presented brings us to a “diagnostic” type of situation that harkens back to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century - the perceived need for speech language pathologists in schools where white settler English is not the only variety of English spoken, as well as a perceived need for primary level reading supports and interventions in those same schools which provide evidence of the prevalence of this belief in Saskatchewan.

A second belief about language and literacy that impacts on assessment of student learning is that a person’s sense of self is developed through language. “It is through language that a person negotiates a sense of self within and across different sites at different points in time, and it is through language that a person gains access to-or is denied access to-powerful social networks that give learners the opportunity to speak” (Norton Peirce, 1995, p. 13). As teachers, we see learning white settler English as being utilitarian for linguistic minority students in order for those students to succeed in provincial school systems. A logical assumption stemming from this utilitarian need for white settler English proficiency would be to expect that students who are motivated to achieve success at learning would also be motivated to acquire white settler English. Students who are acquiring what, in effect, is a second language are often labeled as unmotivated or introverted, factors that are “frequently socially constructed in inequitable relations of power, changing over time and space, and possibly coexisting in contradictory ways in a single individual” (Norton Peirce, 1995, p. 12). What we don’t necessarily acknowledge is the surreptitious way in which that instrumental motivation becomes integrative or at least is perceived as being integrative in a negative way; that

we are trying to integrate students into a white settler English culture by having them learn white settler English. That integration is then perceived by the learners and their families and communities as being a form of assimilation out of their own culture and community and into the culture and community of the dominant white settler majority.

This idea of integration brings up many power and oppression issues closely linked with colonial practices as I discussed in chapter 2. John Ogbu (1992) describes two ways of characterizing cultural differences between minority students and the dominant population. He differentiates between primary and secondary cultural differences that exist between the minority culture and the dominant culture. In the case of students from *voluntary minorities*, those who have chosen to come to a white settler culture from another culture through voluntary immigration, for example, the differences between the cultures existed prior to the meeting of the two cultures. Ogbu suggests that the pre-existence of cultural differences allows voluntary minority students to overcome those differences and therefore perform well at school. In the case of *involuntary minorities*, people who have been brought into a society against their will, as is the case with First Nations people in white settler societies in Canada, the cultural differences are characterized by Ogbu as being secondary cultural differences.

Secondary cultural differences are differences that arose after two populations came into contact or after members of a given population began to participate in an institution controlled by members of another population, such as the schools controlled by the dominant group. Thus, secondary cultural differences develop as a response to a contact situation, especially one involving the domination of one group by another. (Ogbu, 1992, p. 359)

Although the cultural differences between minority and majority groups may pose essentially the same initial challenges to achieving what is perceived as success in school

as represented by high levels of achievement and successful school completion, Ogbu believes there is substantive difference in how readily these barriers can be overcome (if they can be overcome at all) based on the origin of the differences as primary or secondary in nature. With respect to achieving success in school as defined by the dominant group, the motivation for overcoming primary cultural differences that may act as barriers to that success is rooted in the belief that achieving success in school paves the way to a successful future within the dominant society. When students are faced with the same barriers due to secondary cultural differences, the motivation to overcome those differences is absent because the differences still occur and act as barriers to minority students retaining their minority culture while participating fully in the dominant society (Ogbu, 1992). It can be argued that resistance to assimilation into the dominant society, what Fanon calls becoming white, is at the heart of the issue.

In many cases, First Nations and Métis students and their families “do not seem to be able or willing to separate attitudes and behaviors that result in academic success from those that may result in linear acculturation or replacement of their cultural identity”(Ogbu, 1992, p. 361). My observation of the evidence of secondary cultural differences between First Nations culture and white settler culture has been gathered during my own experiences meeting and dialoguing with First Nations education councillors, directors of education and education portfolio holders through my various roles with school divisions and with the Ministry of Education. Inevitably such conversations revisit the negative aspects of residential schooling, loss of language and cultural assimilation into white schools.

The idea of using education to replace cultural identity is historically accurate, at least in Saskatchewan, as evidenced by a 1918 report on the Saskatchewan Education system. In that report Dr. H. W. Foght acknowledges the diversity of the population (but does not include aboriginal peoples in his survey) and what he perceives as a primary goal of education as he goes about making recommendations for the future of education in this province:

To evolve a school system without full consideration of all the divergent elements in the population would be a gross mistake, and would ultimately work as great a hardship on the alien immigrant as it would at first on the native Canadian. The alien, must be understood, first of all. His own inheritance from his mother country must be given full evaluation. Patiently, sympathetically, but firmly, he must be led - and by teachers of highest Canadian ideals, who have special fitness and training for this problem. With the right type of schools established in the heart of the non-English communities - faithfully served - the assimilation process cannot long be delayed. (Foght, 1918)

It is interesting to note Foght's use of the term "native Canadian". In our current world, this terminology, although perhaps not preferred, would invoke the connotation of First Nations individuals. Instead Foght uses it to reference the Anglo-Saxon white settler population, perpetuating the myth of peaceful settlement by colonizers of a previously uninhabited land. His commentary on education does not truly aspire to so-called Canadian ideals, but rather to the white settler Western European values embraced by a dominant population trying to recreate the motherland on foreign soil (Razack, 2002). In his report Foght references some of the issues inherent in the education system of the day, namely "the courses of study in elementary and secondary schools do not, in all respects, meet the demands of a democratic people occupied with the conquest of a great agricultural country" and "the system of examinations in use is a questionable norm of

the average pupil's scholarship, ability, maturity and fitness for advancement” (Foght, 1918). These statements, taken in the context of Saskatchewan in 1918, describe the white settler society of the day, and the values of the white settler society described by Foght are still represented today in what we choose to assess in Saskatchewan – reading that privileges print-based knowledge sharing and writing in so-called standard English. This does not mean that reading and writing are solely white practices. The reading and writing described in Saskatchewan curriculum, taught in Saskatchewan schools and assessed through the *Assessment for Learning* program is, however, tied to the norm of white settler English as the privileged form of English to which all others are compared.

What is and is not present in any assessment tool goes a long way towards a student's perception of what is and is not valued in the society at large. What we choose to test and not to test defines the relative value of those areas. In Saskatchewan, one could say we value mathematics, reading and writing because we test them. We also appear to value, at least to some degree, knowledge of treaties and their history because we test that at the grade 7 level. Conversely, we do not appear to value history, the arts or languages such as French, Cree or German because we do not test those in a formal way across the province. Tests also “define what an educated person should know, understand, and be able to do, and therefore what should be taught and learned” (Madaus et al, 2009, p.100). In Saskatchewan that “educated person” is decidedly white settler in nature based on what we choose to test.

A third belief about language and literacy relates again to variations within spoken English. There is an inherent judgment in the way we describe English varieties

and the underlying theme of that judgment is that the variant speakers are speaking English “wrong”. It is interesting to note that, outside of dictionaries, there is no such thing as pure English. As Wolfram (2000) says, “it is impossible to speak English without speaking some dialect of the language” (p. 226), noting that everyone has his or her own nuances of language use. Still, we are quick to judge intelligence, reasoning skill and even character based on hearing a few words. If the white settler majority in the school makes a student feel inferior by reacting in a particular way to that student’s variety of English, the ramifications in terms of that child’s willingness to risk speaking and writing, as well as that child’s confidence in his or her ability to be a competent learner in that setting are all serious. When the students who are made to feel inferior based on the variety of English they use are all First Nations or Métis students, the issue also reinforces the connection of race to those feelings of inferiority while reinforcing the connection of whiteness to superiority felt by white settler students. These reactions to varieties of English other than white settler English are often difficult to recognize since honest attempts have been made at the classroom, school, school division and provincial levels to develop curricular resources and assessment tools that honour the diversity students bring to the classroom; the previously discussed authentic reading assessments used in school divisions across the province are a prime example of this.

Fourthly, the idea of verbal deprivation, has long been a contributor to widely held belief in a deficit theory of development for children coming to school from homes where a different variety of English is spoken. The commonly held belief as identified by Labov (1969) and Houston (1970) among others, is that minority children come to school

with a verbal deficit that results from a combination of not enough verbal stimulation in the home and the use of varieties of English that prevents children and their families from expressing complex or logical thinking. The effect of this deprivation then, is poor academic performance as evidenced when children are assessed in the school environment (Tizard, Hughes, Carmichael & Pinkerton, 1983). Labov gives specific reasons why the myth of verbal deprivation is not only false, but dangerous to a child's academic success. He points out a concern with the relationship between how individuals form understanding of concepts on one hand and how the individual's language variety differs from that of the majority group on the other.

This idea countering the myth of verbal deprivation has been brought forward by several other authors, many of whom likely take their lead from this early work of Labov's. Essentially Labov

locates the problem not in the children, but in the relations between them and the school system. This position holds that inner-city children do not necessarily have inferior mothers, language, or experience, but that the language, family style, and ways of living of inner-city children are significantly different from the standard culture of the classroom, and that this difference is not always properly understood by teachers and psychologists. (Labov, 1972a, par. 2)

Labov's description of the situation references black American children in inner-city situations but applies equally to First Nations students in Saskatchewan. To paraphrase Labov, the relationship between the language, family style and ways of living of First Nations children living in First Nations communities are significantly different from the white settler culture of the classroom and that difference is not understood by teachers.

Nonetheless, the fact remains that many educators in Saskatchewan today are frequently quick to judge a student's level of conceptual understanding and logical

reasoning skill based on that student's linguistic skills in white settler English or on that student's perceived lack of linguistic skills based solely on the student's race. This judging is often disguised in the denigration of federal schools as being inadequate in comparison to provincial schools for the early years of children's education or in concerns over the lack of parenting experienced by children before they come to school. Although the federal schools are a different twist unique to First Nations populations, the parenting question has been raised in the past in other minority populations and proven false.

In my opinion, these four broad beliefs around language and literacy as outlined here impact the way students are assessed and, perhaps more importantly, how the results of those assessments are used to guide teaching and learning in schools across the province. When assessment results are reported in the context of these four beliefs around language and literacy, it supports the gap terminology used by Premier Wall and reinforces commonly held white settler assumptions about First Nations and Métis students and their academic abilities. This apparent gap in turn helps the dominant group justify retaining its hold on power within the education system as discussed in Chapter 2 and perpetuates abuses of assessments and assessment results as outlined in the next section of this chapter.

### 3.6 Assessment used against minority groups

The idea of measuring or looking for reliable indicators of student achievement and making opportunities available to individuals based on achievement seems very fair on the surface. "As far back as 200 BC, the Chinese used high-stakes tests to help

eliminate patronage and open access to the civil service” (Madaus et al, 2009, p. 13).

Because there is a perception that assessments, especially standardized assessments, look at all students in the same way, the results are assumed to be objective. In turn, “an ideology of equality ultimately masks the aspects of standardization, commodification, control, and surveillance operating through systems of high-stakes, standardized testing” (Au, 2009, p. 45).

If we dig a bit deeper, we see that these perceptions actually result in the perpetuation of discriminatory practices that have been in place in North American education systems for many decades. “The idea that standardized tests neutrally and objectively measure students, masks the economic, historical, and social factors that contribute to test design and test result interpretation” (Au, 2009, p. 43). In a recent analysis, the American National Assessment of Educational Performance (NAEP) reading test scores were looked at in conjunction with factors of home support that are thought to influence student achievement. The analysis showed that approximately two-thirds of the differences in test scores between students who had high levels of home support such as two-parent families, daily time spent reading with parents, lower amounts of time spent watching television and low school absentee rates; and students who had low levels of home support (Madaus et al, 2009). In many cases the tests themselves perpetuate these differences. These concepts of home support are closely tied to the ideal of home associated with white settler societies as opposed to the variety of home situations that might be more common in other cultures. This propensity to idealize the nuclear family and the white settler home and community also affects test items

themselves. In many cases questions are based on assumptions that revolve around a two-parent nuclear family and as a result, the correct responses incorporate those assumptions. For example, a math question that asks about how much food needs to be purchased at what cost to feed a family doesn't always delineate what *family* means and when a student responds with quantities that reflect large extended families as are common in some cultures, the answers are scored as incorrect because the student doesn't feel the need to define family for the scorer any more than the item creator felt the need to define family for the student.

Bachman (2002) identifies that test item difficulty is directly related to the interaction between the test-taker and the task. If the individual taking the test shares the background knowledge that the item creator intended the test-taker to access in responding to the question, the item difficulty remains where the test constructor intended it to be. If however, the test-taker accesses significantly different background knowledge in attempting to respond to the assessment question, the level of difficulty of that particular item can be greatly increased for that individual. The American National Research Council (2004) suggests that test creators and those using test results should pay specific attention to the interaction between the assessment items and the background knowledge of those being assessed, rather than simply looking at the characteristics of the items themselves in isolation. This Research Council suggestion is a practice that, although recommended, is often difficult to do and therefore the standardized assessments that students engage in are not standard at all, but rather perpetuate inequalities among distinct groups based on how closely the students' own lives match

those of the white settler test makers. Two specific ways in which assessments and their results are used against individuals are through 1) the perpetuation of racial achievement gaps and 2) the sorting of students according to results under the pretence of scientific objectivity.

Wayne Au (2009) suggests that inequalities that exist in a broader sense outside of school in society at large are reproduced within schools and particularly reinforced through assessment practices and the subsequent use of the results of those assessments. In Au's view, tests help maintain social, economic and educational inequalities while allowing policy makers and educational authorities to treat learners as products and in turn regulate educational production. While perhaps not an intentional process, there is some validity to Au's claims in looking at wide-scale assessment in Saskatchewan. One way in which inequalities are maintained is through the perpetuation of racial achievement gaps. Learner identities are formed discursively through the assessment tools and associated teaching and learning resources used in classrooms. If multicultural content is not a significant part of the assessment being used, it is not seen as being important and does not figure prominently in the teaching and learning that is being assessed. "If the cultures and experiences of children and their communities are not named, not included in the standards or the tests, then they are not deemed relevant to learning" (Au, 2009, p. 99). In Saskatchewan, there is an effort made to include culturally relevant content for First Nations and Métis students in the *Assessment for Learning* instruments but at the same time, other assessments such as CAT-4 tests as well as commercial assessments used at the school or school division level do not share this

focus. As well, students from other minority groups such as Hutterian students and new Canadians do not see their cultures and experiences represented in the assessment tools being used across the province.

A second way in which inequalities are maintained is through sorting students under the pretence of scientific objectivity. In many cases we establish a set of standards either at the school division or provincial level, and then use those standards to categorize and compare groups of students. Hanson (2000) maintains that, “the individual in contemporary society is not so much described by tests as constructed by them” (p. 68). When individuals are categorized into levels of adequacy or proficiency or they are identified as being below adequate and in need of interventions and supports there are binaries created that in turn shape the way individuals and groups of students are treated throughout the formal education process.

Part of the issue with the whole categorization process is the way in which the categories are decided. On the academic instructional side, categories are frequently decided through the use of cut-scores. This process, having a basis in scientific practice through its recognition as being statistically valid, sees educators arbitrarily identifying a threshold to determine whether or not students have acquired a particular skill or understanding.

Skills, knowledge, and competencies are continuous in nature. We cannot simply draw a line in the sand and say that people on one side possess a skill, knowledge or competency while those on the other side do not. Yet, a cut-score attempts to do just that--a single point on a test score continuum is used to classify a student's level of attainment. (Madaus et al, 2009, p. 83)

The issue that becomes problematic is that, although the use of cut-scores to identify achievement from non-achievement is objective in and of itself, the processes used to obtain the cut-scores are often based on subjective factors and norm-referenced decisions (Madaus et al, 2009).

The use of standards and cut-scores also disadvantage students as individuals. There is always a potential, when using cut-scores to classify students according to standards, that there will be false positives and false negatives. For example, a student who doesn't truly know or understand the material could, on any given day, make a lucky guess or a misinformed judgement on enough selected response items to push that student into the category of having achieved the standard. Similarly another student, through technical error or carelessness could be falsely categorized as not having achieved a standard that she did achieve. "The presentation of an item or its directions can cause some examinees to get the item wrong even though they have the necessary knowledge, skill, or ability, while other students without the knowledge, skill, or ability get it right" (Madaus et al, 2009, p. 68). These misclassifications tend to balance out when looking at large groups of students – across a school division or a province – but when looking at smaller groups of students there is danger of inaccuracies skewing the data and any conclusions drawn from that data.

Both Lipman (2004) and Smith (2004) point out that those in power, be it at the government or school division level, are the individuals who determine the categories and set the boundaries of pass/fail, good/bad, meeting/not meeting the standard, or functional/dysfunctional in terms of learning. In Saskatchewan, those categories are

determined by members of the majority white settler group – the teaching population and related governing bodies for the most part made up of white, middle class individuals with traditional western education and experiences. As a result those boundaries privilege students who share the characteristics of the majority group. Delpit (1988) references this phenomenon as being a part of what she calls the culture of power that exists within education systems. It is this culture of power, enacted within classrooms and being accessible to those who know the rules of the culture that works, often invisibly, to maintain inequality through assessment.

The consequences of the (ab)use of assessment in Saskatchewan schools and school divisions as well as in the province as a whole are widespread. Whether intentional or not, the use of standardized tests and wide-scale assessments have institutionalized the achievement gaps identified between groups within the province. Rather than identifying actual differences in achievement among students, the perpetuation of long-standing practices around test construction, administration and scoring have helped to reinforce the norms that are already in place and to underline achievement gaps that may not be entirely related to student learning. In well-intentioned but perhaps misdirected attempts to resolve the issue of achievement gaps, resources are poured into addressing a problem that may, in fact, only be a symptom.

Too often, we have allowed a performance outcome (i.e. Differences in aggregate test score performance between groups) to be treated as though it were the problem to be solved instead of focusing on the deeper issue of the quality of teaching and learning processes and practices. (Murrell, 2007, p. 5)

It is this focus on test scores among groups that takes away from some of the underlying issues that affect the quality of teaching and learning. Rather than looking at

teacher preparation, cultural awareness and the resources being used within the classroom we tend to focus on the instruments themselves. A focus on the instruments results in disconnection between the assessment instruments and the teaching and learning that goes on day to day. Assessments are tools to get a sense of and attempt to measure student achievement; they should not be considered tools to reform education or to change teaching practice.

Given the history of assessment and the types of assessment used in North America in general and in Saskatchewan in particular, it is reasonable to conclude that long-standing beliefs around language, literacy and assessment contribute to the subjugation of First Nations and Métis students. It is also reasonable to conclude that the impact of that subjugation has played and continues to play an integral role in perpetuating inequalities in our society both within schools and in the broader society outside of schools. Until these issues are addressed head on, students from minority backgrounds will face discrimination through the ways in which we assess, report on and act on student achievement results.

### 3.7 Summary

In this chapter I reviewed some of the history of assessment and focused on the various types of assessment used over time in wide-scale assessment situations. As well I looked at different ways of looking at results: norm referencing, criterion referencing and standards referencing. To complete the background discussion, standardized assessment was explored. With the background in place I moved to the history of assessment in Saskatchewan as it relates to reading. Norm-referenced standardized testing was used in

the 1960s and 1970s, but in the 1980s and through the 1990s students were assessed using authentic reading assessments which more closely resembled real-life reading situations. In the first part of the current century, students have been assessed using a set of indicators that would identify good reader behaviour and thus high reading achievement. All of these together were examined for their effects on students' construction of their identities as readers.

Four beliefs about language and literacy and how they relate to assessment were outlined: the belief that one language or form of language is superior to another, the belief that an individual's sense of self is developed through language, the belief that speaking and writing English differently from the dominant majority means the individual is "wrong", and the belief that speaking a variant form of English means that an individual is deficient in a linguistic sense.

Finally I looked at how assessment is used against minority groups even though the stated intentions of assessment may be just the opposite. The ways in which assessment techniques and tools perpetuate discriminatory practices, the differences in test item difficulty for students from differing backgrounds, the use of assessment to indicate what is valued within education systems and society, the issues around the perceived scientific objectivity of assessment results, and the way in which assessment items are created and approved are all described.

In the next chapter I will outline the research questions that underpin this study and how discourse analysis is used to address those questions and explore the power relations within the discourses of the Saskatchewan *Assessment for Learning* tools.

## 4. METHODOLOGY

In the second chapter, language as a tool of power in postcolonial theory was explored, as well as the role of language in resisting marginalization. In the third chapter, a brief overview of assessment history was provided and then specifics around the assessment of reading in Saskatchewan over the past 40 years were identified. In that section, the construction of the subject of reader was explored. The subject of reader is closely linked to construction of student identities as readers and as learners. In this chapter language, postcolonial theory and assessment are brought together with discourse analysis to describe the methodology used to answer the three research questions on which this study is based.

### 4.1 Research questions

In looking at the reading and writing achievement levels of cultural and linguistic minorities, in particular First Nations and Métis students, as measured by wide-scale assessments, three specific research questions come to mind:

- 1) What are the discourses of wide-scale provincial assessments that are made available for colonial knowledge production and power relations?
- 2) Whose interests are served by the discourses of wide-scale provincial assessments, and whose interests are marginalized?
- 3) How can we trouble and counter the discourses of wide-scale assessments that marginalize minority students?

These questions are asked with the goal of examining how the discourses of wide scale assessments in reading and writing construct disadvantages for First Nations and Métis students and simultaneously construct advantages for white settler students. Using the 2005, 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010 Saskatchewan *Assessment for Learning* instruments

in reading and writing as a source of data, my intent was to determine ways in which wide-scale assessment instruments and associated scoring tools might be altered to better serve the needs of minority students without doing a disservice to other students being assessed with the same instruments. Initially it was the test items that were of interest to me – the reading passages, the associated comprehension questions and the open response items. In identifying the assumptions being made about the knowledge and experiences being brought to the assessment by the students being assessed I realized that the scoring of the assessments is equally of interest. The language of the scoring guides and exemplars was also studied with respect to assumptions being made around the knowledge and experience of the students as well as with respect to the assumptions being made around the form of written English that is generally exhibited in favourable responses. I have chosen to use discourse analysis to explore these research questions. To situate this decision in the context of its applicability to this study, some background about discourse analysis is provided in the next sections of this chapter.

#### 4.2 Discourse analysis

Over the past 50 years scholars have worked to understand the relationship between language and the construction of reality. Accepting the poststructuralist argument that reality is constituted and constructed in language, it follows that understanding reality can be accomplished in part through the deconstruction of the language that created it. This deconstruction of language, termed *discourse analysis*, has been used to describe the study of written, spoken and signed language. In these three sub-sections, I examine the evolution of the term *discourse analysis* as descriptive of a

set of methodological approaches to research. First, I concentrate on the various definitions of discourse analysis currently in use in the research community. The next section relates to the use of discourse analysis as a research tool and then moves to the history of discourse analysis as it has evolved in several disciplines over the past half century as well as how that evolution specifically applies to this study. In the third part of this chapter, I focus on specific approaches to discourse analysis I have chosen to use in this research: critical discourse analysis and Foucaultian discourse analysis as described by Michel Foucault. The discussion of these two approaches highlights their respective characteristics, the similarities and differences between them, and how each approach has been utilized in this research.

#### *4.2.1 Definition of discourse analysis*

Discourse analysis does not lend itself to a single concise definition easily stated, nor is there a definition agreed to globally by researchers (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). In simplest terms, discourse analysis refers to the study of language: whether written, spoken or signed. Discourse analysis is specifically concerned with language as a social phenomenon that can be exhibited through spoken word, text or other forms of communication (Miller & Brewer, 2003). Discourse analysis is more, however, than simply looking at the construction of elements of communication. It involves working with units of language – units of meaning, sense and idea – rather than structural units such as sentences. The systems of statements that make up the units of meaning and idea can be analyzed from a post-structural perspective as “bearers of their rules of formation,

i.e., the rules that made the statements possible and that simultaneously already reside in the (system of preceding) statements” (Diaz-Bone et al, 2007, par. 6).

Penny Powers (2007) describes discourse analysis as a “relatively recent approach to the examination of systematic bodies of knowledge arising from the traditions of critical social theory and linguistic analysis” (p. 18). Because discourse analysis focuses on how power is manifested in social relations, it differs from other research traditions such as ethnomethodology or semiotics (Powers, 2007). Elaborating on the link between social theory and linguistics, Franklin (2005) describes language and society as being in dialogue together, with language both reflecting reality by describing the way things are, and simultaneously constructing that reality to be a certain way. The dialogue Franklin refers to between language and society amounts to what is known as *discursive practice*—“ways of being in the world that signify specific and recognizable social identities” (McGregor, 2003, par. 8).

Discursive practice can be described as referring to the “rules, norms, and mental models of socially acceptable behaviour” (McGregor, 2003, par. 8) that we use as we communicate within our roles and relationships. These rules, norms and models determine the way we produce messages and govern how we receive and interpret the messages produced by others. We say these discursive practices are productive because “they produce the specific semantics of the words in use, and they relate words to objects and to strategies of acting towards and thinking about things” (Diaz-Bone et al, 2007, par. 7); what Franklin (2005) called *construing* or *constructing* reality. This poststructuralist perspective on the role of language and subsequently, on the role of discourse as

constructive of a particular reality, is at the heart of why discourse analysis is well-suited to this research into the discourses of wide-scale assessments and the impact of those discourses on students.

One significant characteristic of discourse analysis is that “discourse analysis assumes that the resources and strategies...used in producing discourse events and texts are characteristics of a community, rather than unique to an event in that community” (Lemke, 1998, par. 36). In keeping with this idea of discourse and events being characteristic of a community, it follows that discourse analysis provides insight into bodies of knowledge in their specific community contexts. In particular, these insights can help interpret the “effects of a discourse on groups of people, without claims of generalizability to other contexts” (Powers, 2007, p. 18). As I explored the discourses of wide scale assessments I looked closely at which community’s characteristics dominated the production of those discourses and how those contexts potentially impacted other communities in return.

Powers (2007) points out that, in particular, discourse analysis “emphasizes analysis of the power inherent in social relations” (p. 18). Power analysis is a key aspect of discourse analysis since discourse always involves power and ideologies (McGregor, 2003; Powers, 2007). Discourse is always connected to history as well, since interpretations of discourse depend on the historical context in which the discourse is constructed. The same discourse can be analysed and interpreted differently depending upon the analyst’s experiences, knowledge and the position of power that individual holds. Because of this, there is no single correct analysis of a given discourse although “a

more or less plausible or adequate interpretation is likely” (McGregor, 2003, par. 9). It is important to recognize that, if discourse has a role in the production of social reality, particularly the distribution of power within that social reality, then discourse also “must play a part in producing and reproducing social inequalities” (Franklin et al, 2005, par. 2).

#### *4.2.2 Purpose of discourse analysis*

Knowing, in general terms, what is meant by discourse analysis as a research methodology, leads to the question of the purpose of discourse analysis. There is general consensus across disciplines that, unlike many other research methodologies, the goal of discourse analysis is not to provide specific solutions to problems or tangible answers to questions. Instead, discourse analysis prompts us to become aware of power relations within specific situations and of our own motivations as well as the motivations of those around us with respect to those situations. In becoming aware of power relations and motivations within any given situation we “ask ontological and epistemological questions” (Palmquist, 2001, par. 1) that in turn may lead to development of solutions to specific problems or questions that are being asked. By asking questions about power relations and motivations within situations through discourse analysis, it is possible to trouble and disrupt those discourses as problems are explored and solutions are sought.

Discourse analysis of the discourses of education systems allow us to see quite precisely what is being mandated, what is being taught and how the power relations are played out within the context of a particular educational system (Lemke, 1998). This can serve to maintain the balance of power in favour of the dominant group since “one of the central aspects of dominant discourse is its power to interpret conditions, issues, and

events in favour of the elite” (McGregor, 2003, par. 4). Discourse analysis of the discourses of education systems can also serve to disrupt the balance of power by bringing into clear view the unspoken assumptions that have been normalized through those particular discourses.

One reason for engaging in discourse analysis is to challenge ourselves to look at language as being more than something abstract; to recognize that our words have meaning “in a particular historical, social, and political condition” (McGregor, 2003, par. 3). Judith Butler (1993) talks about the performativity of language and how, through repetition, discourse has the power to actually produce the phenomena that it is regulating. Discourse analysis can give us access to the ontological and epistemological assumptions behind a given discourse and as a result we are able to put meaning, in our own contextual understanding, to how different actors and institutions work together performatively to produce the complex power relations in which a dominant interpretation of reality is established (Diaz-Bone et al, 2007; Palmquist, 2001).

#### *4.2.3 History of discourse analysis*

Although there are some common elements among the various schools of thought around discourse analysis, the field has not grown from a single common set of foundations. The tradition of hermeneutics was an early precursor to discourse analysis but it has only been in the past 50 years that discourse analysis has come into its own as a research methodology (Kaplan & Grabe, 1992). In recent years, from the 1970s until the present, many disciplines have contributed to the field of discourse analysis. Rhetoric, philosophy, literary criticism and semiotics have all added to the diversity of discourse

analysis as a research methodology. Hermeneutics brings some fundamental concepts to discourse analysis. The hermeneutical rejection of a singular truth to which facts of research will correspond is a foundational element of discourse analysis. The construction of the subject and object of discourse also has its roots in hermeneutics (Heywood & Stronach, 2005; Usher, 1996). Discourse analysis embraces the idea that interpretation always takes place backgrounded by assumptions, beliefs and local norms that are invisible to the subjects and applies it to the analysis of the texts which are also underpinned by the same sorts of assumptions, beliefs and local norms. Specifically, in the case of wide scale assessment, the diversity of the provincial population ensures a diversity of assumptions, beliefs and local norms particular to each of the individual rural, urban, northern, southern, Hutterian, First Nations, Métis, and new Canadian communities found across the province. This diversity cannot help but colour how students from each of these communities interpret the texts of the assessments. These are broad concepts however, and they are refined by the influences of other disciplines as they take shape within the field of discourse analysis.

Rhetoric, a field of study that has existed for centuries, is essentially a study of how arguments are constructed and how discourse is used to make those arguments. Since the time of Aristotle scholars have studied rhetoric and used their findings to structure their own arguments in such a way as to appeal to and win over their various audiences (Wheeler, 2010). This understanding of the way in which discourse can be designed to build from commonly held yet unstated (and often unrecognized) assumptions is a result of understanding the power relations inherent in the arguments

being made and the individuals to whom they are directed. Discourse analysis deconstructs these arguments to expose the carefully constructed rhetoric that built them and thus brings to light how power relations are embedded in and perpetuated through the discourse itself. The rhetoric behind the discourses of wide scale assessments in Saskatchewan demonstrates the power dominance of the white settler majority in the province.

Similarly, semiotics brings the study of making meaning from signs to discourse analysis. If we accept that discourse involves not only the written and spoken word but indeed extends to all forms of communication, signification has a role to play in discourse analysis. The common poststructural theme of denial of neutrality is found again in the semiotic influence on discourse analysis. “That which is represented in the sign, or in sign-complexes, realizes the interests, the perspectives, the positions and values of those who make signs” (Kress & Mavers, 2005, p. 173). As well, the analysis of power relations so prevalent in discourse analysis is a key feature of social semiotics. The sign “must necessarily fit into the structures of power which characterize situations of communication” (Kress & Mavers, 2005, p. 173).

The field of literary criticism, where discourse analysis is frequently employed, has also had a role in shaping this methodology. Although literary criticism has existed as long as there has been literature to critique, the developments in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century seem to run parallel to the development of discourse analysis. The growing attention paid by critics to women’s literature, minority literature and cultural studies has brought to the forefront the idea of how the discourses in literature both reflect and define

the world of the reader and of the writer. In the vein of literacy criticism the discourses of wide scale assessment can be examined from both a postcolonial perspective and an anticolonial perspective, looking in particular at how they construct a self/other binary in the process of constructing student reality and identity.

Finally, philosophy has been influential in the development of discourse analysis as a research methodology. Based on the idea of reality being constructed by events and actions in the time and space context of those involved in the events and actions, discourse analysis is decidedly poststructural in nature. In particular, ethnography has influenced the growth of discourse analysis in that ethnographers emphasize the idea of people as the makers of meaning. There is a focus in ethnography on understanding the cultural worlds people construct in order to understand how they interpret meaning within that context (Goldbart & Hustler, 2005). Similarly, discourse analysis requires the analyst to understand the cultural and historical context of the discourse in order to understand how its meaning is interpreted in that context. Again, with the diversity of community culture found across Saskatchewan, this has far-reaching impact in terms of the interpretation of assessment items and responses to those items.

#### 4.3 Types of discourse analysis

There are several types of discourse analysis that are discussed in the literature and a brief overview of the various types is provided here to help explain why I have chosen a combination of critical discourse analysis and discourse analysis as described by Michel Foucault as the methodology for this research. Miller and Brewer (2003) identify five separate types of discourse analysis as being relevant to the study of social behaviour

which, in turn, is relevant to this research. Of these, several deal specifically with spoken language, the first being what Erving Goffman (1981) referred to as “forms of talk”. Forms of talk are the discourses unique to particular situations such as a teacher in a classroom, a lawyer in a courtroom or a broadcaster on the radio. The second type of discourse analysis identified by Miller and Brewer is the ethnography of communication which looks at the flow of information within communication and in particular, the communication patterns of a group. The analysis is primarily focused on verbal communication but includes nonverbal communication, as well as the use of silence, as ways of passing information. The third type of analysis is conversation analysis, dealing with how conversations are structured, including how turn-taking works within the conversation. The last two types of discourse analysis identified by Miller and Brewer (2003) deal with text along with spoken discourse. The first of these is analysis of accounts which includes looking at word choice and the order of words used in descriptions. The final type of discourse analysis identified is critical discourse analysis which is the topic of the next part of this chapter.

#### *4.3.1 Critical discourse analysis*

Linda J. Graham, in a 2005 presentation to the Australian Association for Research in Education Annual Conference, further delineated the area of critical discourse analysis identified by Miller and Brewer. In trying to find a “methodological plan...[for] doing a form of poststructural discourse analysis that is informed by and consistent with the work of Michel Foucault,” (p. 2) Graham distinguishes “between Critical Discourse Analysis which draws inferences from structural and linguistic features

in texts and discourse analysis informed by the work of Foucault” (p. 3). In her 2005 paper Graham describes critical discourse analysis as an approach that focuses on features of text, both structural and linguistic, and the relationship of those textual features to other social processes. Relating features of text to social processes allows the researcher to analyse texts, particularly policy texts, to examine the way the language of the text works in power relations (p. 3). Critical discourse analysis is structuralist in that it relies heavily on the structures of the discourse itself and the relationships between the linguistic units within a particular linguistic environment however I believe it has a place in this research in light of the focus it places on how text works in power relations. Foucaultian discourse analysis, on the other hand, is poststructural in nature, seeking to avoid substitution of one version of truth for another and as a result is often viewed as being less rigorous than critical discourse analysis (Graham, 2005). Still, “the Foucauldian discourse analyst certainly shares the Critical Discourse Analyst’s concern as to the ‘relationship of language to other social processes, and of how language *works* within power relations’ (Taylor, 2004: 436)” (Graham, 2005 p. 4). Both forms of analysis concern themselves with power relations however, and it is this connection that brings them together in this research into the construction of students’ achievement realities and identities in Saskatchewan.

In his work in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century Mikhail Bakhtin emphasized the *dialogicality* of language. Bakhtin saw linguistic meaning as occurring neither in the reality surrounding the speaker nor in the system of language being used. Rather “a specific utterance should be understood as always responsive, in the broadest sense, each element

of it being spoken...under the influence of the speaker's...previous experiences of the words themselves and the discourses in which they are embedded" (Gillen & Petersen, 2005, p. 147). This dialogicality implies that each discourse is in dialogue with other discourses and through the process of that dialogue, the conceptualization of the reality surrounding those discourses is continually being redefined by and for the individuals experiencing it (Marková, 2003).

Bakhtin's concept of dialogicality is similar to the idea that discourse is dialectically related to other social practices. Fairclough (2001) notes that "discourse internalises and is internalised by other elements [of social practice] without the different elements being reducible to each other" (p. 3). Fairclough also references the idea that knowledge is generated and circulated through discourse. If this is the case, then our knowledge-driven society is, in fact, a discourse-driven society and those discourses are continually changing in dialogue with one another and in relation to other social practices. Fairclough (2005a) describes his version of critical discourse analysis as being transdisciplinary in that "the theoretical and methodological development...of [critical discourse analysis] and the disciplines/theories it is in dialogue with is informed through that dialogue" (p. 76).

Discourse analysis, in the context of this research into the discourses of wide-scale assessments of student learning, is limited to written texts rather than spoken language. In examining the types of discourse analysis available to me, I have narrowed my choice to critical discourse analysis and the poststructural discourse analysis described by Foucault. Discourse analysis, as applied in this research, is closely tied to

power relations and is “concerned with studying and analyzing written texts and spoken words to reveal the discursive sources of power, dominance, inequality and bias and how these sources are initiated, maintained, reproduced, and transformed within specific social, economic, political, and historical contexts” (McGregor, 2003, par. 5). It is meant to aid in the understanding of social problems that arise through the power relationships that are constructed through the performativity of written texts that are used in daily life. Perhaps my own positivist background and experiences with respect to a western paradigm of what constitutes research make me cling to the structured (and structuralist) approach to critical discourse analysis espoused by Fairclough rather than committing entirely to a poststructuralist perspective. As I worked through the perspectives that ground this research I found that elements of both critical discourse analysis and Foucault’s discourse analyses can come together and lend support from two differing perspectives to underlying theme of the research.

The next portion of this chapter will examine discourse analysis and in particular the variations of critical discourse analysis and Foucaultian or Foucauldian discourse analysis, centered around the work of Michel Foucault.

#### *4.3.2 Critical discourse analysis*

Fairclough (2005a) characterizes discourses as “diverse representations of social life” (p. 79). He goes on to describe the articulation of social practices, including discourses, as an “order of discourse” and includes in his version of critical discourse analysis the analysis of the relations between different orders of discourse. Of particular interest is the social ordering of dominance among these different ways of making

meaning; “some ways of making meaning are dominant or mainstream in a particular order of discourse, others are marginal, or oppositional, or ‘alternative’” (Fairclough, 2005a, p. 79). He sees discourse as “constitut[ing] part of the resources which people deploy in relating to one another – keeping separate from one another, cooperating, competing, dominating – and in seeking to change the ways in which they relate to one another” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 124).

Fairclough (2003) also sees critical discourse analysis as being the analysis and research of social life in that, “language is an irreducible part of social life, dialectically interconnected with other elements of social life, so that social analysis and research always has to take account of language” (p. 2). He goes on to describe the role of texts in bringing about changes in social life. According to Fairclough, texts influence the construction of social identity; for example exposure to advertising texts impacts on the way we construct ourselves as consumers. This is a different take on the role of texts in the construction of social reality than would be put forward by poststructuralists like Foucault; still the theme remains of the importance of texts in the construction of identity, either by or for individuals, and social reality. In Fairclough’s view, the use of discourse analysis of texts to discern the influences of those texts on social life also goes beyond this causal relationship between text and social events. Drawing on the work of Archer (1995) and Sayer (2000), he talks about two separate entities that shape the texts that in turn influence social events. Social structures and practices are one of the “powers” Fairclough describes as shaping texts, “causing a particular text or type of text to have the features it has” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 22). The second power is that of social agents, the

people involved in the social events around which the text is centered and which influence the text. “Social agents texture texts, they set up relations between elements of texts” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 22).

Fairclough defines social practices as the organizational entities that exist between structures and events. He notes that the difference between actual events and the spectrum of events that are potentially possible is vast and complex. “Social practices can be thought of as ways of controlling the selection of certain structural possibilities and the exclusion of others” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 23). This difference is important to Fairclough’s conceptualization of the ways in which social structures, social practices and social events are related and how those relationships can be examined through discourse analysis. In terms of how discourse relates to social practices, he sees discourse as only one element of social practice which is articulated along with several other nondiscoursal elements. Fairclough refers to the texts that influence social practice as orders of discourse and defines an order of discourse as “a network of social practices in its language aspect” (p. 24). It is through the linguistic control of social practices that orders of discourse control linguistic variation within the social organization.

In his discussion of critical discourse analysis, Fairclough (2003) describes discourses as different perspectives on the world dependent on the different people involved in the discourse and their perceptions of the world; in effect, their socially constructed reality. Just as there are interrelationships among people, there are interrelationships among discourses. Fairclough’s description of discourses also identifies levels of abstraction in discourse, identifying the complexity of any given discourse as

being made up of “combinations of other discourses articulated together in particular ways” (p. 126). A part of discourse analysis, in Fairclough’s view, is examining texts to determine the various discourses that are being accessed, the degree to which each of those discourses appear in the text and how those discourses come together to create the specific discourse of the text being examined.

Employing critical discourse analysis involves looking for two main components in a text: the social themes being represented in the text and the point of view from which those themes are represented. Texts are produced by people who are members of class and race-based groups and as such, these producers of the text are social agents bringing particular points of view to the representation of themes within that text. People bring unconscious presuppositions to both the creation and reading of text and

...when different discourses come into conflict and particular discourses are contested, what is centrally contested is the power of these preconstructed semantic systems to generate particular visions of the world which may have the performative power to sustain or remake the world in their image. (Fairclough, 2003, p. 130)

Another key feature of critical discourse analysis is that of re-contextualization. When a particular social event is represented, that representation is done within the context of another social event, that of creating the text. As a result, the original event is re-contextualized by the application of the principles that are part of the social network representing the original event. In the process of re-contextualization, filters are applied selectively to elements of the event being represented. In looking for these filters through the process of discourse analysis, we are looking for features of the event. In particular we look for presence in the text; which elements of the event are represented and which

are absent as well as how prominently some elements are represented as opposed to others. We also look for additions to the original event in the text that may take the form of explanations, legitimizations or evaluations of the events or elements of the events.

Another part of text that Fairclough analyzes and categorizes is the representation of social actors within the text. He chooses to name these representations of social actors within texts in the form of binaries (Fairclough, 2003). First, is the binary of inclusion/exclusion—the inclusion or exclusion of the various social actors is important as is the degree of inclusion, another binary—whether or not some actors are marginalized in the text and kept in the background while others are afforded overt placement in the foreground of the text. Other binaries surrounding representation in text include noun/pronoun, participant/possessive, active/passive, personal/impersonal, named/classified and specific/generic. As is generally the case with binaries, each of these choices made with respect to representation of social actors within text reveals a power relationship among those social actors as well as between those social actors and the author of the text.

In his discussion of discourse and identification, Fairclough acknowledges that, in his opinion, there is some validity to the poststructuralist idea that identity is constructed in discourse. He goes on to say that there is more to identification than that which is done textually because “people are not only pre-positioned in how they participate in social events and texts, they are also social agents who do things, create things, change things” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 160).

#### *4.3.3 Michel Foucault's discourse analysis*

Discourse analysis as described by Michel Foucault is quite different from critical discourse analysis although there are similarities as well. To begin with, Foucault shies away from a concrete description of how to perform discourse analysis. Instead Foucault describes what he is doing without “trying to dictate what is to be done” (Foucault, 1980, p. 236). In 1970 Michel Foucault gave a description of discourse analysis as he saw it in a lecture at the Collège de France subsequently published as *L'ordre du discours*. That work provides a basis for understanding Foucault's version of discourse analysis although it does not necessarily explain how one might go about conducting such an analysis.

Foucault starts his description by indicating how he views discourse. He sees it as a dangerous entity that is to be feared and must be regulated and controlled—"in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures, whose role is to avert its powers and its dangers" (Foucault, 1971, p. 216). He sees in all speech a set of prohibitions that regulate it, linking back to the basic ideas of desire and power that Foucault maintains are a key component of all discourse.

Discourse is defined and regulated by a number of principles and it is through application of these principles that discourse is controlled. The first set of principles by which discourse is defined and regulated are three principles of exclusion: prohibition, division and truth. Prohibition, as a principle of exclusion, characterizes discourse as much by what is not said through prohibition, as it is characterized by the actual words that are allowed to be used. Division, a second principle of exclusion, rejects a part of

what is said based on a division that has occurred; Foucault cites the idea that we commonly accept what conforms to the norm of the current discourse and reject as unreasonable that which differs greatly from the norm. Truth, the third principle of exclusion, takes away from power within discourse, maintains Foucault. In fact, he notes the division between true discourse and false means that “true discourse was no longer considered precious and desirable, since it had ceased to be discourse linked to the exercise of power” (Foucault, 1971, p. 218). Foucault emphasizes the importance of truth as an exclusionary system in discourse, showing how the quest for truth has, over time, tried to assimilate the ideas of prohibited language and the division between reason and madness into supports for truth in discourse.

In addition to exclusionary principles, discourse is governed by a set of internal systems of control that deal with ordering, classification and distribution. One of these internal controls is the principle of commentary; the idea that every society has its major narratives that are repeated over and over in various forms because they are believed to embody secrets that, once uncovered, will provide a wealth of some sort to the society. Commentary, according to Foucault, consists of primary and secondary texts in discourse that allow us at once to create innumerable new discourses while at the same time articulating the underlying ideas that have been lying silent in the original texts. Then, there is the principle of authorship that also serves as an internal system of control for a particular discourse. Foucault sees the "author as the unifying principle in a particular group of writings or statements, lying at the origins of their significance, as the seat of

their coherence" (Foucault, 1971, p. 221). Finally there is the principle of disciplines.

According to Foucault

...disciplines are defined by groups of objects, methods, their corpus of propositions considered to be true, the interplay of rules and definitions, of techniques and tools: all these constitute a sort of anonymous system, freely available to whoever wishes, or whoever is able to make use of them, without there being any question of their meaning or their validity being derived from whoever happened to invent them. (ibid, p. 222)

A third group of rules that Foucault sees governing and controlling discourse are the four conditions of discourse. The first of these conditions is the condition of ritual, defining the qualifications of the speaker to speak. The second condition is that of fellowship since each discourse is limited by the speaker's right to belong to the select group of those who are qualified to speak. Third, there is the condition of doctrine which "links individuals to certain types of utterance while consequently barring them from all others. Doctrine effects a dual subjection: that of speaking subjects to discourse, and that of discourse to the group, at least virtually, of speakers" (Foucault, 1971, p. 226). The final condition is the idea of the social appropriation of discourse by particular systems to serve the purposes of those systems. Foucault uses the example of educational systems as "a political means of maintaining or of modifying the appropriation of discourse, with the knowledge and the posers it carries with it" (Foucault, 1971, p. 227).

Having described those things which he feels control discourse, Foucault goes on to enumerate the four principles by which he proposes to analyse discourse. These principles include the principles of reversal, discontinuity, specificity and exteriority. Although he defines these principles in general terms as they relate to discourse, Foucault is very careful not to state explicitly how one might go about performing an analysis of a

particular discourse, leaving it instead to the analyst to apply the principles and deal with the theoretical and philosophical problems raised by the application of those principles to specific discourses. Foucault sees analyses as falling into one of two groups, the first being the *critical* group which deals with the ways in which exclusion, limitation, and appropriation work under the reversal principle to cut out and rarefy discourse. The second group of analyses involves the other three principles and Foucault refers to this as the *genealogical* group. He references “how series of discourse are formed, though, and in spite of, or with the aid of these systems of constraint: what were the specific norms for each, and what were their conditions of appearance, growth and variation” (Foucault, 1971, p. 232).

Over the past two decades, several individuals have examined Foucault’s work with respect to discourse analysis and have made their own commentaries as to the author’s meanings in the absence of his having written a definitive treatise on the practical side of the methodology. Penny Powers (2007) sees in discourse a joining together of power and knowledge in relation to resistance. “Discourse may, therefore, be both an instrument and an effect of both power and resistance” (p. 28). Power can be produced both by discourse and by silence and power can be undermined by discourse and silence as well, allowing a loosening of power and a foothold for resistance. Diaz-Bone (2007) suggests that Foucault disrupts the idea of continuity with discontinuity and “problematizes the category of meaning” (Diaz-Bone et al, 2007, par. 4). The authors go on to enumerate four questions that they feel Foucault asks in doing discourse analysis:

what object is being discursively produced; what logic allows the construction of the discourse; who is authoring the discourse; and finally, what the goals of the discourse are.

One of the main arguments against Foucaultian discourse analysis as a research methodology is the lack of a definitive description of the method by Foucault himself. His own concern about not wanting to replace one perceived truth with another gets in the way of his being prescriptive as to the methods used and he limits himself to being only explicit as to what he has done in specific cases rather than stating a generalized process by which to embark upon discourse analysis.

#### 4.4 Selected methodology for this research

In looking for a methodology for my own research into the discourses of the provincial *Assessment for Learning* instruments, I was torn between critical discourse analysis and Foucaultian discourse analysis. Each has aspects that lend it well to what I was doing but there are also drawbacks to each. Both critical discourse analysis and Foucaultian discourse analysis are concerned with the power relations inherent in discourse and the role of discourse in constructing realities. In the end I chose to begin with some aspects of critical discourse analysis and then examine the analysis through a Foucaultian lens to see how subjects are constructed and systems of power are maintained and strengthened through those texts. By combining these two somewhat differing perspectives, critical discourse analysis focusing in a somewhat semiological way on “static idealized analysis” (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 31) by looking at structures and Foucaultian discourse analysis taking a much broader view that encompasses both structures and language use in a poststructuralist frame (Potter &

Wetherell, 1987, p. 31), I hope to bring a balanced perspective to the question of power relations and the construction of identity and social reality through the assessment texts.

Critical discourse analysis is clearly articulated, providing a “how to” in terms of performing concrete analysis on texts which is appropriate to my examination of the texts that make up the discourses of the *Assessment for Learning*. By looking at the social themes and the points of view representing those themes in the texts of the Assessments for Learning, I examined the impact of the social agents producing those texts on the groups then affected by the discourse. There is a danger in conducting a critical discourse analysis using such specific techniques in that it is possible to get so caught up in the minutia of the elements of the texts that one can easily lose sight of the overall sense of the discourse in the broader picture.

Foucaultian discourse analysis provided the lens through which to examine the power relations inherent in the texts by looking for the principles through which the discourses of the Assessments for Learning are controlled. Using the principles identified by Foucault in his own analyses I looked for exclusion, commentary and conditions of discourse in the texts. Asking the four questions identified by Diaz-Bone (2007) helped to maintain the broader perspective in examining the discourse that I felt was potentially lost in critical discourse analysis.

Discourse analysis theory proposes that the way we communicate with each other and create new knowledge is shaped by power relations in our society and critical social theory “describes how groups of people exist in relation to the historically based dominant ideologies that structure their experience” (Powers, 2007, p. 19). In looking at

the discourses of the *Assessment for Learning* I identify the dominant ideologies being expressed in those texts and how groups of students, some members of the dominant group and some not, exist in relation to that discourse. In doing so it is my hope that “when people are presented with the representation they can recognize the oppressive consequences of the ideology, and make sense of it in their social realm” (Powers, 2007, p. 20). This sounds like it presupposes oppression in the discourses of the *Assessment for Learning* and that is, in fact, the presupposition given that, in any discipline there will always be dominant discourse and, as a counter, a discourse that is marginalized by the dominant discourse. By critically analyzing the discourses of the *Assessment for Learning* I am attempting to re-contextualize them and as such create a new discourse around *Assessment for Learning* that applies a different set of filters, perhaps disrupting some of the binaries inherent in the original discourses.

#### *4.4.1 How the methodology is applied*

In this section I outline the ethical considerations around this study and detail the steps by which the analysis is conducted. This is not meant to be a prescriptive process that defines discourse analysis as a research method but rather, along the lines of Foucault’s work, my intent is to provide a description of what I have done in this particular instance to analyse the discourses of the *Assessment for Learning* tools.

#### *4.4.2 Ethical considerations*

The assessment instruments, scoring tools and exemplars of student work associated with the *Assessment for Learning* program are all available publicly, as are the reports of the results. Access to individual school division results, in many cases, is

available through individual school division web sites and does not raise an ethical concern since there is no identifying information that would infringe on the privacy of any individual anywhere within the reports. The discourse analysis being conducted is on the discourse of the text of the assessment components so there is no interviewing or oral communication within this study.

At the time of this study there have been a total of nine Assessments for Learning in reading and six Assessments for Learning in writing administered in Saskatchewan in their current form. Each assessment administered involves from eight to 18 documents, providing a wide array of raw material to study in terms of representing a consistent body of work and continuing practices in assessing student reading and writing. The quantity of data available for discourse analysis also strengthens the study in that this is not a study of a first or single attempt at a reading or writing assessment, rather it is a group of 15 assessments that have been generated and utilized over a period of six years.

#### *4.4.3 Methodology described*

The actual work of collecting and analyzing the data entailed detailed analysis of existing texts using both Critical Discourse Analysis and Foucaultian Discourse Analysis through a variety of the discourse analysis methods previously outlined. Initially each text was read line by line and broken down by units of sense then transcribed to a five-part matrix. In constructing the matrix to help analyse the texts of the assessments I turned to several questions proposed by James Paul Gee (2005). Through the application of each of these questions to the texts of the assessments I attempted to understand the way the dominant reality around student literacy achievement is constructed.

I began my analysis with a question relating to significance and with respect to each text being studied, asking how the text is making some things significant while rendering others insignificant (Gee, 2005). I also looked at the way in which significance is communicated through the text. By looking at the construction of the texts and the choices of particular words within the text I identified the relationships between ideas in the text and subsequently, the discourses those ideas represent. Fairclough's notion of re-contextualization filters and looking for which elements are present and which are absent in the text figures prominently in this stage of analysis. Each unit of sense was examined with respect to the binary of significance/insignificance first through an analysis of situational values in the text, then looking at what reproductions were either stabilized or transformed by the text. This analysis was accomplished through asking a set of questions, informed by Gee's work, of each unit of sense in the text: 1) what information is significant through being foregrounded in the text and what has been backgrounded or assumed in the text? 2) what are the important words in the text that reflect significance? 3) how is the text attached to relevant objects? and 4) how is the text attached to other texts?

Take, for example, the following statement that prefaces one of the practice texts in the 2009 Grade 4 Reading Assessment. "The natural world is important to many people. How much do you care about living creatures?" (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009s, p. 1). In this passage, a concept of what is important to many people is foregrounded, backgrounding the assumption that the same things are important to the student reading the passage as are important to both the writer/test creator and the "many

people” referenced by the writer/test creator. How much the student cares about living creatures is also foregrounded, backgrounding the assumption that all students care about living creatures. The word *important* stands out in this unit of sense, referencing a student’s sense of what it is appropriate to value and to care about. The relevant objects that this segment of text is attached to include the world and living creatures. The discourse model at play here is an evaluative model of discourse that nature and living creatures are important and to be protected. This discourse stabilizes the idea of caring for the world we live in as normal behaviour.

In each case the questions are also connected to who the reader is – what the test creator, scoring leader or passage author considers important, significant or relevant in terms of words, objects and other texts may be different from what the student writing the assessment, the teacher who has taught the curriculum content, or even the scorer marking the assessment considers important, significant or relevant. In looking at the comparison between what different audiences would consider important, significant or relevant a commentary was made in each case as to what reproductions were being stabilized by the textual unit and what reproductions were being disrupted and potentially transformed.

In the second part of the matrix I examined each unit of sense with respect to the voices represented in the text. In doing so I drew upon Foucault’s principles of exclusion. Specifically I asked in each case, 1) what are the relevant voices or texts included and what relevant voices or texts are excluded? 2) are there other less relevant voices included? 3) who are the voices directly or indirectly attributed to? and 4) how are the

voices textured in relation to one another? Taking the previous example again, one of the relevant voices or texts included is that of the environmentalist and at the same time, the voice of consumerism is excluded. The purpose of this part of the analysis is to develop a sense of how readers (student, teacher, scorer, test creator, member of the public) are likely to be situated in relation to the text and how readers will connect to the text. This analysis becomes important in understanding the construction of identity through the texts later in the analysis process. In this portion of the analysis there is a danger of my imposing my own sense of what is relevant and what is not relevant and I acknowledge that this analysis cannot help but be coloured by my own experiences.

The third part of the matrix deals with the social events represented in the text and at this point in the analysis process I turned again to the very specific techniques of critical discourse analysis around the re-contextualization of social events. Although limiting by their very specificity, these methods helped me to ground the analysis with respect to looking at individual parts of the whole as well as the overall meaning of the text. The process I used was to look at a breakdown of each textual unit in terms of the grammatical formation of unit. In particular I identified the subjects, verbs, objects and adverbial elements in each unit. Fairclough (2003) characterizes the subjects and indirect objects of the texts to generally be participants in the events while verbs represent processes. Adverbial elements are tied to the context of the event with respect to place and time. Returning to the example, “the natural world is important to many people. How much do you care about living creatures”, the participants in the events are “many people” and “you”. In this case “you” references the reader which is intended to be the

grade 4 student. The verbs “is” and “care” represent processes occurring in the text. In examining which elements of events are included and which are excluded, Fairclough suggests that the analyst can determine which elements are given salience by the social actor reconstructing the event and that by determining whether the representation is one of concrete representation of a special event or an abstract representation of social practice representing a social structure. In the example, the natural world is included but the business world, the financial world, and all other considerations of society are excluded. Living creatures are included but people are not specifically included and non-living things are excluded. The representations of events are not of specific or even recurring events but rather they are abstract representations of the social practices of holding the natural world in a state of importance and of caring for living things.

Finally, I looked at the representation of social actors within the textual units. The representation of the social actors within the text gives insight into the degree to which those actors are included (or excluded) and the importance granted to those social actors in the re-contextualization of the event. In this particular case, the student is represented by the pronoun "you" and the population in general is represented as "many people" -- a generic classification but they are not actually impersonalized as can often be the case when generic classifications are used.

The fourth part of the matrix focuses Foucault’s concept of normalization. This section is informed by his ideas of critical analysis, including exclusion, in limiting and rarefying discourse as well as genealogical analysis looking at how discourse is formed with respect to systems of constraint and within the conditions and norms of the system

in which it is formed (Foucault, 1971). The specific questions I asked around each unit of text were: 1) how is exclusion used to trace limits and define difference? 2) how are classification and sorting used to include and exclude within the textual unit? 3) what sign systems are privileged or marginalized within the text in relation to the normative group? and 4) what ways of knowing are privileged or marginalized within the text in relation to the normative group? In terms of the example we have been using, those who do not care about the natural world and living creatures are excluded and limits are traced based on levels of caring about those things. Specifically, students who think the natural world is important and who care about living creatures are included while students who do not think the natural world is important and who do not care about living creatures are excluded.

The fifth and final part of the matrix deals with the construction of identities. Looking at each element of text and reviewing the content of the first four sections of the matrix, I ask what identity or identities are being constructed through the text. Based on the example from the practice materials, the identity of students as being valued is constructed based upon what students think is important and what students care about. Once I have identified the identities being constructed I then ask how those identities reflect postcolonial power relations. It is through this analysis that I address my first research question surrounding colonial values reflected in wide-scale provincial assessments and the subsequent impact on minority learner identity.

The matrix is then used to support the next part of my analysis which focuses on the social perspective inherent in the texts of the assessment tools. In any discourse the

language communicates what is to be taken as normal, right, good and correct (Gee, 2005). At the same time, either explicitly or implicitly, the language is also identifying what is not normal, what has low status, or is wrong or bad. In terms of Foucault's techniques of power, this helps the analyst look at how classification, exclusion and regulation are enacted in the discourses of the assessments. By asking questions of each text as to how social perspectives are communicated, how relationships are defined between ideas within the texts and how the language of the text privileges or marginalizes different sign systems, different ways of knowing and belief systems and claims to knowledge (Gee, 2005), I am able to demonstrate how the techniques of power are manifest in the assessment discourses. It is through this analysis that I answer my second research question, that of whose interests are served and whose interests are marginalized by those assessment discourses.

To answer my final research question, that of how the discourses of the assessments for learning might be disrupted to improve the assessments, I rely on the findings of the analyses already described. It is my hope that by analyzing the discourses of the assessment tools, the binaries that maintain postcolonial power imbalances for minority students have been exposed. It is through this exposure that I am drawing attention to the binaries created and in doing so disrupt those binaries with new discourses around assessments that include points of view other than those of the dominant majority.

#### 4.5 Summary

To answer the three research questions, discourse analysis will be used. Since discourse analysis is a complex term that has many definitions among the research community, a brief history of the method as it arose from the fields of hermeneutics, rhetoric, philosophy, literary criticism and semiotics was described. Five types of discourse analysis were outlined with the narrowing of the field to two types of critical discourse analysis as the methodology for this research explained.

Within the broad area of discourse analysis, I detailed the process known as critical discourse analysis and then described the process undertaken by Michel Foucault. I showed how each influenced the creation of the matrix for analysis that I used to deconstruct the *Assessment for Learning* texts in my data analysis phase and how that deconstruction was designed to help answer the three research questions.

The next chapters of this document will summarize that analysis, using examples from the assessment documents and the subsequent breakdown of their units of sense. In chapter 5, I provide the analysis of the data from the *Assessment for Learning* materials through the use of the first part of the matrix focusing on significance. Chapter 6 looks at the data as it relates to the representation of voices and the re-contextualization of social events. Chapter 7 is an analysis of the data looking at the concepts of normalization and identity construction. Chapter 8 details the findings of the research with respect to answering the three research questions which leads directly into identifying recommendations for change and for further study.

## 5. WHAT IS MADE SIGNIFICANT IN THE ASSESSMENT DISCOURSES?

In this chapter and the two chapters following, I examine the discourses of the *Assessment for Learning* documents through the use of a matrix based on several questions in five distinct areas as outlined in Table 5.1: significance, representation of voices, re-contextualization of social events, normalization, and the construction of identity. In each case, I treat the set of documents of the Assessments for Learning in four separate groups because each was written with a different audience in mind. The document groups are identified in Table 5.2. First, I look at the student materials which are written with the student who is being assessed as the intended audience. These materials include the practice items, the texts on which the reading assessments are based, the reading and writing questions themselves, and the student *Opportunity to Learn* questionnaires. The second group of documents is composed of the teacher materials including the teacher guides, the practice test instructions and the teacher *Opportunity to Learn* questionnaires. The third document group encompasses the scoring materials that assist scorers in taking the individual student responses and applying judgements to those responses. These materials include the *Opportunity to Learn* rubrics, the writing rubrics, the reading open response item rubrics, the scoring guides provided to teachers, the coding guides for use while scoring and the examples of student work demonstrating what each of the levels on the rubrics might look like. Finally, I examine the public reports provided to school divisions. Examples of these reports are found posted on several school division websites. The reports are written formulaically with the division level reports mirroring the school-level reports provided to schools and teachers.

Table 5.1 Discourse analysis matrix breakdown

Matrix Area	Questions
Significant versus insignificant	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What is foregrounded and what is backgrounded in the text?</li> <li>2. What are the important words in the text that indicate significance?</li> <li>3. How is the text attached to relevant objects?</li> <li>4. How is the text attached to other texts?</li> <li>5. What discourse models are at play in the text?</li> <li>6. What reproductions are stabilized by the text and what reproductions are transformed by the text?</li> </ol>
Relationship between voices and discourses	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What relevant voices and/or texts are included in the text and what relevant voices and/or texts are excluded?</li> <li>2. What other voices are included in the text?</li> <li>3. To what or whom are the voices in the text directly or indirectly attributed?</li> <li>4. How are the voices included in the text textured in relation to one another?</li> </ol>
Re-contextualization of social events	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How is the text constructed grammatically in terms of subjects, verbs, direct and indirect objects and adverbial clauses?</li> <li>2. Which elements of social events are included in the text and which are excluded and what degree of importance is given to each of the included elements?</li> <li>3. Are social events represented concretely as specific events or abstractly as social practices?</li> <li>4. What parts of the social events are represented as processes and what types of processes are used in the representation?</li> <li>5. Who are the social actors represented in the re-contextualization of the event and how are they represented?</li> <li>6. How are time, space, and time-space relations represented in the re-contextualization of the event?</li> </ol>
Normalization	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How is exclusion used to trace limits and define difference?</li> <li>2. How is classification and sorting used through the text to bring about inclusion?</li> <li>3. How is classification and sorting used through the text to bring about exclusion?</li> <li>4. How are sign systems privileged or marginalized through the text?</li> <li>5. How are ways of knowing privileged or marginalized through the text?</li> </ol>
Construction of identity	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How is identity constructed through the text?</li> <li>2. How are postcolonial power relations reflected in the text?</li> </ol>

Each school division receives a summary report of results for each assessment as well as a detailed report of the results and a complete set of results from the Opportunity to Learn questionnaires.

I present data from each part of the matrix separately, looking at all four sets of documents within context of that portion of the matrix before moving on to the next part of the matrix. I do this because, although the four document groups are distinct and written for specific audiences, the dialogicality of the discourses impacts on how the overall reality of the assessments and results are conceptualized (Gillen & Petersen, 2005; Marková, 2003). I use examples from several of the *Assessment for Learning* documents to illustrate data from the matrices. Although there are many examples that could be used in each case, I have limited the examples to a few passages that I have included in the appendices of this document. I have done this to allow the reader easy access to the texts in question without having to explore a multitude of documents in the process. In each part of the matrix, I follow the presentation of the data with a discussion of the data and, at the end of the three chapters, I bring the five parts of the matrix together in one overall summary of the data presented. The first part of the matrix I look at deals with how some things are made significant and others are rendered insignificant in the text.

Table 5.2 Documents by group and assessments

Document Group	Assessment	Documents
Student Materials	Reading 2005	Literary Booklet A – grade 5, grade 8, grade 10 Information Booklet B – grade 5, grade 8, grade 10 Pre-assessment Booklet – grade 5, grade 8, grade 10 Opportunity To Learn Student Questionnaire
	Reading 2007	Booklet A Informational – grade 4, grade 7, grade 10 Booklet B Literary – grade 4, grade 7, grade 10 Student Resource Booklet – grade 4 Opportunity To Learn Student Questionnaire
	Writing 2008	Booklet A Expository – grade 5, grade 8, grade 11 Booklet B Narrative – grade 5, grade 8, grade 11 Online Pre-assessment package (selected parts) – grade 5, grade 8, grade 11 Opportunity To Learn Student Questionnaire
	Reading 2009	Booklet A Literary – grade 4, grade 7, grade 10 Booklet B Informational – grade 4, grade 7, grade 10 Student Sample Booklet – grade 4, grade 7, grade 10 Opportunity To Learn Student Questionnaire
	Writing 2010	Booklet A Expository – grade 5, grade 8, grade 11 Booklet B Narrative – grade 5, grade 8, grade 11 Online Pre-assessment package (selected parts) – grade 5, grade 8, grade 11 Opportunity To Learn Student Questionnaire
Teacher Materials	Reading 2005	Opportunity To Learn English Language Arts Teacher Questionnaire Opportunity To Learn Non-English Language Arts Teacher Questionnaire
	Reading 2007	Teacher Resource Booklet Opportunity To Learn English Language Arts Teacher Questionnaire Opportunity To Learn Non-English Language Arts Teacher Questionnaire
	Writing 2008	Online Pre-assessment package (selected parts) – grade 5, grade 8, grade 11 Teacher Handbook Opportunity To Learn Teacher Questionnaire
	Reading 2009	Opportunity To Learn Teacher Questionnaire Teacher Handbook
	Writing 2010	Online Pre-assessment package (selected parts) – grade 5, grade 8, grade 11 Teacher Handbook Opportunity To Learn Teacher Questionnaire
Document Group	Assessment	Documents
Scoring Materials	Reading 2005	Answer Key, Exemplars – grade 5, grade 8, grade 10 Selection-specific Rubrics – grade 5, grade 8, grade 11

	Reading 2007	Answer Exemplars – grade 4, grade 7, grade 10 Analytic Scoring Rubric
	Writing 2008	Opportunity to Learn Rubrics Process Rubric Analytic Rubrics Scoring Guide Expository Exemplars – grade 5, grade 8, grade 11 Narrative Exemplars – grade 5, grade 8, grade 11 Process Exemplars – grade 5, grade 8, grade 11
	Reading 2009	Answer Strategy Comprehension Key – grade 4, grade 7, grade 10 Informational Text Exemplars – grade 4, grade 7, grade 10 Informational Text Coding Guide – grade 4, grade 7, grade 10 Literary Text Exemplars – grade 4, grade 7, grade 10 Literary Text Coding Guide – grade 4, grade 7, grade 10
	Writing 2010	None provided
Reporting Documents	Reading 2005	Sample Report – grade 5, grade 8, grade 11
	Reading 2007	Division Sample Report – grade 4, grade 7, grade 10 School Sample Report – grade 4, grade 7, grade 10 School Summary Sample Report – grade 4, grade 7, grade 10
	Writing 2008	Teacher and Student Questionnaire Data – Living Sky SD Northeast School Division Summary – grade 5, grade 8, grade 11 Northeast School Division Detail – grade 5, grade 8, grade 11
	Reading 2009	Teacher and Student Questionnaire Data – Living Sky SD Northeast School Division Summary – grade 4, grade 7, grade 10 Northeast School Division Detail – grade 4, grade 7, grade 10
	Writing 2010	Teacher and Student Questionnaire Data – Living Sky SD Northeast School Division Summary – grade 5, grade 8, grade 11 Northeast School Division Detail – grade 5, grade 8, grade 11

### 5.1 Significance

James Paul Gee (2011) asserts that human beings make some ideas or events more important and some less important through the use of language, in particular by using “words or grammatical devices...to build up or lessen significance (importance, relevance) for certain things and not others” (p. 92). Foregrounding information through direct statements in the main clause of a sentence gives that information importance in

the eyes of the reader. At the same time, other information, stated through subordinate clauses or excluded entirely, is seen as less important. It is the writer's intention that such backgrounded information is to be taken for granted; essentially the information is assumed to be true by the writer and the writer expects that the reader will share that assumption (Gee, 2011). The awarding of significance is not only a conscious decision on the part of the writer; it also reveals the writer's own assumptions by virtue of his or her choices in the way statements are made. In the discourses of wide-scale assessment, significance sends messages to the reader as to what is valued, what is expected and what the reader is meant to agree with.

#### *5.1.1 Student Materials*

The student materials of the *Assessment for Learning* instruments all follow similar content and organization patterns whether the assessment is of reading or of writing and regardless of the grade level of the students being assessed. Generally speaking, there are practice items, assessment questions and a student questionnaire. In the reading assessment, each student is presented with a set of two assessment booklets. One booklet contains literary texts and multiple choice comprehension questions relating to those texts. The other booklet contains informational texts and multiple choice comprehension questions relating to those texts. Each booklet contains an open-ended question about one of the texts. Students are expected to respond to the open-ended items with written answers, relating their responses to the texts they have read as well as to their own knowledge and experiences (Saskatchewan Learning, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c,

2005d, 2005e, 2005f, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2007d, 2007e, 2007f; Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2009d, 2009e, 2009f).

Students participating in the writing assessment are presented with one of two booklets requiring that they write in response to a prompt provided in the booklet. Half of the students in any given classroom are given a prompt that requires them to write an expository text and the remaining students in the classroom are given a prompt that requires a narrative text be written (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2008m, 2010m). In both the reading and the writing assessments, students are provided with an *Opportunity to Learn* student questionnaire that contains questions about reading or writing habits and students' attitudes towards reading or writing. As well, pre-assessment materials are provided via the *Assessment for Learning* website and it is expected, though not mandatory, that teachers will use these pre-assessment items to prepare students to write the assessments.

Regardless of the grade level or whether the assessment is in reading or writing, directions and information about how the test will be scored are the students' first interaction with the assessment instruments. It is in these first interactions that the students see what the test creators consider to be significant, what assumptions the students are expected to make and what they are to take for granted. For example, in the 2009 reading assessments, students are presented with the following statements at the start of the practice questions in each booklet at all three grade levels:

“Reading is like most things in life – you will reach your highest level of success by doing your best.” In this booklet, you will be asked to read and think about three texts. You will need to use your reading strategies to make certain you

understand each text. (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2009d, 2009e, 2009f, p. 2)

In this short passage, the student is given a context for the assessment that he or she is about to complete. The passage foregrounds the idea that success in reading is directly related to the amount of effort the individual puts into it. In the background, the test creator makes the assumption that reading is important to the students and takes for granted that the students share that assumption. In the second part of the passage, reading strategies and the necessity of using reading strategies to understand the text are foregrounded. In the background this statement implies that reading strategies are all that is necessary for success in reading and it is taken for granted that all students possess these strategies.

The important words in this segment of text bring to mind their unstated counterparts, effectively setting up binaries that lead students to identify with one half or the other of the set. The positive dominant words are foregrounded through direct statement while the negative alternatives are backgrounded as assumptions – the mention of success also speaks of failure, the word best brings up the idea of worst, the alternative to using reading strategies is not using reading strategies and understanding is paired with non-comprehension. There are no relevant objects or texts directly mentioned in the passage that the reader might attach to this text, although the idea of reading may conjure all types of reading materials dependent on the experiences of the students reading the passage.

The discourses at play in this short passage are espoused discourses around the importance of reading and the link between strategies used by good readers and the use of

those strategies as indicators of the quality of a reader. Espoused discourses encapsulate the things we say and say that we believe about a particular topic (Gee, 2005). In this case, it is the norm within white settler society to espouse a belief in the importance of reading to a student's growth and development as a valued member of society. It is also the norm within the formal white settler education system in Saskatchewan to espouse a belief that students who possess a particular set of reading strategies and can demonstrate those strategies are better readers than students who do not demonstrate those specific strategies (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2010a).

Discourses are being produced (or re-produced) in each passage of text, and in that (re)production institutions and discourses can be stabilized or they can be transformed (Gee, 2005). In the aforementioned passage that students encounter at the beginning of the practice questions, the foregrounded ideas about the value of reading and the use of reading strategies, the background assumptions around what students should know and value and the binaries created around success, using reading strategies and comprehension, all work together to stabilize white settler beliefs about the importance of reading and around practices that inform teaching reading, especially the use of reading strategies as indicators of competence in reading.

As students move into the specific instructions for the selected response items, other assumptions about supposed common knowledge and experiences are highlighted. In the instructions, students are told, “[s]ome questions will ask you to make an inference or find ideas and information that are not directly stated in the text. To determine the answer, you need to think about what the author intended” (Saskatchewan Ministry of

Education, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2009d, 2009e, 2009f, p. 2). The direction to, “think about what the author intended” foregrounds being able to think like the author and know that individual’s intentions. The assumption is that all respondents share a common set of knowledge and experiences with the author, allowing them each to put their own knowledge and experiences together in the same way the author has and, as a result, come up with the correct answer. Similarly, the instructions also tell students “Other questions will ask you to evaluate or make judgements about what was said or hinted at by the text. You need to think about what is said in the text and what you know already to answer this kind of question” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2009d, 2009e, 2009f, p. 2). In this case, the passage foregrounds the idea of the reader applying “what you already know”, assuming a common knowledge base among respondents that will be accessed in order to make the same judgements that the test creator made when reading the text.

The instructions refer to the answer, placing significance on the idea of a single specific (correct) answer, leading the reader to the assumption that there can only be one possible correct answer to any given question. The direct reference to the need to “evaluate or make judgements” and to think about “what you already know” to answer questions again gives significance to a common knowledge base that all students are able to access as they make those judgements about the implied content of the text. As a result, there is an evaluative model of discourse at play that sees an author's intent being readily accessible to readers of the author's work if those readers are competent readers. Within this discourse around reading there is an evaluation made around what forms

normal knowledge and experience, and readers whose knowledge and experiences do not fit that model are considered deviant from the norm, a state that is evaluated as a reading deficiency in the context of a reading assessment, rather than as a difference in class or race. This discourse around reading stabilizes the assumption that all students at a particular grade level share a common set of knowledge and experiences that generally equate with common race and class which, in the context of the background of the test creators<sup>2</sup>, is typical of white settler students in Saskatchewan.

Moving to the instructions for the reader response items (the open-ended questions), similar significance patterns are observed. Students are asked to “answer using your own ideas and examples from the text” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2009d, 2009e, 2009f, p. 4). In the bullet points included in the reader response directions students are asked “Have you connected this reading to your own experience, background knowledge, or previous reading/viewing?” (Saskatchewan

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<sup>2</sup> Test creators are essentialized throughout the analysis sections of this document as though they are a homogeneous group who collectively share common knowledge and who have a common set of experiences. While the members of the test creator group have much in common, the members also bring a great deal of diversity to the task of creating the assessment just as teachers bring diversity to classrooms and scorers and standard setters bring diversity to their specific roles. While acknowledging the individual differences among test creators, I maintain there is a certain degree of artificially created and temporarily enforced homogeneity within each group of test creators, standard setters and scorers. This homogeneity is short-lived and stems from the collective training that makes up a significant part of each item development, scoring and standard setting session. Within item development training process for reading, efforts are made to have the participants develop a shared understanding of the reading texts and responses through collaborative development and editing. Within the item development session there is a Foucaultian network of surveillance established among participants through which normal is defined by the majority and limits are set for the exclusion of diverse ideas. This process leads to self-regulation among participants that in turn works to construct an identity for those participants as item developers who are pressured to adopt, temporarily, the common perspective and values, thus avoiding exclusion as deviant from the norm. Although there is a whole research project waiting to occur around the norming of teacher groups, that is not within the scope of this study and will not be explored in this document.

Ministry of Education, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2009d, 2009e, 2009f, p. 4). This foregrounds the ideas of personal experience, background knowledge and previous reading while backgrounding the assumption that there will be connections for the reader to make that in turn will be recognized by the scorers who later mark the items. Just as in the directions for the closed response items, this particular discourse is evaluative, defining student knowledge and experience as normal or deficient based on the white settler norms of the test creators. If students have normal background knowledge, the assumption is that they will all come up with similar responses to the question. The assumption of specific background knowledge implies that students having a different set of background knowledge will not be able to provide responses similar to those provided by other students and as such will demonstrate a lack of reading ability. Once again, this discourse around reading stabilizes the assumption that all students at a particular grade level share a common set of background knowledge and experiences characteristic of white settler students in Saskatchewan.

The *Assessment for Learning in Writing* is not much different than the reading assessment in the area of student instructions. On the front cover of the 2008 writing assessment booklets students are told, “your responses in the Student Writing Booklet will help the Ministry of Education create a snapshot of the factors that contribute to the writing performance of Saskatchewan students” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2008c, 2008d, 2008j, 2008g, 2008k, p. 1). This initial statement that gives students their first contact with the writing assessment foregrounds that the responses will be used to help the Ministry of Education, while backgrounding the assumption that students are

willing to help the ministry and will put in their best effort to do so. This basic assumption is a part of an evaluative discourse about the willingness of students to participate and put effort into an assessment for altruistic reasons. This discourse stabilizes the white settler norm of "doing school" that includes following instructions and fulfilling requests to serve someone else's purposes; an unquestioning obedience to the authority of teachers and other school officials. Helping the Ministry of Education is given significance while any direct value to the student is rendered insignificant. The next statement to students, "In this booklet, you will pre-write, draft, revise, and create a final copy of an expository essay in response to a writing prompt" (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2008c, 2008d, 2008j, 2008g, 2008k, p. 1 ), foregrounds the writing process and what the student will do. It is left unsaid that the topic comes from a prompt in which the student has little say in what he or she is to write about. This arbitrary prompt gives significance to the act of writing while keeping the content of the writing insignificant. Giving process significance over content defines an evaluative discourse model of students' use of the writing process as taught in Saskatchewan schools which stabilizes the view of only one correct way to arrive at a quality written product. That single correct path includes following a single multi-stepped process in a linear fashion. Further instructions to students direct them to brainstorm ideas, construct an outline and then use the ideas and outline to create a first draft of the writing product. In each case, the directions foreground the pre-writing processes of brainstorming and outlining, making the assumption that students will use these methods as opposed to free writing or any other pre-writing techniques that they might choose to employ. Giving significance to the

acts of brainstorming, writing jot notes and outlining is a part of an evaluative discourse that identifies pre-writing behaviours that are purported to lead to high quality written work, stabilizing the idea that following a particular process as outlined in school is required to write well and devaluing any other process that a student might use to arrive at what he or she considers high quality written work.

Significance can also be noted in the choice of texts and writing prompts provided to students within the assessment instruments. Within the reading assessments examined, there were a total of 50 texts presented: 25 literary texts and 25 informational texts. In looking at each of the texts individually, what the test creators value is shown through what is made significant in these 50 texts (see appendix A). Value is attached to white settler societies by virtue of the number of texts that give elements of white settler culture and practices significance as compared to the number of texts that give significance to the cultures and practices of other societies as shown in Table 5.3.

Given that the difficulty of any test item increases if the student is less familiar with the underlying background on which the item is based (Bachman, 2002), the information in Table 5.3 indicates that 40% of the assessment passages advantage white settler students. For the purposes of comparison, a text is seen to advantage a particular group of students if the content of the text references or alludes to knowledge or experiences that are specific to that group of students. As per Bachman, students possessing the knowledge or experiences in question will then find that text more accessible and easier to comprehend than students without the common knowledge or experiences. It can also be noted that only 8% of the passages advantage First Nations or

Métis students however, the effects of this advantage are mitigated by the provenance given within the passages to help students who are unfamiliar with First Nations or Métis culture to understand the particular context of the text. This same type of provenance is not generally provided within the texts referencing white settler contexts as it is assumed to be unnecessary.

Table 5.3 Significance of societal cultures and practices in text selections

Culture and Practice Significance	Number of texts	Percentage of total
White settler societies	20 texts	40%
First Nations or Métis societies	4 texts	8%
Other societies	1 text (Inuit)	2%
No particular significance	25 texts	50%

In one of the reading passages, an excerpt from *Keeper 'n Me*, we read “by the time of the opening Grand Entry—that’s where all the dancers line up and dance in together for an opening prayer by elders—there was about two hundred people here from other places” (Saskatchewan Learning, 2005f, p. 2). The writer, Richard Wagamese, talks about powwow-specific events but explicitly defines what a grand entry is, providing a context for those events to help readers unfamiliar with powwow traditions to understand and appreciate what is being referenced. In direct contrast, no such provenance is provided when the passage references a white settler context:

I never get tired of the story of how Mom and Dad met and married. They were introduced by a friend in the old country on a Wednesday. He asked her father if he could walk her to church that Sunday. (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009e, p. 8)

In this case the reader is assumed to understand the reference to the old country as Eastern European based on the other clues in the selection – names like “nana” and

“poppa” and later, reference to the Ukrainian word for cabbage rolls. Similarly the reader is assumed to understand the significance of going to church as a central social gathering in Eastern European society with no explanation provided to assist with that understanding. These assumptions are based in white settler practices and experiences and while they are given literary terms such as allusion and context clues, the reality remains that a white settler middle class background provides a significant advantage in recognizing what is being alluded to. The first passage would be much less clear to a reader without background in First Nations culture if the provenance were left out: “by the time of the opening Grand Entry there was about two hundred people here from other places” does not provide sufficient contextual information to assist the white settler reader in visualizing the scene other than to picture a crowd of people gathered together.

In addition to texts giving significance to white settler social norms and experiences, several of the texts disadvantage students who live in poverty by virtue of what they make significant and what they assume as readily available to all students in terms of experiences. While these advantages are not specifically white settler in nature, the fact remains that in Saskatchewan, an overwhelming percentage of students who live in poverty come from First Nations, Métis or new immigrant backgrounds. As a result, texts that reference knowledge and experiences specific to middle to high income socio-economic groups advantage students from those groups – generally those students from white settler backgrounds. Of the 50 reading passages, 18% disadvantage students who come from poverty. For example, in the *2005 Grade 10 Reading Assessment*, the selection *Banishing Blemishes* references a number of options for treating acne. Students

who do not have the funds to access many of these solutions will not be able to relate to the suggestions in the same way that students who have tried these solutions can relate to them and make connections. Suggestions such as “us[e] a gentle oil- and fragrance-free cleanser”, “apply a topical acne treatment containing benzoyl peroxide, glycolic acid or salicylic acid over your entire face”, “conceal the blemish using a dab of makeup right on the pimple.... many cover-up products are available to improve appearances while healing the blemish” and “if over-the-counter medications don’t help your acne problem, see a doctor or dermatologist for an antibiotic or other prescription” (Saskatchewan Learning, 2005f, p. 3) all require sufficient disposable income as well as access to specific stores and services. Students without the income and/or the access are disadvantaged when trying to relate to this text in the way the author intends them to.

When looking at the closed response assessment items in the reading assessment, distinct patterns around significance are also observed. Each question consists of a stem and four options that have been designed by the item creator to measure student comprehension of the passage and student use of reading strategies. The item stem poses the question and in doing so foregrounds an idea that the item creator has made significant through inclusion. The options provide the possible answers for the question posed, including by design only those four options that the item creator has made significant, again through inclusion. Consider the following examples from the 2009 Grade 10 assessment. The text in question is a poem, *Defining Freedom* as shown in Figure 5.1.

The first question asks the student how long academics have argued over the nature of freedom. The options provided are “a few years”, “decades”, “hundreds of years” and “thousands of years”. Posed in this way, the question foregrounds the length of time that academics have been arguing over the nature of freedom, backgrounding the assumption that academics actually do argue over the nature of freedom. The definitions provided at the end of the selection for the terms *semantics* and *myopic* indicate that students are not necessarily expected to know those terms.

For millennia  
Philosophers, theorists  
Politicians, anthropologists  
Have argued over the semantics<sup>1</sup>  
The principles, the very nature  
Of freedom.

I have an explanation  
More satisfactory  
Than any of those academics  
Living in their myopic<sup>2</sup> clouds  
Can give.

My dogs  
Chained to that tree  
By a ten foot leash  
Howling and barking incessantly  
Till I let them go.

Then simply to lie down on the grass  
Quiet and satisfied  
Not moving an inch  
From the spot where they were bound.

If ever you want to know what freedom is  
Come and watch  
My dogs.

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<sup>1</sup>semantics: study of the meaning of signs and symbols; interpretation or meaning of a word, concept, sentence

<sup>2</sup>myopic: nearsighted

### Figure 5.1 Defining Freedom

By excluding other terms within the poem from definition, the assumption is that students will bring knowledge of that vocabulary as a part of the shared standard background knowledge common to grade 10 students. This would mean that students are assumed to know what academics are and what millennia are. The correct response is the fourth choice, thousands of years, and the question is categorized as measuring explicit comprehension which the instructions to the student define as asking the student “to find

ideas and information that are directly stated in the text” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009e, p. i). In this case, the reading strategy that is being measured, according to the detailed report multiple choice item analysis, is “using cueing systems” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009q, p. 20). This strategy is defined in the Grade 10 Table of Specifications as “using cueing systems to construct meaning (pragmatic, textual, syntactic, semantic, and graphophonic), and other cues and conventions including visual cues” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2008h). In this particular instance, there are cues within the text to indicate that *millennia* is a term referencing a period of time but, without a common background vocabulary, there are no cues within the text to identify what period of time that might be. Because of the construction of the question with the four options referencing periods of time, the student does not really need to use the textual cues to determine that the term references time, negating the use of cueing systems within the poem itself. The discourse presented is an evaluative model of discourse in which common vocabulary is assumed on the part of grade 10 students; vocabulary that is shared by both the poet and the item creator. This discourse, in turn, stabilizes the belief that assumes grade 10 students have common knowledge and experiences that will allow them to access the correct response to this question.

The second question for this selection asks students which of four given statements best summarizes the first stanza of the poem. In posing the question this way, the item creator foregrounds the selection of the statement that best summarizes the first stanza while backgrounding the assumption that there is a statement that the student feels summarizes the first stanza at all. The word *best* becomes important in this question to

indicate that one of the statements provides a better summary statement than the other three. The correct response, as per the detailed item analysis is, “it is difficult to define freedom only through words and ideas” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009e, p. 2). This question is identified as measuring implicit comprehension and students’ ability to note key ideas and find support within the text. Implicit comprehension items are those questions which “ask [the student] to make an inference or find ideas and information that are not directly stated in the text” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2009d, 2009e, 2009f, p. i). The strategy, noting key ideas and supports includes “determin[ing] main and supporting ideas using prior knowledge, predictions, connections, inferences, and visual clues” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2008h). If the students have the common vocabulary expected in the first question and know that millennia are not short periods of time, the application of the strategy should allow them to conclude that the first option provides the best summary of the stanza. If, however, a student does not share the expected common vocabulary and has erroneously concluded (or guessed) that millennia are short periods of time based on a background from mathematics that sees millimeter as a very short length and milligram as a tiny mass, the distractor “Discussions about freedom have only happened for a short time” provides a viable summary of the stanza. The discourse here is again an evaluative model around experience and knowledge in that a common set of experiences and body of knowledge is assumed that will result in roughly similar responses from all participants and that those participants will have a shared background with the poet and the item creator. As was the case with the previous question, this stabilizes the belief that assumes grade 10 students

have common knowledge that will allow them to access the correct response to this question.

Referencing the same selection, question 10 asks students, “if the concept of ‘freedom’ were applied to teenagers, what would the ‘leash’ be” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009e, p.3)? The options provided include rules, punishment, hunger and reward with the first option, rules, being the correct answer as identified in the detailed item analysis section of the report. In this item the idea of the leash symbolizing something is foregrounded, and in the background is the assumption that the symbolism perceived by the item creator matches that of the student (and/or the poet). If students share a common white settler background it is likely that they will equate leashes and chains, the relevant objects from the text, with rules, thus arriving at the answer the item creator intended. It is possible however, that students could have knowledge and experiences where leashes and chains are equated with one of the other distractors, perhaps that of punishment. The detailed item analysis indicates that this question is intended to have students use the reading strategy of connecting to prior knowledge – “connecting and constructing meaning (making connections to prior knowledge and experiences that relate text to self, text to other texts, and texts to world)” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2008h). This evaluative model of discourse around experience and background knowledge assuming a common set of experiences and body of knowledge means that those participants who do not have that shared knowledge and experience set with the poet and the item creator will not be able to provide a correct answer and will be judged as not having critical comprehension of the text.

Of the 10 questions that reference the poem “Defining Freedom”, four follow the pattern of placing significance on common vocabulary shared among grade 10 students. Of these four questions, three measure implicit comprehension which relies on students’ finding information not directly stated in the text. In these three instances, the information is not really inferred through the text either, rather it comes from the students’ own knowledge and experience, thus disadvantaging those students whose background knowledge differs from that expected by the item creator. These differences between text item creator background and test taker background has significant impact on the difficulty levels of the questions (Bachman, 2002; National Research Council, 2004).

Two more of the 10 items relating to this text reference symbolism as a way of assessing critical comprehension, asking students “to evaluate or make judgements about what was said or hinted at by the text” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2009d, 2009e, 2009f, p. i). If students’ class and race lead to the identification of symbolism within the text that is not consistent with that identified by the item creator, those students are disadvantaged by being labeled as unable to make the expected judgements not for a lack of understanding of the text but rather for a different understanding of the text than was expected.

Moving from the reading assessments to writing, the writing prompts and instructions provided to students reveal similar assumptions made by the test creators through what is made significant. In the *2008 Grade 5 Writing Assessment*, students are given the prompt, “You are a Grade 5 student. Explain in a report what attractions make your favourite town, city, or part of the province interesting to visit. Write your report to

readers of Student Travel Magazine” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2008c, p. 3). Within this prompt, attractions that make a particular city, town or part of the province a student’s favourite are foregrounded, giving them significance. Left in the background are the assumptions that a student has a favourite city, town or part of the province and that the location is interesting to visit based on the attractions the location has to offer. The assumption is also made that what makes a place a favourite of one student will hold interest for other students of the same age within the province. *Attractions* is an important word in this prompt in terms of significance because it reveals that the item creators value places to visit in terms of the attractions they have to offer as opposed to other factors such as family, personal memories or spiritual connections. This prompt models an evaluative discourse that associates events and attractions with the appeal of a place and stabilizes the white settler norm of having a favourite place either where you live or where you go; a place that you are willing to share with others.

The final piece of the assessment that is targeted at the student audience is the *Opportunity to Learn* student questionnaire, also referred to as the student questionnaire. Both the reading and writing assessments include a student questionnaire and in each case the questionnaire is virtually identical at all grade levels being assessed. The instructions at the beginning of the student questionnaire, as is the case in the assessments and practice items, reveal what is valued by the creators based on what is made significant in those instructions. The initial passage of the 2009 student questionnaire in reading states “This is a survey of your activities, both in and out of school, and the strategies you use when you read” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009l, 2009m,

2009n, p. 2). Student activities in and out of school and reading strategies used by students are foregrounded, indicating their being valued through significance. The assumption is made here, as it was in the assessment tool instructions, that students use the strategies indicated within the documents when they read. The reference to the activities students participate in assumes that the students are participants in the particular activities the survey creators chose to include, given that an exhaustive list is not possible. As a result, the instructions reveal an evaluative discourse of what students do and don't do based on typical white settler student activities and white settler classroom teaching practices. This discourse, in turn, stabilizes the discourses of school as it exists in Saskatchewan – the format of which has remained essentially the same for well over a century.

In the same introductory instruction set, students responding to the student questionnaire are assured that “there are no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ answers” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009l, 2009m, 2009n, p. 2) in the second bullet of the instructions but in the seventh bullet of the instructions direct reference is made to incorrect answers with the statement “if you need to change an answer, put an X through the incorrect answer” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009l, 2009m, 2009n, p. 2). Although this is not necessarily an intentional reference to right or wrong, there is an importance placed on the correct/incorrect binary through the signification of the word incorrect.

Moving to the items within the student questionnaire, the valuing of some activities and situations over others is made clear through significance within the survey items. Value is attached to school libraries through the question “How would you

describe your school library? (Fill in ALL that apply)” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009l, 2009m, 2009n, p. 3). This question foregrounds describing the student’s school library, backgrounding the assumption that there is a school library to describe. Although one of the responses provided is “We don’t have a school library”, it is the last response on the list, placing it in a position of insignificance in comparison to the other eight possible responses. Within those first eight possible responses, the assumption is that the library has a variety of resources and the foregrounded idea is the usefulness and interest of those resources to the student for academic purposes. Words within the responses such as *variety*, *good*, *useful*, *like*, *open* and *help* all imply positive traits and accessibility, reflecting again what the item creators value and attaching the question to relevant objects in the resources students might access in the school library including print and electronic resources as well as human resources and space/environment resources. All of these factors within the question reinforce an evaluative discourse of what makes a high quality school library and an espoused discourse of the benefits of a school library to student learning. Students whose only available response is “we don’t have a school library” are left to question their own learning opportunities in the absence of this obviously valued resource.

In another type of question, where students are asked to respond on a four-point rating scale that ranges from “Almost Always” at one extreme to “Hardly Ever” at the other extreme, they are faced with the statement “I forget my books or other materials for class” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009l, 2009m, 2009n, p. 11). While this statement foregrounds the idea of forgetting to bring books or materials to class, the

assumption is being made that said materials are readily available to the student. The evaluative discourse here sees having the appropriate materials at hand as being prepared for class and willing to work, not considering that not having the appropriate materials at hand does not necessarily indicate an unwillingness to work. A student may not have materials at hand because he or she cannot afford the materials expected by the teacher or because his or her family situation has prevented the student from accessing the materials on that particular day, for example. This discourse stabilizes the idea that students have control over their life circumstances with respect to accessing and retaining possession of school-related materials.

#### *5.1.2 Teacher Materials*

The teacher materials for the reading assessments differ from year to year. In 2005 there were no teacher specific materials other than the *Opportunity to Learn* questionnaire. In 2007, there was a teacher resource booklet as well as the questionnaire and in 2009 there was a teacher handbook provided as well as the questionnaire. The teacher materials for the writing assessments consist of an online pre-assessment writing package and a teacher handbook as well as an *Opportunity to Learn* questionnaire. When looking at significance in the teacher materials it is important to remember who the authors are and for whom the materials are written. The authors, the test creators in this case, reveal a great deal about what is valued with respect to trying to measure reading and writing levels and what is assumed about students' knowledge and experiences in this communication to teachers about the assessment tools and their use.

In the *2008 Assessment for Learning in Writing* pre-assessment materials, teachers are told, “[Students] will become competent and confident language users through using the language cueing systems and conventions in varied opportunities to view, listen, read, represent, speak, and write” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2008b, 2008e, 2008i, p. 2). This statement foregrounds the importance of language cueing systems and conventions in becoming competent language users (writers) while excluding any other practices that allow students to develop as competent language users. The imperative around using cueing systems and conventions is repeated, adding emphasis through both repetition and bold text, in a section of the pre-assessment package entitled *What is Writing*. “In order to be effective writers, students have to understand **language cues and conventions**” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2008b, 2008e, 2008i, p. 4). The statement foregrounds the necessity of understanding language cues and conventions. In the background is the assumption that students cannot become effective writers in any other way than by understanding language cues and conventions. The discourse in these statements is an evaluative model of discourse around what writing instruction will impact. That discourse stabilizes the belief that there is a recipe for what will constitute success for students and that it is up to the student and teacher to follow that recipe properly to improve student writing. This type of statement is an example of the assimilation perspective with respect to students that if only they could spell better, read better, speak better English then all would be well (Smith, 1993). The same perspective also extends to teachers in this discourse in the idea that if only

they would teach language cues and conventions and teach the writing process as laid out in the curriculum then their students would succeed.

Through the discourse of the pre-assessment materials there is a portrayal of what the test makers consider to be effective writers. In the initial section of the materials under the heading *What is Writing*, the authors state again, “in order to be effective writers, students have to understand language cues and conventions” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2008b, 2008e, 2008i, p. 4). The espoused model of discourse inherent in this statement links higher literacy to effective writing which in turn links to writing skills and to language study. These linkages demonstrate the valuing of a particular form of writing, and indeed language, that is privileged above all other forms of language, stabilizing the idea that a specific way of expressing oneself through writing is better or more correct than all other forms of written expression. Contrary to the literature that denies any one form of a language being superior to another, the pre-assessment materials go on to assert that “‘Standard’ English in a register most appropriate to the intended audience is usually employed. In general, Canadian English is recommended for written use” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2008b, 2008e, 2008i, p. 23). These statements foreground the idea that standard English in the form of Canadian English should be used for writing and that there is a shared understanding among educators of what constitutes standard English. Specifically the pre-assessment packages inform teachers that “Standard Canadian English follows widely accepted rules of usage and conventions” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2008b, 2008e, 2008i, p. 7). The background assumption is that all students and teachers will be familiar with and

comfortable with using this particular variety of English regardless of their knowledge and experiences. The important word here is *standard* because its use implies that there are other forms of English that are not standard and perhaps do not meet a certain standard making them somehow less valuable (sub-standard even) than so-called standard English. This implication stabilizes the evaluative discourse that situates white settler English as the norm for written language and holds all other varieties of written English in comparison to that norm. The closer a student's written work comes to replicating the norm, the better the student achieves as a writer.

“Usage refers to the choices writers make in vocabulary and construction. It is the established or customary use of words, expressions, constructions, syntax, and spelling in a language” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2008b, 2008e, 2008i, p. 47). This statement from much further into the pre-assessment materials reinforces the idea that white settler English, the dominant form of English in Saskatchewan, is privileged over other varieties of English students may be familiar with. The foregrounded statement around the customary use of words and expressions backgrounds the assumption that all students share the same experience as to what is customary. This discourse is an evaluative discourse around language use that assumes common background knowledge and a common set of experiences for all students at a particular grade level. More importantly, it is an assumption that privileges those students who share that common language use, generally gained through sharing common race and class, with the test creators.

The discourse around students sharing common background knowledge is also evident in the teacher materials for the 2007 and 2009 reading assessments. Teachers are informed of the strategies being tested, and therefore valued, in terms of reading proficiency. As shown by use of an asterisk (\*) in Table 5.4, of the six strategies identified as being critical to reading comprehension and providing evidence of student reading achievement, three refer explicitly to students' access to and use of prior knowledge (Saskatchewan Learning, 2007k; Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2008b, 2008f, 2008j). A fourth strategy relies on students sharing common understandings of language and vocabulary, another form of prior knowledge that comes from the communities in which the student has developed his or her language use. The connections to prior knowledge and background form a discourse around what students bring to reading, specifically the idea that there is a body of knowledge and experience that all students at a grade level are expected to share. Based on the information regarding the number of questions relating to each of the strategies, the three strategies that access a

Table 5.4 Strategies used to measure reading comprehension

Assessment Grade and Year	Using Cueing Systems		Connecting to Prior Knowledge*		Making Inferences/Predictions*		Noting Key Ideas & Finding Support*		Summarizing/Recalling/Drawing Conclusions		Recognizing Author's Message & Craft	
Gr 4 2007	11	18%	9	15%	11	18%	11	18%	9	15%	9	15%
Gr 7 2007	11	18%	9	15%	11	18%	11	18%	9	15%	9	15%
Gr 10 2007	10	17%	9	15%	11	18%	11	18%	10	17%	9	15%
Gr 4 2009	11	18%	10	17%	9	15%	11	18%	9	15%	10	17%
Gr 7 2009	12	20%	10	17%	6	10%	12	20%	10	17%	10	17%
Gr 10 2009	12	20%	10	17%	6	10%	12	20%	10	17%	10	17%
Totals	67	19%	57	16%	54	15%	68	19%	57	16%	57	16%

Source: Saskatchewan Ministry of Education Assessment for Learning in Reading Detail reports 2007-2009

student's prior knowledge and experience represent 168 of the 360 questions, almost half of the closed response assessment items. If the background knowledge and experiences the students are being expected to access comes from their out-of-school experiences then almost 50% of the questions disadvantage those students whose lives do not parallel those of the white settler item creators.

In the Teacher Handbooks for the writing assessment, teachers are informed that “Students will be expected to demonstrate effective writing behaviours by using pre-writing (before), drafting (during), and revising (after) strategies” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2008m, p. 4; 2010m, p. 8). This statement foregrounds the use of a particular writing process that students have been taught while excluding any other writing processes that students may use and backgrounding the assumption that this specific process will result in a high quality written product if followed by students. The discourse here is evaluative, setting one process as better than any other in terms of how effective writing is created. The discourse reinforces the belief among teachers that there is only one correct way to develop a good piece of writing and that way is the method that has been settled upon by the curriculum writers and test creators who are relatively homogenous in their backgrounds and experiences as Saskatchewan educators. This discourse also pushes teachers who do not necessarily share the belief that there is a single path to good writing to either change their own belief system or classify themselves as deviant from the espoused norm of Saskatchewan teachers, calling into question their own identities as qualified professionals with respect to the teaching of writing. Although teachers share some similarities as a group by virtue of the

requirements to be certified as a teacher, they are not a homogenous group as individuals and certainly do not share a common background and set of experiences in a broader sense. This discourse, while reinforcing a belief among many teachers, also defines limits and excludes teachers who, like many students, do not come from a white settler English background.

Although the Assessments for Learning in Reading and Writing are not standardized assessments in the strictest sense, there are elements of standardization to the assessment itself. Teachers are encouraged to manage the assessments over the course of three sessions that will total three hours of classroom time. They are also instructed to introduce each session to the students by reading a prepared script designed for that particular writing session (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2008m, 2010m). The instructions stop short of dictating dates and time of day for the assessment sessions but do suggest through the scripts what portions of the writing process should be undertaken and completed in each session. This timing suggested through the scripts gives significance to the pace at which students work, valuing the linear progression of the task over the creative side of the process. The provision of exact wording to read to students in the form of scripts for each session gives significance to a particular way of sharing instructions that may or may not resonate with all students. If the students are not used to the wording used in the scripted instructions, which are identical for all grades of each of the assessments, they are potentially disadvantaged over other students whose teachers use similar language to give directions on a regular basis. This scripting reinforces the

valuing of a particular way of speaking and using English over all others, and in this case it is the way the test creators have determined directions should be shared.

The *Opportunity to Learn* questionnaire for teachers that accompanies each reading and writing assessment is the final piece of the assessment package aimed specifically at teachers. These documents also make certain aspects of reading and writing and teaching reading and writing significant while rendering other aspects or methods less significant through the discourse of the questionnaire. In the reading teacher questionnaire, teachers are provided with a list of 27 reading strategies. For each strategy listed, the teacher is expected to select one of three choices as to how that strategy has been treated in their teaching for the school year: “explicitly taught”, “reinforced or incidentally mentioned” or “not addressed” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009o, p. 4). The inclusion of the 27 strategies in the list gives them significance over any other reading strategies teachers may teach or reinforce. The list, then, becomes an evaluative discourse of what strategies should be taught to produce effective readers. This discourse stabilizes the idea that if a specific repertoire of isolated skills are taught, students will read effectively. The assumed converse to this idea is that if students do not exhibit use of the strategies listed they will not be good readers. Similarly with respect to teachers, regardless of how well students read, if teachers teach a specific repertoire of isolated skills they have taught effectively, but if teachers do not teach the strategies listed they will not be good teachers.

In the writing questionnaire, there are 36 writing strategies presented to teachers and a similar identification of the frequency with which the teacher has presented the

strategies during the school year is requested. In the next part of the questionnaire the creators of the instrument ask teachers how well their students are doing as writers. The response foregrounds the necessity of knowing and using the strategies as a part of being good writers. Teachers are asked to indicate, “What percent of your students have an adequate understanding of writing strategies?” and “What percent of your students can apply their writing strategies to a variety of text formats?” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2010o, p. 20). By foregrounding the understanding and use of writing strategies as indicators of effective writing, the item creator backgrounds the assumption that these strategies are the only elements that allow success in writing.

### *5.1.3 Scoring Materials*

In both the reading and writing assessments, scoring materials are provided to teachers to assist them in scoring the assessments for classroom reporting purposes. In reading, the closed response items are scored electronically by scanning student answer sheets. Consequently the only scoring materials provided for closed response items are answer keys identifying the correct option for each question. For the open response items in reading and for all writing items, the scoring materials consist of rubrics, coding guides and exemplars of student work. While provided to teachers to allow them to assess their students’ work for classroom purposes, open response item scoring materials are initially written for the use of scorers in the centralized summer scoring sessions.

Over the course of the years during which the assessments have been administered, the scoring rubrics have not changed a great deal. The same rubrics are used for all grade levels with the exemplars serving to assist teachers, students and

parents in understanding what each rubric level looks like based on the question in the context of the specific student grade level. The *Reader Response Rubric* is designed to be generic enough to apply to any open response item in the assessment regardless of text type or content (see Figure 5.2).

In the *Reader Response Rubric* for the reading assessments there are five levels identified and student work is assessed and coded to fit in one of the five levels in each of four areas: 1) Addressing the prompt, 2) Understanding of the text, 3) Providing support from the text to justify the response and 4) Making connections between text and self to background knowledge and experiences. Within these areas the descriptors of the each of the levels quantify what a response at that level should include. The language used within the level descriptors provides the evaluative discourse around what is valued in an expected response. In the addressing the prompt area, significance is given in each level descriptor to how much of the prompt is addressed but it is only at the “Insightful” level, the highest of the five, that how well the prompt is addressed is made significant. Because the reader response item prompts include three or four distinct elements in each case, this backgrounds assumptions as to how these two factors fit together.

While the word *thoroughly* is important in the descriptor of the *insightful* level on the rubric which states, “all parts of the prompt are addressed thoroughly” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2009d, 2009e, 2009f, p. iii), the remaining levels deal only with how much of the prompt is addressed. Taken as an overall unit of sense, the levels of performance around addressing the prompt give significance to the quality (thoroughness) of the response at the very highest level.

### READER RESPONSE RUBRIC

*(This rubric will be used to assess the written response question.)*

This response is...	Insightful	Thoughtful	Generalized	Simplistic	Inadequate
<b>Addressing the prompt</b>	All parts of the prompt are addressed thoroughly	All parts of the prompt are addressed	Most parts of the prompt are addressed	Some parts of the prompt are addressed	No parts of the prompt are addressed
<b>Understanding of the text</b>	Demonstrates a thorough understanding of the text, offering an insightful response	Demonstrates a strong understanding of the text, offering a thoughtful response	Demonstrates an adequate understanding of the text, offering a generalized response	Demonstrates a limited understanding of the text, offering a simplistic response	Demonstrates an inadequate understanding of the text, offering an irrelevant response
<b>Providing support from the text to justify response</b>	Demonstrates insightful support with full details	Demonstrates thoughtful support with considerable details	Demonstrates generalized support with some details	Demonstrates vague support with minimal details	Demonstrates irrelevant support with no details
<b>Making connections between text and self to background knowledge and/or experiences</b>	Demonstrates perceptive, sophisticated connections to background knowledge and/or experience	Demonstrates logical, thoughtful connections to background knowledge and/or experience	Demonstrates obvious, straightforward connections to background knowledge and/or experience	Demonstrates vague, limited connections to background knowledge and/or experience	Demonstrates no pertinent connections to background knowledge and/or experience

Figure 5.2 Reader response rubric (2009)

This rubric provides an evaluative discourse that ties completeness of a response – in this case addressing all parts of the prompt, to how thoroughly any one part of the prompt can be addressed, effectively valuing completeness over quality at all but the very highest level of the rubric. What is also communicated is that thorough treatment of some of the prompt is no more valued than general treatment of some of the prompt. This discourse provides an evaluative discourse model of student work that privileges less thorough responses that address each part of the prompt over thorough responses to most of the prompt while parts leaving out, stabilizing the idea that compliance with the directions is valued more than the specific content of the response which may or may not be what the scorer expected to read.

In the section of the rubric dealing with the student's understanding of the text, an insightful response is characterized as "demonstrat[ing] a thorough understanding of the text, offering an insightful response" (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2009d, 2009e, 2009f, p. iii). This descriptor gives significance to the demonstration of understanding through offering a response to what has been read. While the expectations that students understand the reading selection and have a personal response to the text are reasonable in the context of a reading assessment, the important words in the descriptor reflect assumptions being made on the part of the scoring leaders as to what constitutes thorough and insightful. Since the criteria for being thorough and/or insightful are not stated within the rubric, the individual using the rubric must interpret terms and decide what those criteria might be. It is likely the interpretations will not be the same for the grade 7 reader referencing the scoring rubric as she writes as they are for the teacher-scorer referencing the rubric either alone in his classroom without input from other teachers or as a part of the centralized summer scoring process where each descriptor is thoroughly discussed and agreement around terms is reached. With the assistance of the exemplars and the application of their background experience and training as teachers, the scorers may already share similar perspectives as to what insightful and thoughtful work looks like. If individual scorers do not share those perspectives, the efforts of the scoring leaders to bring everyone to consensus and therefore produce similar scores for similar work also serve to pressure those individuals to abandon or at least put aside their perspectives temporarily or risk being marginalized as deviant from the majority of scorers.

This common background assumption also reinforces an evaluative model of discourse around student experience and background knowledge. A common set of experiences and body of knowledge among students at a particular grade level is assumed and that common background is expected to result in roughly similar responses from all respondents, stabilizing the belief that students share common background and experiences typical of students who are a part of the white settler majority.

In the fourth area of the *Reader Response Rubric* referencing making connections, the descriptors of the levels focus on the quality of students' connections with the text. At the Insightful level, the descriptor states that a response “demonstrates perceptive, sophisticated connections to background knowledge and/or experience” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2009d, 2009e, 2009f, p. iii). As was the case in the Understanding section of the rubric, the degree to which the students and the scorers share similar backgrounds and values impacts the way in which the Making Connections area is scored. The descriptors *perceptive* and *sophisticated* are determined by judgements on the part of the scorer - if the connection of the texts to experiences and background knowledge differ significantly between the scorer and the respondent, as is the case when class and race differ significantly between the scorer and the respondent, there will be a deviation from what is expected and the judgement of perceptive and sophisticated is unlikely to be awarded.

The exemplars provided across the three administrations of the reading assessments show an evolution of the scoring materials. In 2005, the first reading

assessment administration, the rubric was provided as a set of five levels with the four areas being considered together (see Figure 5.3).

The 2007 rubric is very similar to the 2009 rubric shown in Figure 5.2, with minor organizational differences. The exemplars booklet for 2007 also provided clarification for the rubric (see Figure 5.4). This clarification quantified what the various rubric levels would look like in terms of student work and the accompanying examples of student work were used to illustrate parts of the rubric. The timing of the provision of these materials is important – the Exemplars booklet was not available to teachers scoring the assessment in the classroom. The booklet was compiled from materials used at the central scoring session in the summer and posted on the *Assessment for Learning* website in the fall, after the results were tabulated. The discourse of the scoring guide is parallel to that of the rubric, privileging white settler middle class knowledge and experiences through the need to connect with the same things the white settler scorers and scoring leaders perceive to meet the requirements for high level responses.

**READER RESPONSE RUBRIC**

<b>5</b>	<i>Demonstrates thorough understanding of the text and the prompt, offering insightful responses with explicit support from the text and sophisticated connections to background knowledge and/or experience.</i>
<b>4</b>	<i>Demonstrates strong understanding of the text and the prompt, offering thoughtful responses with direct support from the text and thoughtful, logical connections to background knowledge and/or experience.</i>
<b>3</b>	<i>Demonstrates adequate understanding of the text and the prompt, offering generalized responses and obvious, straightforward connections to background knowledge and/or experience.</i>
<b>2</b>	<i>Demonstrates limited understanding of the text and the prompt, offering a simple retelling or vague, limited connections to background knowledge and/or experience.</i>
<b>1</b>	<i>Demonstrates inadequate understanding of the text or the prompt.</i>

Figure 5.3 Reader response rubric (2005).

Figure 5.4 2007 Reading assessment scoring guide

In the coding guide for informational text which is being used in conjunction with the text “Bottled Water Creating Problems”, the prompt asks the reader to

Use evidence from the text to note four points presented in the article concerning bottled water consumption.

What action could you propose as solutions to one of the concerns mentioned above? What actions, other than those mentioned in the article, could you propose? Explain why your proposals would be effective. (Saskatchewan Learning, 2007f, p. 15)

In the rubric, a score of *Insightful* with respect to *Making Connections* is described as “demonstrat[ing] perceptive, sophisticated connections to background knowledge and/or experience” (Saskatchewan Learning, 2007g, p. 14). The coding guide provides clarification with the statement “Must have one perceptive connection between text to own background knowledge and/or experiences or comments regarding personal, community or global repercussions of solutions” (Saskatchewan Learning, 2007a, p. 143). The idea of one perceptive connection is foregrounded in this statement with the word perceptive given importance. The inclusion of the reference to personal, community or global repercussions of solutions is given less significance coming at the end of the statement and not being awarded a qualifier such as *perceptive*. The ongoing evaluative discourse of what is perceptive and in whose view that definition is developed still remains, privileging the responses of white settler students over those of students connecting with non-white settler groups in terms of background knowledge and experience.

In the *2009 Assessment for Learning in Reading*, the coding guides were among the scoring materials that were provided to teachers at the time the assessment was administered. These coding guides provided more specific information for teachers who

wanted to score the student work prior to sending it back to the Ministry of Education, information that was previously only available to teachers after the results had been scored and reported. The provision of scoring guides potentially facilitates a closer match between teacher-assigned scores and those assigned later through the central scoring process for the same piece of work. On the other hand, the practice also reinforces and stabilizes the perception of what constitutes connection, what perceptive looks like and how students should understand text based on the white settler backgrounds and experiences of the assessment creators and scoring leaders.

The *Assessment for Learning in Writing* in 2008 included simple three-level rubrics in the student materials and examples of three-level student and teacher rubrics in the online pre-assessment package. The rubrics used in the scoring process were posted on the *Assessment for Learning* website in the fall of 2008, after scoring was completed. There were three sets of rubrics used: 1) a three-level process rubric that was not shared with students in the assessment materials, only in the online pre-assessment package if the teacher chose to use it; 2) a set of four-level writing process and writing product analytic scoring rubrics that were not shared with students in any form; and 3) a set of six-level writing product analytic rubrics that were not shared with students. Additionally a set of three-level writing product analytic rubrics were shared in the online pre-assessment package that do not appear to have been used in the scoring process.

In 2010 there were no analytic rubrics included in either the student materials or in the online pre-assessment materials; rather, both included a checklist type of scoring guide that students could use in guiding their writing and teachers could use in scoring

the writing for classroom purposes before sending the booklets back to the Ministry of Education. The online pre-assessment materials included a five-level holistic scoring rubric in Appendix B prefaced by the statement:

In order to facilitate comparisons amongst assessment data from different subject areas (reading, writing, math, science), the Assessment for Learning Unit reports on student achievement in writing will convey data according to the following five level rubric. (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2010c, p. 46, 2010f, p. 50, 2010i, p. 51)

The idea of facilitating comparisons amongst assessment data is foregrounded here, backgrounding the assumption that such comparisons are desired and valid. The level descriptors place significance on writing elements rather than content, stabilizing the evaluative discourse around ways of knowing that privilege being able to express knowledge in writing over other ways of exhibiting knowledge and understanding. Sentences in the level descriptors such as “the student controls language elements and techniques effectively” and “the writing shows an uncertain grasp of basic language elements and techniques of composition” give significance to the control of language that does not take into account the validity of diversity in linguistic background. The unstated assumption is that the language elements and techniques sought by the scorers are those elements and techniques common to white settler linguistic backgrounds – what the curriculum references as standard English. It is unclear what additional rubrics and/or scoring guides may have been supplied to teachers participating in the summer scoring session as, at time of writing, none of those materials had yet been made publicly available.

There is also an *Opportunity to Learn* rubric included in each of the assessment material packages. Although the rubric is not used by individuals to score any student or teacher work, it provides descriptors of the five levels of opportunity that are used to report student opportunity to learn in each of the measured areas. The actual scoring takes place mechanically and electronically as the *Opportunity to Learn* questionnaires are scanned and the responses to the individual items are mapped to specific levels and processed through computer software. The rubric provides another lens on the discourse around wide-scale assessment, student identity, norms and results. This item could also be classified as a part of the reporting tools in that it informs stakeholders about the components of *Opportunity to Learn*; I will deal with it as a rubric in the scoring materials section.

The *Opportunity to Learn* rubric for reading is divided into five categories: 1) Preparation and commitment to learn, 2) Student knowledge and use of reading strategies, 3) Home support for reading, 4) Availability and use of resources and 5) Classroom instruction and learning. The first three categories are informed by student responses to the *Opportunity to Learn* student questionnaire although, in the case of the reading assessments, there is no indication as to which specific questionnaire items connect with each part of the rubric (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009r).

The *Opportunity to Learn* rubric for writing has a similar construction to the rubric for reading. It too is divided into five categories: 1) Propensity to learn, 2) Knowledge and use of writing strategies, 3) Availability and use of resources, 4) Instruction and learning, and 5) Family/home support for writing. The Propensity to

Learn, Knowledge and Use of Writing Strategies and Family/Home Support for Writing categories are connected to questions on the student writing questionnaire. Availability and Use of Resources and Instruction and Learning are connected to questions asked of teachers through the teacher questionnaire. The specific questions tied to each part of the rubric are identified in the rubric itself. (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2008n)

Context around *Opportunity to Learn* is provided by the Ministry of Education as articulated in the preamble to the *Writing 2008 Opportunity to Learn Rubrics*:

Fundamental to the Assessment for Learning Program is a recognition of shared responsibility for student achievement. Both indirect interaction with students (e.g., grants, funding structures) and direct interaction with students (i.e., readiness related, classroom related, and support related) affect student achievement.

The term, “Opportunity to Learn,” refers to student attitudes, commitment, and engagement, as well as to the circumstances within the home and school that work to promote or detract from student achievement. (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2008n, p. 1)

The preamble gives significance to “the circumstances within the home and school that work to promote or detract from student achievement” while leaving in the background the assumption that students with a certain set of circumstances, generally those found in middle class white homes will be privileged towards higher achievement over students who do not have ideal circumstances. Similarly student attitudes, commitment and engagement are foregrounded against the assumption that students with the right attitude and high levels of commitment and engagement will succeed in terms of writing achievement. This preamble sets the tone for the entire *Opportunity to Learn* component of the *Assessment for Learning* program through an espoused discourse model that links a desired combination of student attitudes, home circumstances and

value systems around education to high levels of student achievement. That espoused discourse emphasises the white settler belief system that privileges written language over oral language as the way to conduct the business of society.

Examples from the reading and writing *Opportunity to Learn* rubrics support this discourse and, in the case of the writing rubrics, acknowledge the role of the discourse in developing student identity around writing. For example, consider the following two levels in the *work habits* section of the Preparation and Commitment to Learn area of the reading *Opportunity to Learn* rubric. Level 2, the second lowest level on the rubric is characterized by the following descriptor:

The student sometimes tries to do his/her best work and usually finishes short and interesting assignments, but may give up and quit when the assignments become longer and more challenging. Effort is made, but the time spent doing homework often falls short of what is needed to complete assignments and understand the work. (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009r, p. 1)

Level five, the highest level in the same category, is characterized by the descriptor:

The student completes all assignments, showing his/her best work. In addition to spending sufficient homework time to complete these best works, the student likes to read and engages in self-directed reading activities for personal enjoyment. (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009r, p. 1)

In both cases the connection between student effort and interest level of assignments is foregrounded leaving the assumption that a student's work habits are primarily based on factors of choice that are within the control of the student. This evaluative discourse around work habits sees students who do complete their work and exhibit high quality work as having excellent opportunity to learn while those who are generally unable to produce work at a particular level of quality as having less sufficient opportunity to learn. Through the statements in the rubric, it is suggested that the determination of work

quality is used to make a judgement about a student's attitude and effort. Using circular logic, the (lack of) attitude and/or effort is then used to make a judgement as to why a student's work may lack a particular level of quality. This whole process stabilizes the idea that effort and quality of work produced are matters of choice where good students choose to complete their work and do it well while poor students choose to leave work unfinished or apply little or no effort.

In the category of Home Support for Reading, the same type of judgement is evident. The descriptors for each of the five levels foreground the importance of reading as communicated by a parent, backgrounding the assumption that all parents should view reading as important. The descriptors also foreground reading to children as the way parents demonstrate the importance of language learning while completely leaving out other ways of knowing such as the oral tradition of storytelling that is predominant in First Nations and Métis culture. The descriptors as they are written provide an evaluative discourse that privileges written language over oral language through reading to children as opposed to any other form of knowledge sharing. In turn this reproduces the white settler norm of written language as the route to power and linking reading proficiency with intelligence, competence and a right to power and privilege.

#### *5.1.4 Reporting Materials*

The reporting materials available for the Assessments for Learning in Reading and in Writing for all administrations of the assessments have remained relatively constant with only minor changes and additions being made from year to year. In each instance, a school division receives a set of detailed division level reports on both the

assessment results and the *Opportunity to Learn* questionnaire responses. As well, the division is provided with parallel school level detailed result reports. In each case, with the exception of the 2005 Reading Assessment, the division has also been provided with a shorter summary report of division results and parallel summary reports of school results to facilitate communication with parents and other interested members of the public. In addition to the Summary and Detail reports, school divisions are provided with a *Subpopulation Report* detailing results in specific areas for populations within the overall student population. The subpopulation report for an assessment reports the results disaggregated by gender, by First Nations/Métis self-declaration, by community school status and by participation in French Immersion programming. School level subpopulation reports are not provided. In spite of all the levels of reporting available, no provincial reports have been generated for any of the *Assessment for Learning* administrations; instead, provincial data is included in each division level report for comparative purposes.

The audience for each of the reports is somewhat difficult to discern. Both the detail and summary reports are provided to school division directors of education who in turn may choose to share the reports with the board members, rate payers, school administrators and other interested groups. Some school divisions choose to post the entire reports on their school division websites where anyone can access the information. Others provide information gleaned from the reports to individuals and stakeholder groups through presentations at board meetings, through their annual reports and by using other venues and media as they see fit. The school level detail reports are likely written

for school-based administrators and teachers to provide information about the performance of students from that individual school in comparison to the division and to the province. The school level summary reports are written “primarily for school-based administrators, teachers, and School Community Council members” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009k, 2009l, 2009m, p. 1) which includes both educators as well as elected groups of parents and community members who are responsible to work with the school in development of the school’s learning improvement plan. The *Assessment for Learning* results are to be utilized within that planning process to work toward improving student achievement. (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2008n).

The *Opportunity to Learn* questionnaire report and the *Subpopulation Report* for each division are also provided to the respective directors of education. The nature of these reports indicates that the audience is likely to be comprised of senior administrators with background as educators. In the *Opportunity to Learn* questionnaire report it is stated directly that the “report is intended as a reference document for administrators, teachers and others showing the percentage distribution for every question asked on the language arts teacher questionnaire, and on the student questionnaire” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2010g, p. 1). The information could be disseminated to other stakeholders at the discretion of the school division. In some cases, the reports are posted on the public website in the form they are received with no further explanation provided with the online post.

Looking at the summary and detail reports for both divisions and schools there is considerable significance given to what the reports are not. The first section of the front

pages of the summary reports in both reading and writing begin with the heading “Notes, Considerations and Cautions”. This placement gives significance to things the reader must be aware of or watch out for as the report is being read. The statements “When planning for improvement, it is recommended that educators and other participants consider multiple measurements, more detail, and several perspectives (lenses), both from this assessment and other data sources.” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009q, p.1) and

The results are more reliable when larger number of students participate and when aggregated at the provincial and division level, and should be considered cautiously at the school level. Individual student mastery of learning is best determined through effective and ongoing classroom-based assessment. (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009q, p. 1)

foreground the use of multiple sources of data and large populations to get reliable data about student reading and writing achievement. There is a background assumption to the whole reporting process that schools and divisions will use the information to plan for instruction and provide supports for student learning, an assumption which contradicts the cautions made in this section. The discourses themselves appear to be in contradiction to one another. On one side of the contradiction, we have the espoused discourse that providing data around student achievement based on an assessment tool that matches curriculum is a reliable way to improve teaching and learning and therefore student achievement in our schools. At the same time, that discourse is in dialogue with an evaluative model of discourse around the validity and reliability of wide-scale assessments when applied to small populations such as the students in a single grade in a single school. The resultant discourse is one that espouses the theory of the thoughtful

and reflective use of data to improve student learning but at the same time doubts the value, on all but the most general of levels, of the data being collected and presented through the available tools. This apparent contradiction allows the members of the education sector to talk about what should and could be while still reproducing the existing status quo around which students (white settler) are privileged and which students (First Nations and Métis) are marginalized based on existing assessment results.

Within the body of each summary report, the content is divided into three areas. The student results are described to attempt to answer the questions 1) How well are standards being met; 2) How do the results compare to the division/province; and 3) How do the results compare over time? Throughout the report, significance is given to comparing the results to standards or other groups to arrive at answers to these questions. With the significance given to comparisons, the validity and reliability of the actual results is assumed and not mentioned. This assumption goes back to the dialogical discourse created within the report itself and underlines the complexity of trying to answer questions of comparison using only the *Assessment for Learning* data and applying those comparisons within populations of as few as five students.

Having examined what is made significant in the discourses of the assessment documents, in the next part of the matrix I look at the voices of the discourses. This section of the analysis examines the relevant voices included in (and excluded from) the discourses and the relationships between voices and discourses within the various documents of the Assessments for Learning.

## 6. VOICES, DISCOURSES AND THE RE-CONTEXTUALIZATION OF SOCIAL EVENTS IN ASSESSMENT TOOLS

### 6.1 Relationships between voices and discourses

The voices that make up every discourse, the ways in which those voices are included (or excluded), their relationships to one another and their relationship to the discourse itself, impact the way relationships are built, sustained or changed through the discourse. Fairclough refers to those whose voices are a part of discourse as social actors, and sees them as having a significant role in the creation of discourse through the re-contextualization of social events. It is important to note that the reader of the text becomes one of the social actors once he or she engages in the discourse through reading the text. The relationships between the social actors, including the reader, are defined in part through Foucault's conditions of discourse. These four conditions, revolving around the right of the speaker to speak, the speaker's membership in the group qualified to speak, the doctrine that surrounds the voices of the speakers and the structures, such as the education system, that make speaking possible all work to impact the authority of the speaker to speak and to be heard by the other social actors. All of these factors are visible in the relationships among the voices, both those included in and those excluded from the discourse. In looking at the relationships among voices within the texts, we ask how the components of the discourse are being used to "build and sustain or change relationships of various sorts among the speaker, other people, social groups, cultures and/or institutions" (Gee, 2011, p. 115).

Two of the key voices in the discourses of the Assessments for Learning are the authors (authors of the reading texts, authors of the assessment tools, and authors of the reports) and the readers (students, teachers, scorers and members of the public). How the reader sees him or herself in relation to the author impacts how the reader connects to the text. This connection is important on multiple levels within the discourses of the *Assessment for Learning* materials. On one level the student as reader is connecting with the materials and being constructed as a reader based on his/her relationship with the texts. On another level, teachers and scorers are constructing ideas of students as readers, the subjects of the assessments, through their interaction with the texts which in turn are describing the interactions of the students with the text selections and questions. Teachers and scorers are also being constructed as teachers through their interaction with the teacher and scoring materials. A third level involves my own relationship with the discourses while writing this thesis as my voice is now involved in the context of my knowledge and experiences as I create yet another discourse around the instruments.

To explore the relationships in each of the text groups I asked first which relevant voices were included and excluded and then what other voices, if any, were also included. The next question I ask is one of attribution of voices, either direct or indirect, and finally I ask how the voices are textured in relation to one another. This exploration of the relationships between voices in the text and the social actors reading the text helps to delineate how the discourse is working to define the identities of students as readers and writers.

### 6.1.1 Student materials

There are essentially three types of text within the student materials: the instructions, the informational and literary texts (reading only) and the assessment items. Within each of these, there is a pattern to how the voices are included and textured in relation to one another. With respect to Foucault's conditions of discourse, the authors of the assessment tools certainly have the right to speak and are members of the group qualified to speak. The doctrine of the assessment program and the K-12 education system fulfil the other two conditions giving the authors (or test creators) a relevant voice in any of the discourses of the assessments. Looking first at the instructions to students there is a definite tone of authority on the part of the speaker leaving little room for any other voices to be included in those particular texts. Here are three examples from the first page of the *Grade 7 2009 Assessment for Learning in Reading*:

In this booklet you will be asked to read and think about three texts. You will need to use your reading strategies to make certain you understand each text.

To determine the answer, you need to think about what the author intended.

You need to think about what is said in the text and what you already know to answer this kind of question. (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009c, 2009d, p. i)

The author of the assessment is telling the reader, in this case the student, what he or she will be asked and what he or she will be doing. The statements are written from an authoritative perspective evidenced by the directives "you will need to...", "you need to think about..." and "make certain you understand each text" (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009c, 2009d, p. i), but where that authority lies is unclear. It might be that the authoritative voice we hear represents the voice of the Ministry of Education

assessment unit. It could also be a representation of the Ministry of Education curriculum branch, the people who create the various curricula which are being assessed through the use of the *Assessment for Learning* program. Regardless of which entity is perceived as speaking, that entity is entitled to speak by virtue of having met all four conditions of discourse. As a result, the relationship with the reader is one of authority. For some students, that voice of authority may be equated with the teacher or principal who has been working with students to ensure students are putting their best effort into the assessment process. Regardless of where the reader perceives that voice to be coming from, it is the only voice that is included in each of the statements shown. The reader is the other relevant voice in each discourse. In every case, the voice of authority dominates with the expectation that the teacher's voice, although unheard in the text, will be in alignment with that authority and the student will have the strategies deemed appropriate by the authority. In every case, the author's voice is privileged over that of the reader with the reader's voice being excluded from the discourse.

The reading passages are a second type of text within the student materials that include a broad range of voices in the discourse. Texts are unique to the reading assessments having no comparable component within the writing assessments. Within these text selections that students read as a part of the assessment process, the authors are varied and the inclusion and texturing of voices within the passages are at the discretion of those authors. In each passage how the reader situates him or herself with respect to the voice(s) in the text impacts on how well that reader connects with the passage and is able to respond to it. For example, the selection "The Nose Knows" from the 2009 Grade

7 reading assessment is a dialogue between two friends, Melanie and Robert, as they discuss the statements and actions of a third friend, Carla, who is not present at the time of the conversation (see Appendix B). Robert's voice throughout the passage is textured as having knowledge and wisdom, both through the statements that Robert makes and through the way in which Melanie treats him – as an individual from whom she seeks advice. In the critical part of the conversation, where the facts of the issue are raised and countered, Robert is painted as the voice of reason in counterpoint to Melanie's self-centered voice and Carla's much less prominent voice as someone having a problem with her friend Melanie. The identification of the reader with any or all of the three speakers in this passage will work to create connection with the text itself. Making such connection is less likely if the reader does not identify with any of the included voices and as a result the reader's voice is excluded from the discourse.

The importance of the variety of voices and how they are textured in relation to one another within the text selections revolves around the building of relationships among the social actors. In any situation, relationships between individuals are enacted and contracted as an operative and consequential part of that situation (Gee, 2005). As a student interacts with each text he or she develops those relationships with the author and with social actors within the text. One's relationship to others is closely connected to one's own identity and therefore the student's relationship to the discourses of the assessments impacts on the individual's identity as a student.

The third type of text in the student materials includes the questions dealing with the texts, the *Opportunity to Learn* survey questions and the prompts provided to students

in the writing assessments. Within the questions, there are distinct voices included and the exclusion of particular voices is also evident in many of the questions. Using the previously described text passage, “The Nose Knows”, we can look at one of the questions that would be typical about any of the passages, asking the student to look for the key message conveyed by the text:

What key message does the author want to convey?

- A. Perfume is full of chemicals such as ethyl acetate and camphor.
  - B. Anyone who wears perfume should be aware of other people's allergies.
  - C. When we want to resolve our problems, we should talk to a go-between.
  - D. Students who have a summer job flipping burgers are very responsible.
- (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009c, p. 4)

Within this question the item creator’s voice is heard as the entity posing the question to the student. The author's voice is referenced directly in the stem of the question but the item creator’s voice is privileged here through the authority to speak as a member of the group setting the assessment. To be successful in the assessment, the reader is expected to determine what the author was communicating through the text. The reader's voice is included if s/he shares the point of view of the item creator but the reader’s voice is excluded completely if that reader does not identify with any of the four potential key messages presented. The item creator’s interpretation of what the author has written has salience as the core of the question and the correct response. Although likely not the case, one could argue that the author’s voice may actually be excluded if the item creator has taken a different interpretation of the text than the author intended any reader to have.

### *6.1.2 Teacher materials*

The teacher materials are, for the most part, written as directives to teachers telling them how to prepare students for the assessment, how to conduct the assessment,

and how to properly package and return the assessment materials to the Ministry of Education. For example, teachers are told “students will record their answers to the practice questions on the accompanying answer sheet. Ensure that students use the correct side of the answer sheet” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009o, p. 8). As was the case with the instructions to students, the voice included here is that of the assessment creator, in this case the Assessment for Learning Unit of the Ministry of Education. The conditions of discourse having been met, the assessment creator’s voice is that of authority and is textured as having dominance in the discourse of the teacher materials.

Some statements are phrased as suggestions rather than direct instructions such as this point from the same teacher handbook:

Results from previous assessments have shown that students whose teachers marked and provided feedback and/or incorporated this assessment mark into their classroom evaluation plan performed better than students who did not have their assessments scored at the classroom level. (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009o, p. 7)

While not written as an imperative, the voice of the assessment creator is textured here as the voice of experience by referencing the results of previous assessments. If the teacher is in agreement with the statement he or she shares in that voice of experience and thus sees his or her own voice reflected in the statement, building a relationship with the assessors and identifying as a member of the privileged group holding authority. If the teacher is not convinced that including the assessment in the classroom evaluation plan is a good idea, that teacher would see the voice of the counter opinion as being excluded and by association, his or her own voice being excluded from this text. That voice of

dissent is also excluded by virtue of Foucault's conditions of discourse in that the teacher who does not agree with the test creator speaks without being a member of that group of teachers who hold the experience referenced in the statement, therefore making the knowledge of those teachers outside the agreeing group a subjugated knowledge when held against the knowledge attributed to the test creators.

In addition to the handbooks for the assessments, selected parts of the online pre-writing materials are included in the teacher materials set. Within the online pre-writing materials the statement "the Ministry of Education has provided this Online Writing Pre-assessment Package to help support what students have already learned about both expository and narrative writing formats" (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2008c, 2008g, 2008k, p. 1) directly attributes the narrative voice to the Ministry of Education. This statement sets the conditions of discourse privileging the Ministry of Education as the only voice included; students are talked about throughout the materials but as peripheral social actors only, their voice is not included in the discourse. In terms of texturing the voices in relation to one another throughout the online pre-assessment materials package, the ministry is the voice of authority in complete dominance over the silenced student and teacher voices.

### *6.1.3 Scoring materials*

The scoring materials are very similar to the teacher materials in that they are constructed by Ministry of Education personnel to give direction to the scorers, most of whom are teachers. The rubrics are written for a broader audience of students and teachers and to some degree parents and other interested members of the public as a part

of reporting results. Within the rubrics the voice of the assessment creator is included as having met the conditions of discourse and providing the voice of authority. No other voices are included.

#### *6.1.4 Reporting materials*

The reporting tools, especially the summary reports, are written for members of the general public – parents, ratepayers, board members – who each have their own background knowledge and experiences that impact their perception of assessments and assessment results. The report authors are one relevant voice included in the report materials and, similar to the cases of the teacher materials and the scorer materials, the authors of the reports fulfil the conditions of discourse. What is different in the report materials is the attribution – the statements are directly attributed to the *Assessment for Learning* program: “When planning for improvement, the Assessment for Learning Program recommends that educators and other participants consider multiple measurements, more detail and several perspectives (lenses), both from this Assessment and other data sources” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2007h, 2007i, 2007j, p. 1). As well, the texts of the reports acknowledge other relevant voices within the discourses of the reports. By referencing stakeholders and inviting discussion of the report contents, those stakeholder voices are, to a degree, included as relevant to the discussion. Because of the way the voices are textured in relation to one another, the report authors appear to be including teachers, parents and division personnel – indeed anyone reading the report – as relatively equal in the discourse.

The tables and figure permit the reader to consider results in light of standards and normative comparisons, and may assist in further investigation and target areas

for potential improvement. We encourage reviewers to consult the website to look at the questions, the curriculum guide to review the objectives, and to consider other evidence and pedagogical research during further investigation and the improvement planning process. (Saskatchewan Learning, 2007h, 2007i, 2007j, p. 9)

The language usage through the terms *permit*, *consider*, *may assist*, *encourage* and *consider* invites the reader to engage with the text of the report and become an active participant in the reporting of the data. This engagement builds a relationship between the reader and the report creator that is one of partners in the assessment with the report writer taking less of an authoritative stance while giving the reader an opportunity to identify with the text as a member, to some extent, of the group meeting the conditions for discourse.

The voices included in the discourses and the relationships between the voices and the discourses provide a sense of who is able to speak through the discourses. What is spoken about is equally important to the overall discourse of the assessments. The third portion of the matrix is used in analysing the discourses of the Assessments for Learning with respect to the re-contextualization of social events.

## 6.2 Re-contextualization of social events

To understand how the key elements of social agents and social events interact to produce the discourses of the assessments for learning I turn to the re-contextualization of social events through discourse. To understand the interactions involves identifying which elements have been included in and which elements have been excluded from the discourse and looking for the social themes that are evident in the text along with the point of view from which those themes are expressed. Fairclough views texts as

contributing to the construction of the reader's identity, so that, just as advertising texts contribute to the development of an identity as a consumer, so do assessment texts contribute to the development of an identity as a learner. He also sees discourse as reflective of the socially constructed realities of the individuals involved in the discourse. Social events are always represented in the context of the social event of creating the text, a re-contextualization process that involves the social agent doing the re-contextualization applying filters that work to select which elements of the event are to be represented and how that representation will occur (Fairclough, 2003).

### *6.2.1 Student materials*

The re-contextualization of social events in the individual passages of the reading assessments are a good example of how that process works to reflect socially constructed realities and to develop students' identities. Consider again the grade 7 reading selection "The Nose Knows" (see Appendix B). In this constructed script meant to mimic actual events, the writer is recounting a dialogue between two friends. The author is re-contextualizing the event of the conversation as he or she sees it, possibly from the point of view of an observer although that information is not provided. Along with the statements made by the participants, the author has chosen to relate some, but not all, of the body language and non-verbal components of the interaction. In doing so, the author has filtered the elements of the event and chosen which elements merit inclusion and which are not sufficiently important to be included.

The selection begins with the statement "Two friends meet in a café." This is an element of the event the author has chosen to include out of the almost infinite number of

elements that could be included. The author has not chosen to include anything about the surroundings, other individuals at the café, whether or not the two friends, Melanie and Robert, are there as customers or simply as a location to meet. The author has chosen to keep the surroundings for the conversation in the background, signalling their (lack of) importance in the event that is being re-contextualized. In the dialogue itself, Melanie responds to Robert's question of "What's new?" with "Nothing too exciting. Although I did go shopping at this amazing new mall in Calgary and I bought myself a lot of nice things" (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009c, p. 1). Within this statement the author of the dialogue has filtered for inclusion again – the events of going shopping, going to Calgary and buying things are included but the interactions with other people which undoubtedly occurred are among the elements left out of the retelling.

Throughout their conversation, Melanie and Robert in turn recount events, re-contextualizing those events through the retelling as well. In describing her summer activities, Melanie relates that she "learned how to fish. It gave me a legitimate excuse to laze around on the lake, read, relax and take in some rays" (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009c, p. 1). What the author chose to have Melanie include and exclude constructs a particular social reality and a particular identity for the character in the dialogue. Students who read the passage are then influenced in terms of their own identities and social realities much as consumers are influenced by the texts constructed by advertisers. In this statement, the inactive elements of fishing are included but the active work of fishing is excluded from the text. In terms of the representation of events, learning how to fish is a concrete event while lazing, relaxing, reading and taking in rays

are less concrete events that happen on an ongoing basis. Throughout the reading passage, the theme develops that Melanie enjoys a lifestyle that allows her to focus on her own wants and preferences while remaining essentially unaware of the effects of fulfilling some of those desires, in particular the wearing of scented products, on those around her. The way the author has re-contextualized the event of the conversation underscores some other themes that may not have been included intentionally and therefore provide some insight into the assumptions and discourses that the author subscribes to. One of these themes is around gender roles. Throughout the passage the context elements in the conversation paint a picture of Melanie as privileged, lazy, self-centred and uninterested in the way the things she enjoys function and affect others. Robert is characterized as hard working, caring, considerate and knowledgeable about a broad range of topics including how the human body reacts to scented products and why some people react more negatively than others.

Reading through the conversation it is also possible to discern the author's point of view regarding the use of scented products. Phrases including "the smell of perfume is almost impossible to detect when you are outside", "perfume contains lots of different chemicals", "perfume contains ethyl acetate", "perfume irritates the eyes and respiratory tract" and "perfume contains camphor" all represent the author's inclusion of information regarding the negative effects of perfume. Other effects of scented products such as those related to aromatherapy benefits and the practices of specific belief systems are excluded.

Throughout this portion of the dialogue, perfume takes on the role of the actor. For example “perfume irritates the eyes and respiratory tract” sets up a sentence construction where perfume is the actor carrying out the active process of irritating the eyes and respiratory tract. The human beings involved are merely passive recipients of the processes, not even directly referenced in the dialogue at this point. Instead the group of individuals negatively affected by perfume are social actors but the statements are phrased in a way that broadens that group to all human beings.

The level of abstraction in process that the author brings to the dialogue ranges from the concrete: single events such as shopping at a mall, flipping burgers or sneezing and wiping eyes, to more abstract: generalization of series of events that border on social practices such as the wearing of perfume and the effects of perfume on people coming into contact with perfume wearers. In this instance of recounting a conversation the author does not represent any of the processes in total abstraction as social structures.

The arrangement of elements within this text is dictated by the flow of the conversation being shared. The author has chosen however, to set up a sort of binary between sharing information in the form of facts about perfume provided by Robert and the opinions provided by Melanie. In doing so, the author has organized a traditional statement of a binary where the dominant side (in this case the scientific facts) is presented ahead of the lesser side, in this case, opinion. The author has perpetuated binaries around gender associations with respect to science versus aesthetics, working hard versus having fun and considering others versus focus on self. This organization of

elements within the passage impacts social reality being constructed through the reader's interaction with the text.

The questions that go along with the individual reading passages are more important to this research than the reading selections they reference. In choosing what to ask and what not to ask, the test creators have full control of how they re-contextualize the acts of reading and understanding the texts. By selecting what to ask about each passage, the test makers decide what they want the reader to have focused on and what they want the reader to simply ignore or treat as being of peripheral importance. By selecting the options to provide in closed response items, the item creators limit the ways in which the students are able to express the ways in which they relate to the reading passage. It is in the asking of questions and the provision of the distractors that the item creators are able to add to the text, introducing their ideas as to how students may relate to that text and what they might derive from reading that text.

The questions associated with "The Wired Teen" (see Appendix C) illustrate how the event of reading the article is re-contextualized in the setting of the test items associated with it. In a question regarding a visual image of student activity on the world wide web presented by the author, students are faced with a set of four of options

The reference to "teens wandering aimlessly around the Web, tripping onto sinister sites and bumping into shady characters" (paragraph 6) refers to

- a stereotype of young computer users.
- most teens' attitudes about Internet use.
- an accurate reflection of teenage computer users.
- a warning that teens are unaware of Internet dangers. (Saskatchewan Learning, 2005e, p. 12)

The item creator has chosen to include the reference to have students identify the connections they make between the text and the world around them. By including this reference representing either a stereotype or perceived reality (choices a and c respectively) there is a focus on the fact/opinion binary. The other two options, b and d, are inclusive of two points of view – one being a generalization of teen attitudes and the other being a statement around generalized dangers on the Internet – but what is left out is also indicative of the item creator’s point of view. The item creator has not chosen to include the distractors “most adults’ attitudes about teen Internet use” which could also be a legitimate inclusion. While individual questions alone do not comprise the re-contextualization of reading the passage, a set of questions, such as the 10 questions attached to each reading selection, provide exactly such a re-contextualization. The answer to the question above, according to the test creators, is that the reference is to a stereotype of young computer users.

Looking at the other questions associated with this passage, the theme of stereotyping is evident in three of the 10 multiple choice questions as well as being the focus of the open response item

“The Wired Teen” discusses a stereotype of teenagers and technology. Explain the stereotype of teenagers and technology that is discussed in the passage. Discuss how such stereotypes emerge and tell whether you think they are fair, based on your own knowledge and the information in the passage. (Saskatchewan Learning, 2005e, p. 14)

While Sue Ferguson, author of the original McLean’s article that was printed in May 2000, may or may not have been focussing on stereotypes in her article, the assessment

creators have added that element through the questions that are being posed around the passage.

### *6.2.2 Teacher materials*

Re-contextualization within the teacher materials occurs mainly in the restating of curriculum information within the context of the assessment. Teachers are expected to use the Saskatchewan curriculum in their daily practice and that curriculum forms the basis for each of the assessments. The assessment creators have taken information from the English Language Arts and French Language Arts curricula and provided an assessment framework, essentially a summary of the curriculum information and how it scaffolds the assessments in reading and writing. This summary can be found in the grade-specific tables of specifications for the assessments. See Appendix D for the 2009 Grade 7 Reading Table of Specifications.

In the tables of specifications, the goals, outcomes and indicators are directly quoted from the curriculum guides. The assessment creators have written the assessment framework and within the assessment framework, they have stated the strategies that are being measured through the assessment. Each of the strategies is stated in the same way with a descriptive title followed by a sentence describing the actions the strategy entails.

Strategy #7 – Understanding and Personal Connections  
 Extending and applying new understandings or strategies (relate their understanding of texts to personal experiences, purposes, and other texts)  
 (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2008b, 2008f, 2008j, p. 1)

Within the statement of the strategy the events are not represented as concrete specific events; they are represented in a more generalized way as continuing over a series of events. “Extending and applying new understandings” is not a one-time special reading

event in the context of this description. For students to be applying the strategy this must continue over many reading events for the student. Verbs generally indicate processes in an event and in this case the verbs *extending* and *applying* are the processes. Fairclough (2003) talks about process types; these two processes are material process where the student is the actor and the new understandings or strategies are what is affected by the processes. Because we can identify both an actor (the student) and the affected (understandings/strategies) the processes of extending and applying are transitive processes. Because these transitive processes happen without an agent, Fairclough would characterize them as active transitive material processes. Within the statement of the strategy the representation of social actors helps the teacher reading the strategy to understand the discourse around reading that the assessment creator is working to construct. The social actors who are doing the understanding and applying are the students who are being assessed. The students are not directly identified in the statement so they must be inferred because they are backgrounded in the text of the strategy within the larger text of the table of specifications. Even without being directly named, students are the activated social actors in the statement of strategy, enacting the processes directly. Finally, students are generalized into a group represented as the classification of students in general without individuality being recognized.

Taken together, this analysis can provide some insight into the interrelations among the discourses of the various components of the *Assessment for Learning* materials. The level of abstraction presented in the statements of the reading strategies in the *Grade 7 Table of Specifications* taken together with the representation of students as a

generalized group places this discourse in a position hierarchically superior to the discourse of the student assessments and scoring guides which represent students as individuals. The theme here is that students as a general group should behave in a particular way, that way being to apply the reading strategies as iterated in the text of the table of specifications. If individual students do not behave in that particular way they can be classified differently from the general group, leading to the construction of identities and a social reality that sees a norm around reading strategies and compares all students to that norm.

Inclusion and exclusion of elements are also an important part of how an event is re-contextualized. In this case the writers are using the *Assessment for Learning* documents to re-contextualize the English Language Arts outcomes and indicators. Consider the following statement which appears at the top of the *Grade 7 Reading Table of Specifications*:

For the purpose of the Assessment for Learning Reading Assessment Program the following types of text are utilized: literary texts (narrative, script, and poetry), and informational texts (explanatory, persuasive, and procedural). The theme of the texts is in keeping with the Ministry of Education three broad areas of learning: Building Lifelong Learning; Building a Sense of Self and Community; and, Building Engaged Citizens. Questions in this assessment have been designed in relation to seven reading strategies compiled from the English, French Immersion, and francsaskois programmes. A reading strategy may encompass more than one outcome. (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2008f, p. 1)

This statement sets the tone for the re-contextualization of curricular reading outcomes within the context of the *Assessment for Learning* tools. The reference to seven reading strategies informs teachers immediately that the strategies tested are a subset of the reading strategies students are expected to know. There are 20 reading strategies

enumerated within one outcome of the Grade 7 English Language Arts curriculum (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2008o). In the Table of Specifications the assessment writers go on to identify the curricular goals, outcomes and indicators that inform the seven included strategies. In the heading “Indicators” the reader is cautioned that “not all indicators have been included” signalling that a filtering process has taken place in the re-contextualization of the curricular expectations within the assessment materials.

In compiling the seven strategies measured by the *Assessment for Learning* in reading, the writers have both rearranged and added to the original elements of the curriculum by recombining and restating the outcomes and indicators in a new framework. A specific example of this rearrangement can be found looking at Strategy #1 – Cueing Systems “using cueing systems to construct meaning (pragmatic, textual, syntactic, semantic, and graphophonic), and other cues and conventions including visual cues)” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2008f, p. 1). This strategy, tied to curricular outcome CR7.3 in the Table of Specifications is actually tied to a hybrid of a CR7.2 indicator “use cueing systems to construct meaning and self-monitor comprehension” and CR7.3 indicators

Recognize and comprehend the particular purpose (pragmatic cues), textual structures and patterns (textual cues), sentence patterns (syntactical cues), word patterns and meanings (lexical/ semantic/morphological cues), sound-symbol relationships (graphophonic), and other cues and conventions in oral, visual, print, and multimedia (including digital) texts. (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2008o, p. 36)

In re-contextualizing these indicators as a single strategy, the assessment creators have filtered out some of the descriptors around the indicators and have arranged the elements

of the indicators to give salience to those mentioned early in the strategy statement over the visual cues referenced at the end of the statement. The inclusion of the words “other cues and conventions” near the end of the strategy #1 descriptor suggests that other cues are less important than those specifically listed at the start of the descriptor. The use of the word *including* prior to *visual cues* suggests that this indicator might be considered more important than the unmentioned *other cues* therefore needs mention in order to gain a place of importance somewhere between semantic and graphophonic cues and the remainder of the unidentified other cues and conventions.

### 6.2.3 Scoring materials

Analyzing the scoring materials through a lens of re-contextualization provides insight into the perspective of the assessment creators as to how student work should look. The analytic scoring guide for writing product, for example, provides specifics around what the scorers are to look for in student work. In the area of Organization and Coherence the scoring guide states

The main idea is maintained and acceptably developed. Ideas are supported and presented in a reasonable and logical fashion. The text is coherent and transitions are evident. The writing demonstrates a conscious choice of an appropriate format and presents a clear and acceptable beginning, middle, and end. (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2008u, p. 3)

In this statement, the event is the specific event of applying the scoring guide to the student writing being evaluated. It is a concrete representation as opposed to the abstract representation of writing events found in the table of specifications. The breakdown of the components of the statement see various components of the student work as subjects – *main idea*, *ideas*, *text*, and *writing* are all nouns and are the subjects of the verbs. The

verbs are *being*, *demonstrating* and *presenting*, all representing the processes within the statement. The only active processes are *demonstrating* and *presenting*; the first part of the statement deals with existential processes – what is and what is not. The representation of social actors is inferred as opposed to being overtly stated. While the subjects of the verbs are clear, they are things as opposed to people and the social actors, the students doing the writing, are not directly referenced. The statement “ideas are supported and presented in a logical fashion” does not tell the reader who is supporting and presenting those ideas but we can infer that it is the student who is the actor. Since each piece of writing is unique, each time a question is scored the student is a different individual not a generalized group as was the case in referencing students in the table of specifications.

#### *6.2.4 Reporting materials*

In the reporting tools we see how the *Assessment for Learning* program has brought together the re-contextualization of curriculum outcomes and student performance on the assessments. Since the reports cannot report all of the information collected from the assessment results in a verbatim form, the writing of these reports is the most detailed example of re-contextualization within the assessment texts. The summary reports, available for all but the 2005 Reading Assessment, are short and are intended to provide appropriate information to a wide and diverse audience (See Appendix E). It is here that we can see the re-contextualization process at work by comparing the summary reports to the detail reports and to the data we know to have been collected through the assessment process. The statement of purpose at the beginning

of each summary report is used to inform the reader that the re-contextualization process has occurred.

Because this is a summary report, the data reported are selective in content and detail. When planning for improvement, the Assessment for Learning Program recommends that educators and other participants consider multiple measurements, more detail and several perspectives (lenses), both from this Assessment and other data sources. (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009h, 2009i, 2009j, p. 1)

The additional sentences beyond the opening sentence of this statement of purpose acknowledge the existence of other information within the *Assessment for Learning* program materials but give it less importance by the decision not to include it directly in the summary report.

Within the summary reports themselves, the statements around the results are carefully constructed to express a particular theme and point of view. The theme has guided the *Assessment for Learning* program since its inception and that theme is one of using the assessment results to improve teaching and learning. The theme emphasises that the results are not summative measures of student achievement or accountability measures of the effectiveness of teachers, schools or school divisions. This theme can be seen stated outright in the first sections of the report, “the results are not definitive. They do not tell the whole story. They need to be considered along with other sources of information available” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009h, 2009i, 2009j, p. 1). This theme is also evident in the way the text of each report is constructed.

In the summary reports for reading in 2009 the description of the reading performance gives the reader information about the results and how they can be interpreted.

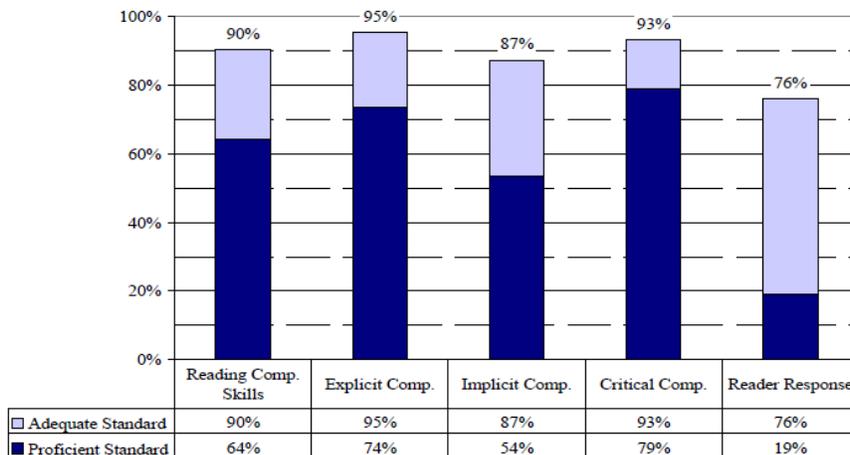
Figure 1.1 shows, for each of the five performance areas, the percentage of Grade 4 students achieving the adequate standard or higher and the percentage achieving the proficient standard. The standards help adjust for perceived differences in difficulty and serve to help interpret which performance areas were met with greatest success. The performance area with the highest percentage of students achieving the adequate (or higher) standard represents the performance area of greatest relative strength. (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009h, 2009i, 2009j, p. 2)

This description of the information represented in the graphic Figure 1.1 includes the percentage of students achieving each of the two standards but excludes direct mention of the remainder of the students who, by definition of not having met the standard of adequate or better can be considered having demonstrated below adequate work in the individual performance areas (see Figure 5.4). The ordering of the information within this paragraph also emphasises the performance of those achieving one or both of the standards by stating the information regarding *greatest success* and *greatest relative strength* while leaving the other half of those binaries *least success* or *greatest challenge* and *least relative strength* or *greatest relative challenge* out of the statement entirely. The use of the phrase “the standards help adjust for perceived differences in difficulty” sends a very soft message with the standards being the subject of the sentence and the verb being help instead of adjust. In this case, helping is the process whereas the writers could have made the sentence much stronger by making *adjust* the process verb.

The graphs shown in the summary report are as much a part of the discourse as the text that accompanies them. In the case of Figures 1.1 and 1.2 from the summary report, the writers of the report have chosen to present this particular subset of information from the wealth of information available to them. As well, they have chosen to exclude the percentage of students who do not meet the threshold of adequacy, leaving

that to the readers to work out for themselves. Similar graphs appear in the summary reports for writing, showing the percentages of students meeting standards but not actually stating what percentage of students do not achieve at least adequacy on the writing assessment (see Figure 6.1). The graph and chart are used to show how many students achieve the levels of adequacy and proficiency. The chart, labelled Figure 1.2 specifically does not mention that 28% of students doing the expository writing task did not achieve at least Adequate in terms of the writing they produce (quality of writing product). The writers chose instead to go with a theme of strengths and highlighted the 72% of students who did meet that threshold.

**Figure 1.1: Percentage of Grade 4 Students Achieving Adequate and Proficient Standards, School**



**Figure 1.2: Reading Strategies - Percentage of Students Achieving Adequate and Proficient Standards**

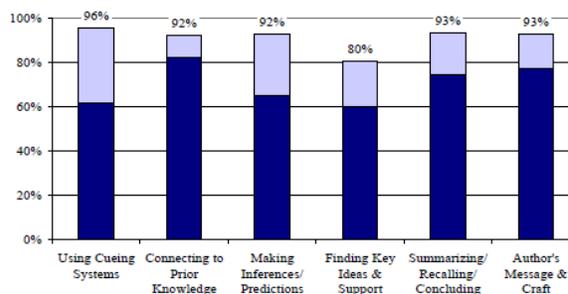


Figure 6.1 Graphs of reading achievement in grade 4 2009 summary report

Figure 1.1: Percentage of Grade 11 Students Achieving Adequate and Proficient Standards, Division

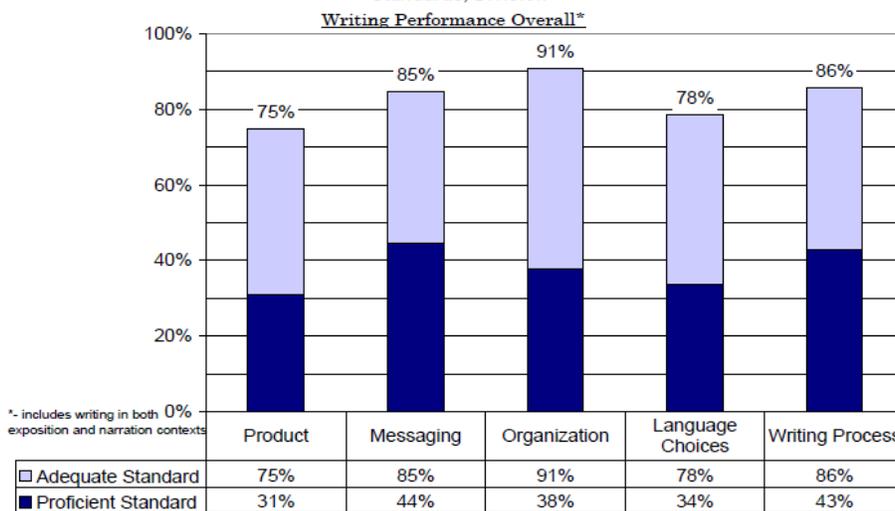


Figure 1.2: Writing Performance (Expository and Narrative) - Percentage of Students Achieving Adequate and Proficient Standards

Performance Area	Adequacy		Proficiency	
	Exp.	Narr.	Exp.	Narr.
Quality of Writing Product...	72%	78%	27%	35%
Message Content and Ideas...	77%	92%	34%	56%
Organization and Coherence...	88%	94%	39%	37%
Language Choices...	80%	77%	32%	35%
Demonstration of Writing Process...	85%	86%	45%	41%

Figure 6.2 Graphs of writing achievement in grade 11 2010 summary report

The detailed reports for the assessments carry on the theme of relating the strengths of the results and leaving the challenges up to the reader to determine. This overall messaging, while positive and celebrating success, re-contextualizes the event of the reading or writing assessment as being in the past tense. The fact that the assessments are identified as being assessments for learning indicates a need to know areas of challenge or weakness in order to improve student learning. “The tables and figures permit the reader to consider results in light of standards and normative comparisons, and may assist in further investigation and target areas for potential improvement” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009q, p. 12). The event of considering the results

is represented as concrete specific event. The reader of the report is one of the social actors included but the writer has carefully stayed away from any directive to the reader, instead using the words *permit* and *may* to ensure the autonomy of the reader in deciding what action to take or not to take. The reader is named in terms of a general group in the report but could be a member of any one of a number of classifications of readers including teachers, administrators, board members, parents or the public. Students, although their performance is the basis for the existence of the report, are only passive social actors in the reporting materials.

The next chapter deals with normalization and identity construction; specifically how the discourses of the *Assessment for Learning* tools use classification and sorting to include and to exclude, defining difference and privileging some while marginalizing others, thus impacting on how students' identities are constructed.

## 7. NORMALIZATION AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION THROUGH ASSESSMENT DISCOURSES

### 7.1 Normalization

In looking at normalization in the fourth part of the matrix I ask questions about using exclusion to trace limits and define difference, about using classification and sorting through the text to bring about inclusion and exclusion, about how sign systems are privileged or marginalized through the text and about how ways of knowing are privileged or marginalized through the text. The answers to these questions will in turn show how Foucault's work on power and knowledge, normalization and examination relate to this research.

#### *7.1.1 Student materials*

The student materials contain multiple examples of how normalization is used to preserve the linguistic dominance of white settler English through the discourses of the *Assessment for Learning* program. One area in which this is evident is in the statements that precede the reading selections, statements that are meant to set a context for the selection and encourage students to engage with the text. The classification and sorting that happens through these introductory statements colours the reader's view of the selection and ultimately the way he or she views the questions posed about the selection. As an example, see Appendix F for the selection "Treaties" and its accompanying questions from the *2009 Grade 7 Assessment for Learning in Reading*. At the start of the text the reader sees the text "many of us are used to 'making deals' with friends or family members. What kind of deals or agreements have you made? Do you honour your

agreements? What kinds of deals could nations make between each other” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009d, p. 5)? As each student reads this statement and set of questions prior to the actual reading selection, there is classifying and sorting occurring based on the internal responses the reader is making to the questions. If “many of us” are used to making deals then what about those who are not a part of that group?

Immediately, a student who does not identify as one who makes deals with family and friends is classified as being a part of the group who are different. Asking about what kinds of agreements have been made and whether or not the reader honours agreements takes this further – within the group classified as being a part of the norm, making deals with friends and family, the types of agreements made and whether or not they are honoured serve to further classify students within that inclusive group while at the same time emphasising the exclusion of those students already identified as deviant from the norm. While those who are included through this classification and sorting process likely will engage with the text, those who are excluded are less likely to even look for points of engagement with the text as they are marginalized by the preamble and construct a reality around the text that does not include themselves as social actors.

Once students begin reading the text, this type of classification and sorting continues, now through the discourse of the text itself which comes from the author rather than the creator of the assessment tool. In the first paragraph of the text selection readers are told “it is important for all of us who live in this province to know what the treaties are, why they were created, and who benefits from them” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009d, p. 4). With this statement, those who identify with living

in Saskatchewan are included while those not permanent residents, residents of border communities or perhaps new to the province are potentially excluded. The underlying question that is not stated but is still relevant, is one of what it takes to identify as “living in Saskatchewan” – is mere residency, even for a single day sufficient? Is there a length of time one must be in the province before one is considered to live here? What about students who attend Saskatchewan schools but live elsewhere for any number of reasons? Even for those students who consider themselves Saskatchewan residents, there is the issue of who benefits from the treaties. Knowing what treaties are, why they were created and who benefits from them from them is privileged as being important in this statement. Sharing the view as presented by the Office of the Treaty Commissioner is considered the norm with other views marginalized through exclusion from mention in the article.

The questions for the selection, written by the item creators, also classify and sort to either include or exclude students. Consider question 3 for this selection. This question asks students to identify one of the four responses provided as being correct.

3. What could be an example of a treaty in your own life?
  - A. a part-time job at the local fast-food restaurant
  - B. an action plan to eat more nutritiously
  - C. a contract with your teacher
  - D. a research project on First Nations people(Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009d, p. 7)

If the student cannot find a response he or she feels is correct then that student is excluded from the group who have the correct response, the normal group. This question is interesting in that it is constructed to expect students to answer with “C. a contract with your teacher”. The strategy that students are expected to apply in arriving at this answer is “Strategy #2 – Connect to Prior Knowledge - Connecting and constructing meaning

(making connections to prior knowledge and experiences that relate text to self, text to other texts, and texts to world)” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2008b, 2008f, 2008j, p. 2). The prior knowledge could be the information students have encountered through the treaty education materials from the Office of the Treaty Commissioner but the information from the reading selection itself, the definition of a treaty taken from those materials, would tell students that there are no correct answers. In this particular case, only 53 percent of students across the province chose the correct answer as identified by the test creators, understandable if the student keyed in on the idea of treaties being agreements between nations as was stated at the beginning of the article, the student would be excluded because none of the responses provided deal with agreements between nations.

The instructions to students around the types of questions they will be asked also serve to define the norms against which students will be measured. Students are informed that “some questions will ask you to make an inference or find ideas and information that are not directly stated in the text. To determine the answer, you need to think about what the author intended” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2009d, 2009e, 2009f, p. 1). In this case reading for face value as opposed to looking deeper into the passage traces limits that define difference, with those students who do not look beyond what the text says directly being classified as deviant from the norm. Those students who think about looking for author's intentions are included while those who read without consciously considering the author's intentions are excluded as being less

capable readers, even if they are, in fact, capable readers who are not metacognitive about their own reading practices.

The highest prevalence of normalization through the questions on the assessment occurs in the questions that deal with implicit comprehension and critical comprehension. In these questions that make up bulk of the questions in each of the reading assessments (See Table 7.1), students are asked to “make an inference or find ideas and information that are not directly stated in the text” or to “evaluate or make judgements about what was said or hinted at by the text” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2009d, 2009e, 2009f, p. i).

Table 7.1 Comprehension types across reading assessments

Assessment Grade and Year	Explicit Comprehension		Implicit Comprehension		Critical Comprehension	
Gr 5 2005	15	25%	28	47%	17	28%
Gr 8 2005	14	23%	32	53%	14	23%
Gr 10 2005	14	23%	32	53%	14	23%
Gr 4 2007	15	25%	23	38%	22	37%
Gr 7 2007	11	18%	23	38%	26	43%
Gr 10 2007	8	13%	23	38%	29	48%
Gr 4 2009	9	15%	26	43%	25	42%
Gr 7 2009	11	18%	20	33%	29	48%
Gr 10 2009	11	18%	20	33%	29	48%
Total	108	20%	227	42%	205	38%

Source: Saskatchewan Ministry of Education Assessment for Learning in Reading Detail reports 2005-2009

In each case, there is a privileging of a particular perception and interpretation of the text over all others and that privileged interpretation is the one that matches that of the item creators which in turn reflects white settler social norms and perceptions. Of the 540 closed response items administered in the nine reading assessments from 2005 to 2009,

80 percent of those items were measuring implicit and critical comprehension which test in part, how closely the student's interpretation of the text matches that of the item creator.

### *7.1.2 Teacher materials*

The teacher materials use normalization to attempt bring teachers together in how they view student work and in how they teach students to apply the strategies and to interpret text. By identifying norms and representing students who meet those norms as being successful, there is incentive for teachers to attempt to assimilate their students to the norms and thus bring up the student achievement in reading and writing for their classrooms and schools.

Teachers are also being constructed by these discourses. The attempt to bring teachers together in how they view student work also means that they are being asked to think, teach and make judgements based on the norms set through the discourses of the assessment materials. If, as individuals, teachers see their own practices and beliefs as being aligned with the ways they are being asked to view student work, to teach reading and writing, to score open response items and to set standards of achievement, then those teachers see themselves included as a part of the dominant majority. This membership in the majority privileges those teachers as normal over colleagues who may not see themselves as a part of that majority and are marginalized as being deviant from the norm. Feeling inclusion as members of the majority, teacher will be likely to self-identify as good or effective teachers since their practices and beliefs are validated based on their perceived alignment with the discourses of the *Assessment for Learning* materials.

Teachers who do not agree with the ways they are being asked to teach and to view student work are marginalized by the discourses of the assessments in a number of ways. These teachers are not a part of the norm and are then identified as deviant, excluding them from the construction of good or effective teachers. This group of teachers may then be constructed as being less adequate instructors for their students than teachers who do identify with the majority. Alternately the teachers who are excluded may see themselves as being the only ones who can see the truth, viewing the majority as being misguided or misinformed and as individuals feel compelled to be champions for students who bring something different to the overall construction of student than what the majority might expect. By virtue of minority numbers, the voices of these different-minded teachers are seldom heard and, over time, they become silent and perhaps, like Spivak's subaltern, unable to speak.

In the pre-assessment package for the writing assessment, teachers are informed that “[students] will become competent and confident language users through using the language cueing systems and conventions in varied opportunities to view, listen, read, represent, speak, and write” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2008c, 2008g, 2008k, p. 2). According to this statement, those students who do not use language cueing systems as described by the ministry will not become confident and competent language users and therefore will be excluded and/or defined as different. Cueing system and conventions use (or lack thereof) will classify students as included in (or excluded from) the realm of confident competent language users. In terms of sign systems, use of cueing systems as prescribed in curriculum is privileged over other forms of communication and

those who become competent and confident language users (of white settler English) are privileged over those who use any other variety of English no matter how competent and confident they are in that variety.

Teachers are also themselves classified and sorted to define norms through their responses to the *Opportunity to Learn* teacher questionnaire items. The questionnaires ask teachers about the reading or writing strategies they teach in their classrooms. The three options for any given reading strategy are “explicitly taught”, “reinforced or incidentally mentioned” and “not addressed”. For the writing strategies, teachers are asked to respond how frequently they have taught each of the writing strategies to their students during the current school year. Because these strategies have been included in the questionnaire they have been given significance. As a teacher goes through the strategies and marks a response for each one, he or she is self-classifying based on the number of strategies taught, the number simply mentioned or reinforced and particularly the number of strategies not addressed. For a teacher to be classified as a having provided normal opportunities to students he or she may feel that marking any strategy as “not addressed” or “never” labels that teacher as deviant from the norm and perhaps reflects on the individual’s worth as a teacher.

### *7.1.3 Scoring materials*

The rubrics and coding guides used for scoring provide a great deal of insight into what the assessment creators believe the norms for Saskatchewan student work in reading and writing should be. Through a combination of the standards that are set, the rubrics that are used to classify student work and the scoring of student work as per the

exemplars provided to scorers, teacher and parents, the norms around what constitutes good reading and writing are clearly defined and described. For example, the scoring guide for the 2008 writing assessment provides scorers with several instructions to help them interpret the statements on the rubric and to decide how those statements apply to individual student work. In the process, the statements are really defining the norm for student work and defining for scorers what deviance from that norm looks like. In the Language Choices section of the scoring guide, scorers are told that “profanity is generally inappropriate, although an occasional ‘Darn’ or ‘blasted’ may suit the context in the piece of writing and/or inoffensively provide emphasis” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2008u, p. 4). In this statement, the assessment creators who are guiding the scoring are defining the use of profanity as different and beyond the limits of what is appropriate. The norm against which students are measured is one of not using profanity. The statement goes on to provide some sense of classification and sorting, allowing that mild profanity, such as darn or blasted, would be appropriate (part of the norm and therefore not deviant) if used inoffensively. Although not stated, the implication on the part of the assessment creators is that other profanities that might be considered stronger or more offensive would classify the student writer as excluded from the normative group, deviant in his or her use of language in the writing process although the context of the piece of writing may support the use of the student’s language choices.

Another note to scorers in the same scoring guide is that “sophistication/polish refers to complexity of language use. e.g., sentence variety used deliberately for emphasis, sentences varied in length, purpose, and structure, or figures of speech that

contribute to tone and style” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2008u, p. 4). Looking particularly at the latter part of this note, figures of speech are often specific to the linguistic background and cultural experiences of the writer. In this instance, referencing figures of speech when instructing scorers about the evaluation of student work brings into the mix the linguistic backgrounds of both the students writing the assessment and the scorers evaluating that writing. If the scorers and students share a common linguistic background, figures of speech used by the students will be familiar to the scorers, in other words, represent the Saskatchewan norm. If, however, the scorers have white settler linguistic backgrounds and the students writing the assessment do not, figures of speech used by the students in their daily lives will not be familiar to the scorers and as such will not be recognized. This has the potential to result in artificially low scores in the area of *sophistication/polish*, not because the students do not use figures of speech or do not use them properly, but rather because the scorers cannot identify those figures of speech in what they are reading and therefore see the student work as falling short of the norm.

In a similar vein, the final note for scorers around language choice is specific to the grade 11 writing that is being scored. Scorers are cautioned that “For the gr.11 expository prompt, an appropriate level of language does not include slang, dialect, or overly elevated/sophisticated language” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2008u, p. 4). This statement is defining the limits of acceptable language choice by excluding slang and dialect. One dictionary definition of dialect is “a regional variety of language distinguished by features of vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation from other regional varieties and constituting together with them a single language” (Miriam-Webster, 2011).

Another definition is “a particular form of a language which is peculiar to a specific region or social group” (Oxford Dictionaries, 2011). If the scorers are not to allow dialect in looking at what constitutes an appropriate level of language use, white settler English becomes the norm since any differences based on region or social group outside of the white settler group are viewed as dialects by the white settler scorers.

The norms defined through the exemplars of student work are harder to articulate than those traced through statements in scoring guides. The exemplars provide samples of student work, scored according to the guides with rationale as to why the scores were awarded. In the case of the exemplars it is often what is not shown that helps to define the norms of student work. In the 2009 Reading assessment, grade 7 students were asked a set of open response questions about an article discussing whether or not school uniforms are a good idea. The scoring guide provides the scorers with guidance as to how to code each student response (see Appendix G). The guide separates the components of the written responses and provides concrete direction to scorers as to what to look for in a response to warrant the assignment of a particular letter code. The letter codes are not intuitive as to defining a level of response, the letters selected for each code level were chosen to allow for efficient keyboard entry of scoring data. In the final component of the analysis, Connections, scorers are looking for evidence of students “making connections between text and self to background knowledge and/or experiences” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009p, p. 1). Taken at face value, this statement does not trace limits or define a norm around making connections. It is quite possible to make connections to any background knowledge or experiences and still be categorized as

responding well through making those connections. The limits are defined within the coding guide for the Connections component. To get the highest score (a W), the student work must show connections that are ‘perceptive/thoughtful/well-considered OR creative/evaluative OR complex’ (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009p, p. 1). This statement asks scorers to define for themselves what the terms included in the descriptor look like when present in student work. To do this, scorer training sessions precede all centralized scoring sessions to ensure that there is a common understanding of what each level of response looks like and thus result in high rates of inter-scorer reliability. The norming process of seeing white settler connections as privileged over other connections students may make comes from the scorer training process as witnessed through the choice of exemplars provided. First, the scorers share a degree of homogeneity by virtue of their teaching experience and education as teachers. Then, in a centralized setting, differences in interpretation of the terms *perceptive*, *thoughtful* and others in the coding guide are discussed and scorers come to a consensus as to what constitutes perceptive in the context of this particular assessment and the selection and prompt the reader is responding to. During the process of discussion and consensus building, scorers with differing views and diverse backgrounds have a voice, but it is a minority voice that is ultimately marginalized in arriving at a collective decision as to what the group will do based on majority agreement. From my own experiences in similar scoring situations, scorers are frequently asked to know and understand the group definition of each term while suspending the way they might ordinarily view the same piece of work in the context of their own classroom. As a result, the consensus view of

what the different levels of connection look like becomes the norm and that norm is decidedly white settler in nature based on the individuals coming to that consensus along with those directing the process. Finally, exemplars are used to demonstrate the application of the scoring codes to actual student work and rationale as to why each code was applied is provided in the justification sections of the exemplars documents.

The exemplars show full student responses to a question and how those responses were coded in each area (see Appendix H). The justification reveals the thinking that went into the awarding of each particular code (see Figure 7.1). In this instance, the student work has been coded at the highest level in each of the categories of Understanding, Support and Connections. The second highest code was assigned for the Prompt category because according to the scoring guide, there was only one specific action identified and explained when to receive a code of W, there would need to be more than one. The justification for a code W in the Connections area describes limits and classifies this student's response as making complex connections to the text, thus including the student in the group of those who read with a high level of comprehension and respond well to the text. This inclusion also marks inclusion into the group of students whose responses to the text match well with the responses the assessment

### **Justification**

**Prompt** – states and explains own view of people who wear uniforms, provides over 4 effects of wearing uniforms, 1 general ‘I would support because...’ and 1 specific ‘picking own wardrobe’ action (R).

**Understanding** – perceptive on first page, thorough thoughtful discussion of both sides of the school uniform issue, specific evidence of understanding the text, refers to sense of belonging and professionalism (W).

**Support** – several specific references to the text (W).

**Connections** – shows complex connections to the text (personality shown through clothes, clothes affect mood) (W).

Figure 7.1 Justification for coding a response from grade 7 reading 2009

creators and scorers expect students to have; responses that they themselves likely have to the text. The excluded group are exactly that – excluded. Their responses are not selected as exemplars because the connections they make to background and experience may not even be recognized as connections by scorers reading through their work. Those students’ work receives codes of X or S because the scorers do not connect to the written work of the students and therefore do not see the responses as having complexity, perceptiveness, thoughtfulness because they are not fitting into the white settler norm that has been defined.

The *Opportunity to Learn* rubrics also provide insight into what norms are defined by the assessment creators in terms of the access Saskatchewan students have to “excellent” and “sufficient” opportunity to learn. The rubrics are constructed based on the assessment creators’ research-based ideas of what constitutes high opportunity versus what constitutes low opportunity in terms of students’ learning environments. What is not taken into account in the labelling of where a student’s opportunity to learn exists on the continuum of high to low are the student’s race and socioeconomic class and related experiences. As an example, one of the indicators of having a high level of opportunity to

learn in English Language Arts is the prevalence of written material in the student's home. The correlation is thought to be that families who value literacy and support students' efforts in reading and writing are providing a high level of opportunity. The number of books and amount of print material available in the home are thought to be indicators of how literacy is valued. In the *Opportunity To Learn in Writing Rubric*, under the Home Support for Writing, the following descriptor applies to levels 4 and 5, the two highest levels in the rubric: "Student has frequent access to a variety of writing models and references; print, digital and audiovisual materials; a work space to do homework, and assistance from an adult or family member to help develop writing skills" (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2008n, p. 14). Contrast this with the level 2 descriptor, "Student has access to some print, digital and audiovisual materials; and a make-shift work space to do homework" (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2008n, p. 14). In each case the limits of what is normal are being described. Access to print materials is one of the limits, and sorting students by the access they have to those materials is an indicator of the support for writing available in the home. Space to do homework is also described as a limit and the statements in the rubrics value permanent space over makeshift space for doing homework. In both cases, the deciding factor does not appear to be will or supportiveness on the part of the adults in the home but rather it appears to be what would be considered a normal socioeconomic status and lifestyle for white settler students in Saskatchewan. It appears, from the norms defined within this particular part of the rubric; that being supported at home in terms of writing is attached to the material wealth that can provide resources and space. The lower level descriptor

does not mention “assistance from an adult or family member” at all, leaving the reader to interpret whether the absence of such assistance is simply assumed if the resources and space are not there or if that assistance is not valuable without the resources and space.

This perspective is also apparent in the reading *Opportunity to Learn* rubric. In the home support for reading section of the rubric, the material wealth of the family is brought into the picture with the statement “The child has a large personal library of books including informational and fictional materials” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009r, p. 3). At the low end of the rubric, the contrasting statement “There may be hardly any reading material in the home. Parent does not take the child to the library” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009r, p. 3). Reading material in the home was measured in the survey questions as number of books, an indicator that reflects a white settler value of possessing books as a measure of valuing education. Oral traditions that pass knowledge from generation to generation through storytelling as opposed to through the use of print do not mesh well with that white settler norm and consequently, students who come from cultural backgrounds that include oral language traditions over print language are defined as deviant from the norm, less supported in their learning and having lower opportunities to learn than their white settler peers.

#### *7.1.4 Reporting materials*

The reporting materials for the assessments for learning in reading and writing convey the messages of what is valued provincially in terms of student achievement in those areas. The text of the reports, including charts and graphs displaying the information about student results, paint a picture of what is considered normal and what

is considered to be outside the norms within the province. Statements about the meaning of results are one way in which the norms are defined and determine how student results are sorted and classified as within the norm or not. In the detailed report for writing, for example, the reader is told

Student performance in a large-scale assessment is dependent on many factors, including:

- the knowledge and proficient use of writing strategies acquired by the student;
- the effort undertaken by the student;
- the conditions in which the assessment is administered; and,
- the level of difficulty of the assessment items.

(Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2010n, p. 3)

Within this statement, the limits of normal are traced as being dependent on knowledge of writing strategies as well as effort on the part of the student and in part, the level of difficulty of the assessment items. In each case, the link back to white settler background as opposed to other cultures or classes provides the example of the desired state, making the provincial norm a white settler norm. In terms of knowledge and proficient use of writing strategies, the statement is referencing the knowledge and use of those strategies as perceived to be appropriate in a white settler context, a topic that has already been discussed earlier in this chapter. With respect to student effort, the way effort is classified is based on the white settler norm of what students exhibit when they know how to “do school”. Finally, the difficulty of any assessment item is increased if the knowledge and experience of the individual taking the assessment does not match closely with the (white settler in this case) knowledge and experience of the assessment creators.

The standard setting process engaged in to develop a way to compare results from one administration of an assessment to the next also sets a white settler norm for student

performance on assessments. In the detailed reports, the standard setting process is described as follows:

In order to establish opportunity-to-learn and performance standards for the 2010 Writing Assessment, three panels were convened (one from each assessed grade), consisting of teachers and post-secondary academics including Education faculty. The panelists studied the writing tasks from the 2010 assessment in significant detail and engaged in a process involving several judgements and discussions to make final deliberations regarding levels of difficulty for each assessment measure. The detailed process undertaken resulted in the establishment of cut-scores for these measures.

The cut-scores for the overall Writing Product were defined as levels three (the threshold of adequacy) and four (the threshold of proficiency) of the five-level holistic rubric. Standard setters worked to clarify the quality of student work that would just meet these thresholds.  
(Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2010n, p. 4)

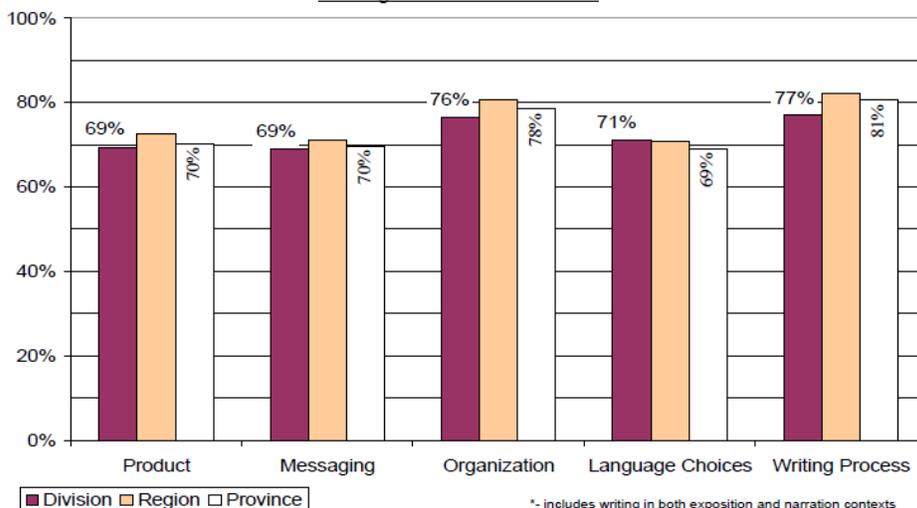
The description of the standard setting process begins by identifying the standard setting panel as being composed of (predominantly white settler trained) educators sharing a (relatively) common (western) educational and pedagogical background as it pertains to student writing<sup>3</sup>. The description goes on to clarify that it is the considered opinion of this generally homogenous white settler group that determines the difficulty level of each question in the assessment and further, determines what portion of the assessment must be done correctly or what level must be achieved on a particular response to meet the

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<sup>3</sup> The standard setting group is meant to be representative of the Saskatchewan context and as such included a small number of non-white settler educators. In some cases this was by design, as in the case of specifically including educators from northern and First Nations schools and in some cases by coincidence depending on the race and personal experiences of the participants. The revised Angoff process used in standard setting involves discussion and building of consensus among group members. In cases where consensus is not able to be reached, the majority opinion in the group tends to win out, meaning that the minority group representatives, also a minority in the standard setting process, are overruled by the dominant white settler majority, perpetuating the dominance of white settler norms, even in the face of significant dissension.

threshold of a standard, sorting results into those that are classified as proficient, adequate or not adequate. Differences in opinion among the group members regarding the cut scores for each standard are dealt with by taking the average of all the values provided by each standard setter. This means that if the majority are in agreement, the voices of those in the minority are effectively silenced as statistical outliers when given the same weight as the more widely represented majority. While adequacy and proficiency themselves do not represent the norms, the percentage of students within a particular school, school division or region achieving those standards brings the idea of normal into the picture. Results are reported in terms of comparative charts and graphs (see Figure 7.2) that show how the local group compares to the normative larger body – school to division and division to province – espousing the belief that each entity should demonstrate close to the same results as its larger comparator group. Normal then, is what the majority of white settler students achieve across the province and even if that is a very low level of performance, the reports would have the reader believe that being at or very near the provincial level is the desired state and the goal that a division or school should be setting.

**Figure 2.1: Percentage of Grade 8 Students Achieving Adequate or Higher Performance, Division, Region, and Province**  
Writing Performance Overall\*



**Figure 2.2: Meaningful Differences in Performance**

	meaningfully higher than the Province	meaningfully lower than the Province
Of the five Performance Areas, the division performed ...	-	-
Within the two context areas, the division performed ...	-	- Writing Process (Expository)

Figure 7.2 Writing results for division, region and province

The comparison of achievement levels and opportunity to learn reinforces the norms that have been defined through the student, teacher and scoring materials. The construction of what constitutes normal in both achievement level and opportunity to learn has been shown to be closely connected with what reflects white settler communities and therefore race and class. Figure 7.3 shows a graphical representation of the comparison between opportunity to learn and the percentage of students who have achieved the standard of proficiency. The purpose of the graph is to indicate to the reader that there is a direct relationship between students’ opportunity to learn and student

achievement of the standard of proficiency in writing. If the norm for attaining proficiency on the assessment items is strongly correlated with sharing white settler knowledge and experiences and the norm for having high opportunity to learn is also strongly correlated with a white settler race and class, the graph represents two measures, each of which are correlated to being part of the white settler group and does not really show any correlation between opportunity to learn and student reading skills and comprehension.

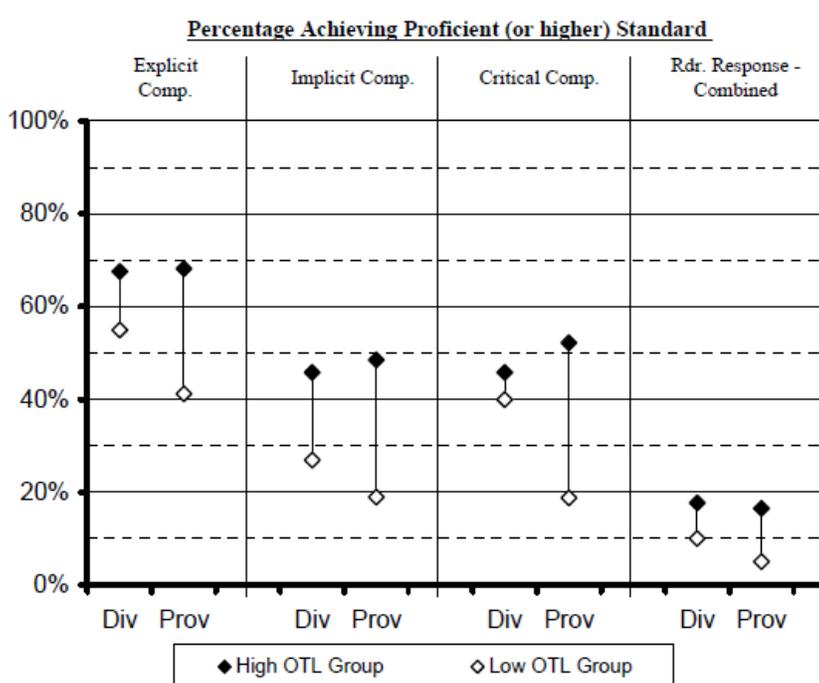


Figure 7.3 Comprehension Comparison between High OTL and Low OTL

As was previously discussed, the implicit and critical comprehension items in reading are more closely tied to sharing race and class with the assessment creators and as such, on a provincial level, the gap between the high and the low opportunity to learn group is greater in those two areas than in the area of explicit comprehension.

In the final part of the matrix I look at the questions of identity – how identity is constructed through text and how postcolonial power relations are reflected in identity construction.

## 7.2 Identity

In this part of the matrix I ask only two questions, 1) what identity or identities are being constructed through the text and 2) how are the identities constructed reflecting postcolonial power relations? Answering these questions entails reviewing the first four parts of the matrix as well as the actual units of text to get a broad sense of the discourse in which the identities are being constructed.

### 7.2.1 *Student Materials*

Right from their initial contact with the assessment materials, students' identities as readers or writers are being (re)constructed as they begin to interact with the assessment. The initial statement in the 2009 *Assessment for Learning* is “Reading is like most things in life--you will reach your highest level of success by doing your best” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2009d, 2009e, 2009f, p. i). In the first part of the matrix, we already looked at how a direct relationship between success in reading and effort is made significant in this statement. We also looked at how the assumption of the importance of reading as an espoused discourse stabilizes white settler beliefs around reading proficiency as an indicator of intelligence and success. Reading is referenced as a grammatical metaphor - a nominalization of the sentence “people read texts”. Nominalization allows the suppression of talking about who reads and who does not, who does his or her best and who does not, and who is actually

successful and who is not. The sorting and classification accomplished within this single short statement appears to be very straightforward. Defining the subject who does his/her best in reading also simultaneously defines those individuals who do not do their best, excluding them as deviant from the norm. In this statement written language is privileged (able to be read) while other language forms such as pictorial sign systems are marginalized. In terms of ways of knowing, knowing through reading is privileged while oral traditions are marginalized in a context based on a culture where print-based communication is privileged over oral traditions for the passing of information from generation to generation. Students faced with this statement are being constructed as readers based more on effort put into reading than on acquisition reading skills. Lack of success at reading is intertwined with being constructed as someone whose efforts, even though those efforts may indeed be the student's best efforts, are not good enough. Postcolonial power relations are evident through this discourse where reading has been privileged as the ultimate way of knowing and good reading is the norm by which comparisons are made. To be constructed as a good reader, one must aspire to the societal (and colonial) norm of making the same connections to the text as do members of the dominant group.

Further instructions to the student reinforce this identity construction, based in large part on whether or not the student is included or excluded from the normative group. The instructions "[i]n this booklet you will be asked to read and think about three texts. You will need to use your reading strategies to make certain you understand each text" (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2009d, 2009e, 2009f,

p. i), foreground knowing reading strategies as necessary to understanding the text. The assumption that strategies are the only things necessary for success and that all students possess these unnamed strategies have students who may doubt their knowledge of reading strategies beginning to exclude themselves from the normal group. Those students are then constructed as less successful readers than other students who are writing this assessment. This construction confirms for students the espoused discourse of a link between the strategies used by good readers and the use of those strategies as indicators of the quality of a reader. It also confirms for students the exclusion from normal of those who do not have (or do not recognize that they have) reading strategies as it implies that they will have no understanding of the texts they are reading. The conscious use of reading strategies is privileged as the way of knowing necessary to understand the text passages and, by exclusion, any other way of knowing is marginalized. Thus the student's identity as a reader is associated with his or her knowledge and use (or possession) of reading strategies. Reading strategies, as per western educational best practices of the day, are a characteristic of members of the dominant group; those with few or no strategies lack power in this paradigm and as such colonial power (im)balances are maintained.

Further instructions to the students firmly set the context for maintaining white settler norms, measuring all students against those norms and justifying the success of white settler students and the achievement gaps experienced by minority students based on those norms. Going back to the instructions, and what was made significant in the text, students are told, “[t]o determine the answer, you need to think about what the author

intended” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2009d, 2009e, 2009f, p. i). Knowing what the author intended leads to a construction of reader that is positive, while not knowing or confusion leads to a negative construction of students as readers. Students’ race and class are also brought to bear in the instructions with students taking their own knowledge and experiences into account as they think about how they fit into the larger group of students being assessed. The statement “You need to think about what is said in the text and what you already know to answer this kind of question” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2009d, 2009e, 2009f, p. i) tells students that their personal experiences, home life and cultural background will impact on their ability to succeed in this assessment. Although students may not realize it on a conscious level, recognizing how what is said in the text connects to prior knowledge (for those who have relevant prior knowledge) leads to positive identity construction while not recognizing connections or not seeing any related prior knowledge leads to negative identity construction. This connects to the colonial norms of white settler society in that thinking about what the author intended is relatively easy for students who share the class and race of the author but considerably more difficult if the students’ class and race don't match the dominant white settler norm generally represented by the author's knowledge and experiences.

Students are continually brought back to the idea of shared experience that is common to all Saskatchewan people be they students, teachers, assessors or scorers. In the reader response sections of the reading assessments students are asked “[h]ave you connected this reading to your own experience, background knowledge, or previous

reading/viewing (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2009d, 2009e, 2009f, p. iii)? Through these questions, the identification of connections has students self-identify with the dominant group whether they want to or not, making students choose between assimilation<sup>4</sup> or resistance through their responses to the texts they have been reading. From a postcolonial power perspective, self-identification with the white settler majority reflects a degree of assimilation and a reiteration of white settler dominance while non-identification, even as an anticolonial act, also reinforces the myth of deserved dominance since lack of connections results in poor reading performance.

Within the text passages students read in order to complete the assessment there are discourses that lead students to either identify with the dominant white settler majority, and thus be constructed as belonging to that group or, alternately to exclude themselves from the dominant group and be constructed as different and perhaps deficient as compared to members of that group. The selection “The Nose Knows” provides examples of this. Students reading the passage are faced with the phrases

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<sup>4</sup> The term *assimilation* is used in several places in this thesis. In the first chapters I reference the historical use of language as a tool to assimilate colonized peoples into the society of the colonizers in an attempt to eliminate the Other from the society in question. Anticolonialism resists this type of control through focused retention of language and the worldviews, values and belief systems that are an integral part of culture tied to language. When assimilation through language is attempted, there is no attempt or desire on the part of the colonizer to recognize the language, worldviews, values and belief systems of the colonized; the attempt is to eliminate all of these along with the language and thus remove the Other as a threat to the power of the colonizers.

First Nations and Métis students who are successful and attain high levels of academic achievement and still retain their cultural identities do so in spite of the current white settler education system. The current education system makes requires minority students who strive for academic success to learn an additional language (white settler English) without providing any of the supports typically afforded to language learners, adding a layer of complexity to achieving success that is not experienced by white settler students.

“Nothing too exciting. Although I did go shopping at this amazing new mall in Calgary and I bought myself a lot of nice things”, “I learned how to fish. It gave me a legitimate excuse to laze around on the lake, read, relax and take in some rays” and “Consider yourself fortunate - it must be nice to just laze around soaking up the sun”, in relation to what Melanie, the speaker, has been doing during her summer holidays. The students reading this passage and trying to make connections to it, as they have been instructed to do, are constructed positively if, in their personal experience, shopping in another province is run-of-the-mill, fishing is a leisure activity and having a job is what prevents lazing around and soaking up the sun. Students will be constructed considerably differently as readers and as members of the normal group if travel of any great distance is not a part of their personal experience, if fishing is done for sustenance either as a source of food to eat or commercially to earn a living, and if negative circumstances outside of the students’ control are what prevents lazing around and soaking up the sun. The positive identities constructed for students connecting with the characters in the script are reflecting postcolonial white settler power in that identity construction that is largely based on factors of class and race.

The *Opportunity to Learn* student questionnaires for both reading and writing also play a role in identity construction and in the maintenance of postcolonial power structures. Students are informed that “[t]his is a survey of your activities, both in and out of school, and the strategies you use when you read” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009l, 2009m, 2009n, p. 2) as they begin the reading survey. The subsequent statements in the instruction portion of the survey give significance to the use of reading

strategies providing an evaluative discourse of what students do and don't do while reading based on a stereotypical white settler student and white settler classroom teaching practices. This stabilizes the discourse of school as it exists in Saskatchewan - the format of which has remained essentially the same for well over a century and whose format was constructed to serve the interests of the white settler majority exclusively through assimilation of all those not a part of that group into it. Again, those students who use reading strategies but do not name them as such or perhaps feel they do not use strategies are marginalized. Students will self-identify as either using or not using reading strategies, with the using of reading strategies being privileged over not using (or not feeling that they use) reading strategies. Reading strategy use is a white settler construct that is reflected in the assumption of the knowledge and use of such strategies. Those with a strong command of the strategies retain power over those without.

### *7.2.2 Teacher materials*

As well as construction of students' identities as readers and writers, teachers are constructing their perceptions of students as readers or writers and those constructions, which in turn influence the ways in which teachers interact with their students, are shaped in part by the discourses of the *Assessment for Learning* tools. In the pre-assessment booklet for writing teachers are told "[students] will become competent and confident language users through using the language cueing systems and conventions in varied opportunities to view, listen, read, represent, speak, and write" (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2008b, 2008f, 2008j, p. 2). As was the case with the student instructions discussed in section 7.2.1, this statement places significance on the importance of

language cueing systems and conventions in becoming competent language users (writers) while implying that the use of such systems and conventions is the only way to become competent language users. Through this statement, teachers are led to believe that students who do not use language cueing systems as described by the ministry will not become confident and competent language users and therefore should be excluded and/or defined as different when talking about students who achieve well in writing. This belief reinforces the idea that use of cueing systems as prescribed in curriculum is to be privileged over other forms of communication. In a broader context, those who become competent and confident language users (of white settler English) are privileged over those who use any other variety of English no matter how competent and confident they are in using that variety of English. Students who are perceived by teachers to be following the rules and are also competent writers are labelled in ways that lead to the construction of positive identities as learners, writers and language users. Students who are not perceived to be following the rules or who have not developed a level of writing expected by the teacher are labelled negatively, leading to the construction of identities as inferior learners and poor writers. This identity construction, in turn, leads to students who do not write and use language in the ways expected by the white settler teachers being identified as proof of the need for the achievement gap and the maintenance of white settler dominance.

Further statements to teachers around language use, effective writing and language study serve to reinforce the privileging of effective writing over other forms of communication with effective being equated to white settler norms and conventions for written work.

This equating is at odds with the cultural backgrounds of minority groups where oral traditions such as storytelling have been the way of teaching and sharing information in a non-print-based system. As a result assimilation of language use to that of the dominant majority in the form of writing according to the form expected by white settler teachers maintains the dominance of the white settler majority.

### 7.2.3 Scoring materials

Some of the rubrics which are part of the scoring materials are also provided to students at the time of the assessment (see Figure 7.4). These rubrics in particular play a role in how students construct their identities as readers and writers.

Students are provided with the rubric to assist them in constructing a high-quality response to the questions, in part by letting them know what is expected in an answer to score at each level of the rubric. While most students who pay attention to the rubric are working to get the best score possible, many who read the criteria for a level can be discouraged before even beginning when they do not see themselves in any of the high level criteria.

The area where this is most apparent is section D, making connections between text and self to background knowledge and/or experiences. If the student does not see connections to make between herself, her background knowledge and experiences and the text, she will place herself on the lowest two levels of the rubric. This leads to the reader then self-identifying with the labels *inadequate* or *simplistic*, words which themselves lead to the construction of a less than adequate reader. From the postcolonial power perspective, the classifications of student work, and to some degree students, as

inadequate or simplistic again works to justify the power of the dominant white settler majority in view of the academic achievement of groups of students classified as inadequate or simplistic.

		<b>Level 5</b>	<b>Level 4</b>	<b>Level 3</b>	<b>Level 2</b>	<b>Level 1</b>
	This response is...	<b>Insightful</b>	<b>Thoughtful</b>	<b>Generalized</b>	<b>Simplistic</b>	<b>Inadequate</b>
<b>A</b>	Understanding of the text	Demonstrates a thorough understanding of the text, offering an insightful response	Demonstrates a strong understanding of the text, offering a thoughtful response	Demonstrates an adequate understanding of the text, offering a generalized response	Demonstrates a limited understanding of the text, offering a simplistic response	Demonstrates an inadequate understanding of the text, offering an irrelevant response
<b>B</b>	Addressing the prompt	All parts of the prompt are addressed thoroughly	All parts of the prompt are addressed	Most parts of the prompt are addressed	Some parts of the prompt are addressed	No parts of the prompt are addressed
<b>C</b>	Providing support from the text to justify response	Demonstrates insightful support with full details	Demonstrates thoughtful support with considerable details	Demonstrates generalized support with some details	Demonstrates vague support with minimal details	Demonstrates irrelevant support with no details
<b>D</b>	Making connections between text and self to background knowledge and/or experiences	Demonstrates perceptive, sophisticated connections to background knowledge and/or experience	Demonstrates logical, thoughtful connections to background knowledge and/or experience	Demonstrates obvious, straightforward connections to background knowledge and/or experience	Demonstrates vague, limited connections to background knowledge and/or experience	Demonstrates no pertinent connections to background knowledge and/or experience

Figure 7.4 Constructed response rubric

What is not taken into account in most cases, is that the measure is perhaps not looking at reading comprehension or response to understanding of a reading passage. It is quite likely that what is being measured, as much as any reading skills, is the student's class and race and how similar they are to those of the scorer. If the similarity is high then the scorer will likely see more connections in the written response than if the similarity is low. It is interesting to note that in some scoring situations great efforts are made to ensure that a teacher is not given the work of his or her students or, in some cases, students from the same school to eliminate any bias that may arise from familiarity with individual student work. The argument would be that students whose work is scored by

their own teacher score higher than they would if that work were marked by another teacher. Based on the connection between better performance and similar knowledge and experiences, it is also possible that students and teachers who share common experiences such as living in the same community and spending their days at the same school might recognize and understand connections being made more easily than students being scored by teachers from a different school and community.

The *Opportunity to Learn* rubrics, while not available to students at the time the questionnaire is completed, serve to construct the student as a subject in the eyes of teachers and administrators. If students are classified by their opportunity to learn, those with insufficient opportunity to learn are labeled as deviant from the norm, resulting in the construction of those students as less capable and therefore requiring more supports from teachers than those who are labelled as having sufficient or excellent opportunity to learn as per the rubric. Unfortunately, much of what is to be measured using the rubric is not necessarily observable. To try to judge what students think or do on a regular basis from a snapshot set of answers to direct questions about a particular set of reading tasks does not necessarily yield good information. Student responses are likely to be skewed to the most recent reading task completed or to a desire to pick the right answers based on what the students think the teacher wants to hear. The perception of what constitutes a high level opportunity versus a lower level opportunity is wrapped up in white settler norms of what a home, a family and values towards education should look like. Alternate conceptualizations of home, various family structures and culturally diverse views of

what constitutes education and achievement are seen as deviant from white settler norms and result in evaluation of a lower opportunity to learn.

#### *7.2.4 Reporting materials*

The reporting materials are not written with the student in mind as the audience and generally do not impact directly on how students are constructed as readers or writers. The materials do, however, paint a picture for the public reading the reports of what students look like as readers and writers across the province. These portrayals of students and their levels of achievement are in turn fed back to students by their parents, their teachers and members of their communities, ultimately impacting on their identities as learners. In the school division summary report for the *2008 Assessment for Learning in Writing*, parents, school board members, teachers and administrators are provided with information about students' opportunities to learn (see Figure 7.5).

Looking closely at the descriptors for each of the student-specific opportunities, the reader sees that the areas measured and reported are the student readiness areas of propensity to learn and student knowledge and use of writing strategies as well as the home support for learning area. Nowhere in the summary report are the definitions of these areas provided so the reader is left to his or her own interpretation of what they may be referencing. Using a basic dictionary definition of the term *propensity*, “an often intense natural inclination or preference” (Miriam Webster, 2011) one can say that the propensity to learn area would be measuring the students' learning preferences and natural disposition towards learning. The three categories of opportunity identified in the report are “Excellent” (the highest level of opportunity), “Sufficient” (the middle range of

Figure 3.1 shows, for each of the two student readiness-related and one home support-related opportunity-to-learn (OTL) elements, the percentage of Grade 11 students in the division with at least sufficient opportunity and those with excellent opportunity (as determined through the standard-setting process). A five-level scale (rubric) is used to describe the characteristics typical of low (Level 1) to high (Level 5) opportunity. Figure 3.2 shows division results for the two classroom-related OTL elements. Tracking and discussing student opportunity-to-learn with OTL rubrics (available online at the Assessment for Learning Program site at <http://www.education.gov.sk.ca/afl>) and actively creating student opportunities to learn should contribute well to improved students outcomes.

Figure 3.1: Percentage of Grade 11 Students With at Least Sufficient or Excellent Opportunity-to-Learn, Division

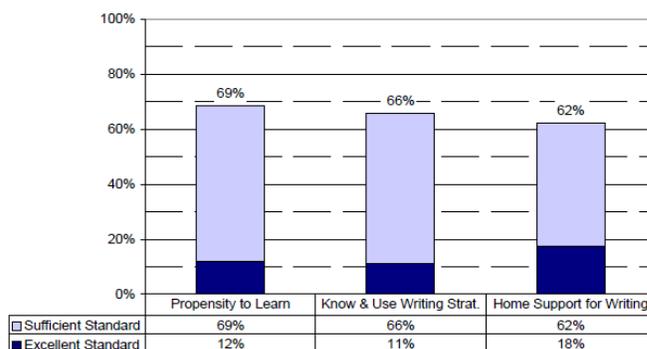
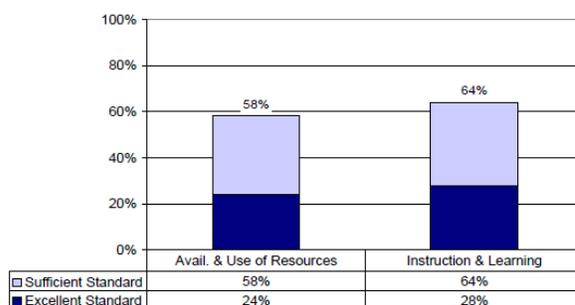


Figure 3.2: Percentage of Secondary Language Arts Classrooms in the Division With Sufficient and Excellent Opportunity-to-Learn



### Figure 7.5 Opportunity to learn in writing

opportunity) and “Below Sufficient” (low opportunity). From the text of the report, the reader is informed that “actively creating student opportunities to learn should contribute well to improved students outcomes” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2008r, 2008s, 2008t, p. 5). This sentence foregrounds active creation of student opportunities to learn, backgrounding the assumption that the reader agrees with the report writer in believing that the students’ current opportunities to learn are lacking in some way. If

opportunities to learn include a student's natural inclinations towards learning and a student's home circumstances one needs to return to the rubrics discussed in the previous section to determine exactly what excellent opportunity to learn looks like. As noted in that section, there appears to be a correlation between excellent opportunity to learn as defined in the rubrics and the white settler norm of student attitudes and preferences towards learning. Similarly there appears to be a correlation between excellent opportunity to learn and the white settler norm of what home looks like and what constitutes support for learning.

Individuals reading this report with or without the support of other documents such as the rubrics and questionnaires can find themselves with a very discouraging sense of the opportunities they are able to provide for the students in their school and the potential for high levels of achievement from those students. If this discouragement is communicated back to students, it can also construct identities as learners for students, in which those students expect failure and view the cause as being something outside of their personal span of control. The implied connection between white settler norms, high levels of opportunity and high levels of student success serves to reinforce the justification for dominance by the white settler majority and underscores the belief that the achievement gap is just an indicator of the natural order of student achievement for First Nations and Métis students.

Looking at the detailed reports written with educators – both classroom teachers and senior administrative staff – as the intended audience, similar themes around the construction of student identities are evident (See Appendix I). The stage is set to have

the report readers begin constructing student identities as readers with the statement “Tables 10.1a, 10.1b, and 10.1c provide a condensed overview of results and comparisons to indicate how well students can read” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009q, p. 7). Regardless of all other cautions in the preceding introductory pages of the report, this one statement foregrounds the idea that the results will tell the reader how well students can read. If the tables in question show that the students in the particular school perform meaningfully lower than the students of the division or province at the same grade level, a perception of the students in that school as poor readers is the basis for constructing the identities of those students as readers.

Continuing past the overview of student results, the readers of the report are reminded that

Student achievement outcomes are affected not only by student ability, but also by differences in student experiences. Students' opportunities to learn reading strategies and develop reading proficiency are dependent on the learning experiences in the school and classroom, on the preparation and commitment of the student to engage in these experiences, and also on the supports provided to students outside the school environment. (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009q, p. 9)

This statement makes significant the idea that how well a student can read is dependent on the student's own attitude and effort as well as on the student's home and community life. School experience is only one of the three components that will affect student achievement in reading. This statement underscores the assumption that some students, particularly those who do not fit into the norm of what white settler society considers appropriate levels of attitude and effort or the right kind of home situation are unable to achieve at high levels. By classifying students outside the stereotypical white settler

norms as deficient in either propensity to learn or home support for learning, the educators reading the report have a built-in justification for why achievement levels for those students might be lower than desired. If there is a sense that classroom based opportunities to learn are the only elements within the control of the teacher and the school system, there is also a stabilization of the white settler belief that, unless there is a way to impact culture, race and class, students will not be as successful as those who have higher opportunity to learn scores.

### 7.3 Summary

In these chapters the discourses of the Assessments for Learning in Reading and Writing from 2005 to 2010 were analyzed using a five-part matrix. I looked at how some elements of the texts were made significant while others were either excluded or left as assumed truths. By examining what was made significant in the texts I was able to identify what the assessment creators value in terms of reading and writing and what the assessment creators expected students and teachers to value. In this section I found multiple examples of an evaluative discourse that expects Saskatchewan students to share common backgrounds and experiences. I also found evidence that the range of knowledge and experiences students are expected to share are predominantly characteristic of students from mid to high socio economic groups and who come from white settler backgrounds.

The second part of the matrix looked at the relationships between voices and discourses within the texts. These relationships include the student as one of the social actors involved in the discourse and lead to the student either hearing his/her voice in the

text and being included as a member of the normative group or alternately not identifying his/her voice in the text and self-classifying him/herself as different/deviant/deficient from the norm. The identification of self with text and hearing one's own voice reflected in the assessment tools is closely linked to the development of identity as a learner and a member of the normal group. Those students who are constructed with identities that marginalize them as learners and non-members of the normal group are typically also marginalized as poor readers or writers. If these students' identities are constructed in this way because of their cultural and socioeconomic differences from the norm rather than because of any actual achievement differences, this maintains the power imbalance that sees the dominant white settler majority justify positions of privilege over minority groups that appear to achieve lower in academic assessments.

The third part of the matrix explored the re-contextualization of social events through the assessment tools. In this section I looked at how opportunities for students to identify with the texts, the questions, the surveys and the writing prompts were constructed. This construction took place through the inclusion and exclusion of elements and the social themes evident throughout the *Assessment for Learning* materials. Within this section, as was the case in the previous two sections, evidence was found that saw a preponderance of the text including students who identify with white settler societal norms and excluding students with knowledge and experiences that were not as closely aligned with those of white settler students. This re-contextualization creates a situation in which marginalized students are further excluded and constructed as learners in ways that place them outside the norms of good readers and effective writers.

Re-contextualization led into the fourth section of the matrix where I looked at normalization. In this section, the texts of the assessment materials were examined for exclusion used to define difference and how sorting and classification through the texts caused inclusion or exclusion from the normal group. I also looked at how particular sign systems and ways of knowing were privileged over others through the text.

In the final section of the matrix I examined how the first four parts came together and impact on the construction of students' identities as readers and writers. When taken together as a whole there was strong evidence to show how students might be constructed as readers and writers based on what was made significant in the text, whether or not they could hear their own voices in the texts, whether they saw themselves in the re-contextualization of events and whether or not they could place themselves as a part of the normal group. Along with the identities constructed, it was apparent that power imbalances left from colonial dominance of white settler societies over First Nations were supported through the discourses of the assessments and worked to maintain them.

In the next chapter I look at the three research questions that were posed and articulate my findings based on the analysis of the discourses of the assessments. I also provide some recommendations for potential changes to the existing system of assessments that could move toward disrupting some of the discourses that are currently in place as well as some areas for further research.

## 8. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Having analyzed the data from the *Assessment for Learning* tools in the previous three chapters, this final chapter brings that analysis back to the original research questions. The data analysis has led to some specific findings which are provided for each of the questions, as well as a set of recommendations for change that could potentially improve current practices and suggestions for further research into the impact of the discourses of wide scale assessments on students.

8.1 What are the discourses of wide-scale provincial assessments that are made available for colonial knowledge production and power relations? Findings for the first research question.

This first research question gets at the heart of how the dominant colonial power structure that privileges white settler culture in Saskatchewan retains dominance through institutions such as the provincial education system. In answering this question, I show how the use of language in gaining and retaining power over colonized people is carried on through the discourses of the *Assessment for Learning* materials currently in use in Saskatchewan. I also show how the knowledge produced through those discourses works to maintain and solidify the current power relationship between the dominant white settler majority and the colonized First Nations and Métis people of the province. There are at least four distinct discourses within the *Assessment for Learning* materials that are made available for colonial knowledge production and power relations. These discourses can be identified as:

1. linking reading and writing proficiency in one particular variety of English to becoming a successful and productive member of society;
2. valuing the possession of a particular set of reading and writing strategies as exclusive indicators of reading and writing proficiency;
3. espousing a set of common experiences and knowledge among all students at a grade level; and
4. placing white settler English and associated culture above all other varieties of English and associated culture as the norm against which student work is measured.

Throughout the *Assessment for Learning* materials there is a first discourse that links reading and writing proficiency in one particular variety of English to becoming a valued and successful member of society. The longstanding colonial practice of asserting power by measuring the colonized against the benchmark norm of the cultural standards of the colonial mother tongue (Rassool, 2007, Smith 1993) is evident in the assessment tools where white settler English is firmly established as the norm. This norm goes beyond just the linguistic side of white settler English and encompasses the white settler belief system around education, lifestyle, family structure, class, race and religion as well.

The assessments also stabilize a second discourse that values possession and demonstration of the sets of reading and writing strategies identified in the assessment materials as exclusive indicators of reading and writing ability. Students who possess and demonstrate these specific reading and writing strategies are deemed proficient readers

and writers while other students are not, even though they may possess and demonstrate other reading and writing strategies. Education policies that establish widespread use of the assessment materials and the curricula that perpetuate these discourses work to continue the transmission of these white settler cultural beliefs by linking them to student success in school (Bourdieu, 1991). In Bourdieu's estimation, a view of language that denies the importance of context and history as integral to bringing meaning to any linguistic exchange, such as is apparent in the discourses of the Assessment for Learning materials, sees language as "an object of contemplation rather than as an instrument of action and power" (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 37). Taking this idea further, Bourdieu argues that the power in language is actually in the society that regulates the use of that language. It follows then, that the white settler society in Saskatchewan regulates the use of (white settler) English through the assessment of that use via the *Assessment for Learning*.

One of the methods by which colonial power is seized by the colonizer from the colonized is through replacement of indigenous languages with the language of the colonizer (Crawford, 2000; Phillipson, 2008). With such replacement it is expected that the colonizer's culture will then naturally replace the indigenous cultures as well. This phenomenon is replicated in the *Assessment for Learning* materials whose third discourse espouses a belief that all students at a particular grade level share a relatively common set of background knowledge and experiences. This theme is based on the presumption of the students sharing white settler backgrounds and culture because they are a part of the

white settler society in which the colonizing language, white settler English<sup>5</sup>, has replaced all other languages. This theme could also be taken as one of assimilation if one subscribes to Fanon's claim that the better the language acquisition of the colonized individual – in this case acquiring white settler English over other English varieties – the more like the colonizer that individual becomes (Fanon, 1952). It remains that the current system in place in Saskatchewan maintains colonial power through putting barriers in the way of student success. These barriers are put in place when students are required to master a different form of English, essentially acquire an additional language, to be able to succeed alongside students who speak that language as their first and primary language. Adding to the difficulty, it has not been the practice within education systems in Saskatchewan to recognize the additional language acquisition needs of First Nations and Métis students but rather to treat those students as deficit in linguistic development and in need of correction.

In the portions of the assessment tools that look at students' written work and their abilities to express ideas as they connect with a text passage or with a writing prompt, there is a fourth discourse that sees white settler English placed above all other

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<sup>5</sup> It is appropriate to acknowledge that English is not the only western European language that remains in Saskatchewan following colonization. The Fransaskois population of the province, while also a linguistic minority, are not marginalized by the Assessment for Learning materials in quite the same way as other linguistic minorities. In particular, the Assessment for Learning instruments in reading are simultaneously developed in French and English with items and texts originally in French being translated into English and items and texts originally in English being translated into French. The assumptions about background knowledge and experiences brought to the item creation process by the French item developers impacts the difficulty levels of those questions for students who do not share that knowledge just as it does when assumptions are brought by white settler developers. Assumptions are perhaps more readily identified and hopefully mitigated as they are often revealed during the translation process.

varieties of English as the norm against which student work is evaluated. This discourse, clearly articulated in the scoring materials for written work that denounce the use of slang, of dialects and of language cues and conventions that do not match those of the white settler English Language Arts curriculum, requires that the First Nations or Métis student put on a mask and become a white settler student in order to write as a white settler student in order to achieve the highest levels of success. At the same time, scorers are carefully watching for the absence of connections to white settler culture and experiences that highlight differences and often result in First Nations student achieving well, but not quite as well as white settler students, justifying the dominance of higher achieving white settler students over lower achieving First Nations and Métis students.

Students who wish to resist the colonial linguistic domination perpetuated in the *Assessment for Learning* materials are faced with a lose-lose situation. If First Nations or Métis students want to highlight their distinct cultural roots through the use of figurative language, symbolism and connections to aboriginal culture, worldviews and ways of knowing, they draw attention to the differences between themselves and white settler students and effectively construct themselves as Other. While making clear the distinction between white settler society and First Nations or Métis society this puts those students in the unenviable position of having low levels of achievement on the reading and writing assessments. Rather than encouraging a multilingual approach that would see First Nations and Métis students supported in becoming fluent speakers, readers and writers of white settler English, First Nations students are often treated as in need of correction or remediation in a unilingual environment. Faced with a system that wants to

change their way of speaking and writing rather than supporting acquisition of an additional language, First Nations and Métis students are discouraged from anticolonial acts. Those anti-colonial acts would, in theory, give those students a First Nations or a Métis voice in a white settler dominated world because those voices represent “subjugated knowledges” (Foucault, 1976) when held against the dominant white settler majority voice. This fourth discourse that privileges white settler English over other English varieties recurs throughout the assessment materials.

The ways in which the discourses of the Assessments for Learning work to impact construction of students’ identities as learners also reinforces white settler dominance. White settler English is used as a tool within Saskatchewan schools, via the curriculum and via curriculum assessments, to construct the students’ world. In the case of First Nations and Métis students this means constructing a new world at school that is different from the world of their homes and communities (Ashcroft et al, 1989), and involves the acquisition of an additional language. In constructing a new world at school, students’ identities as learners are also constructed and those identities are often filled with difference and separation from the norm of the white settler English that plays a significant role in the school world in which they are immersed. Like Fanon’s changed individual, students and their teachers may feel that language acquisition of white settler English has been successfully achieved, only to see a different perspective when students are held up against the white settler norms of wide scale provincial assessments.

The discourses of the *Assessment for Learning* materials continue to work to maintain white settler dominance through the values evident within the reading

selections, the questions about those selections and the writing prompts. Colonizer values are imposed on colonized cultures through the colonizer's literature being taught in schools (Aikant, 2000). White settler literature, which makes up the majority of the literature used in the *Assessment for Learning* materials, exemplifies white settler values as the cultural norm in Saskatchewan and constructs identities for First Nations and Métis students that position their own cultural values, generally not represented in the texts, as inferior relative to the white settler norms (Fontaine, 2010, p. 136). Even when First Nations and Métis students write about their own connections to the literature based on their own languages, values, worldviews and ways of knowing, their knowledge is treated as a subjugated knowledge when held against the dominant white settler language, values, worldviews and ways of knowing.

The discourses of the Assessments for Learning construct students as subjects to be transformed and improved. This is an example of the exercise of what Foucault (1975) calls disciplinary power, where the goal of the exercise of power is to reform. The discourses of the assessment documents repeatedly impose white settler norms on the evaluation of student work, attempting to correct deviant behaviour in terms of reading and writing by imposing white settler norms. The normalization section of the data analysis matrix revealed multiple examples of students being sorted and classified through the instruments using a normal/abnormal binary to report student achievement and to exert control on individuals through teachers, schools and school divisions to conform to those white settler norms and thus improve student achievement scores, not necessarily through successful language acquisition of white settler English speaking,

reading and writing skills but instead through replacement of values, beliefs and worldviews with white settler values, beliefs and worldviews.

8.2 Whose interests are served by the discourses of wide-scale provincial assessments, and whose interests are marginalized? Findings for the second research question.

Based on the evidence presented here, the discourses of the provincial Assessments for Learning privilege students who come from white settler backgrounds but whose interests does this privileging serve? By insisting that all things related to the power of the state, including commerce, education, justice and governance, be conducted exclusively in the language of the dominant group, the dominant group can retain control over those functions as their sovereign territory (Butler & Spivak, 2007). Therefore, the privileging of white settler students serves the interests of the dominant white settler majority in terms of justifying the power remaining in white settler hands. Privileging white settler students also serves the interests of the dominant white settler majority to insist on exclusive use of white settler English in the assessment tools to maintain high academic achievement as the sovereign territory of white settler students.

Just as white settler interests are served by the current *Assessment for Learning* tools, First Nations and Métis student interests are marginalized, as are the interests of other linguistic minorities including Hutterian students and new Canadian students who do not speak the same variety of English as do the local white settler students. Dominant groups who exercise power through language are constantly struggling to defend their hold on that power (Fairclough, 1989) and it is in the interests of maintaining that power that all students are measured against criteria in reading and writing that effectively looks

for how closely those students match to the white settler norms. “Becoming a white settler” in this respect is an interest of the dominant group because once the Other has become a part of the dominant group they are no longer a threat to dominant power. At the same time this assimilation does not serve the interests of marginalized groups who wish to retain their identities as distinct with language, culture, worldview and ways of knowing intact. Providing First Nations and Métis students with the rules of the culture of power (Delpit, 1988) as they acquire white settler English would mean that First Nations and Métis students could effectively demonstrate their knowledge, skills and abilities in reading and writing. It is this interest that is marginalized by the discourses of the *Assessment for Learning* materials. By not providing language acquisition supports to First Nations and Métis students who are learning white settler English as a second language that hold the key to power in a white settler dominated society, the current education system is effectively withholding the tools of power (Delpit 1988), from those students.

“Language reflects power” (Smith, 1993, p. 1) and there is no power relation without a correlating field of knowledge (Foucault, 1975). The discourses of the *Assessment for Learning* serve the interests of the white settler majority who have knowledge in the form of reading and writing proficiency in the dominant white settler variety of English as measured by the assessments. This knowledge constitutes power in terms of high levels of achievement for those who are proficient readers and writers of white settler English and less power for the First Nations, Métis and other marginalized students who are collectively less proficient readers and writers when measured using

only that variety of English and its associated world view, values and belief system. This difference in proficiency between white settler students and First Nations and Métis students is the achievement gap that is so prominent in the Saskatchewan PreK-12 education sector today. As I stated at the beginning of this research, there may well be an achievement gap if you subscribe to a belief in absolute measures of achievement, but the gap that is currently measured and being reported through the *Assessment for Learning* program is not as much an achievement gap as a gap between First Nations and white settler linguistic and cultural norms.

If, as outlined in the findings around the first research question, having First Nations and Métis students conform to white settler norms would reduce the achievement gap, then the discourses within the assessments for learning that lead to that outcome privilege the white settler majority. The processes espoused by the discourses of the *Assessment for Learning* materials, including the use of multiple measures of reading and writing achievement, placing emphasis on classroom assessment and encouraging ongoing assessment at the school and classroom level describe the examination as identified by Foucault (1975) and described in Chapter 2. In Foucault's examination, the simple instruments of surveillance and normalization are combined to exert disciplinary power on the subject. Foucault described surveillance as hierarchical observation where, since a single observer cannot make all the observations alone, a network of observers pass information about what has been observed through the system. Surveillance described in this way defines very well the collection of information about students through the *Assessment for Learning* tools. When coupled with the normalization

inherent in the discourses of the *Assessment for Learning* materials the power system of the provincial education system is able to exert control over First Nations and Métis students. The assessment data collected and the scores awarded for student work provide the documentation or the data to support the formation of categories and norms that create knowledge around what proficiency in reading and writing look like. Essentially, the education system is provided with the means to control individuals through a system of observation and comparison in the form of the *Assessment for Learning* program.

8.3 How can we trouble and counter the discourses of wide-scale assessments that marginalize minority students? Findings for the third research question.

As identified in Chapter 2, surveillance in the form of continual observation coupled with the articulation of norms and the gaps between individuals and those norms allows the individualization, through classification, sorting and isolation, of those most in need of disciplinary control. This practice is not necessarily a negative given that Foucault sees power as producing the reality and in fact producing the individual (1975). This idea of power producing reality would imply that if we can change the discourses of the assessment materials we can potentially change the social reality constructed through those discourses. The first step in changing the discourses of the assessment materials is to counter and trouble them, bringing them into full view and under the scrutiny of those most closely associated with them.

To answer this third and final research question, let me return to the four specific discourses identified in the findings for the first research question. There are ways in which each of those discourses can be troubled and countered. In doing so, it is possible

that we can disrupt these discourses and put in their place new discourses that do not marginalize First Nations and Métis students.

The first identified discourse made available for colonial knowledge production and power relations links reading and writing proficiency to becoming a valued and successful member of society. To effectively trouble this discourse it is necessary to challenge the definitions of reading and writing proficiency as well as what it means to become a valued and successful member of society. The research into the discourses of the *Assessment for Learning* materials has shown that reading and writing proficiency have been narrowly defined in a decidedly white settler context and yet the inclusion of non-white settler literature in the recommended curriculum resources and in the assessment tools themselves would indicate that proficient writing can come from other cultural groups in non-white settler varieties of English. Broadening the scope of what constitutes proficiency in writing and in reading through recognizing the validity of students making connections white settler English varieties and cultures would certainly begin to counter this discourse. Encouraging anticolonial engagement with education systems in the form of normalizing indigenous English<sup>6</sup> as equal to white settler English would also counter this discourse. Teachers and test item creators can actively seek out literature that exemplifies the use of varieties of English other than white settler English. When teaching about reading and writing strategies, examples from white settler English

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<sup>6</sup> When referencing varieties of English I am looking at the broader context of a language variety that includes figurative language, symbolism and references to culture and worldview. I am not advocating for acceptance of lack of fluency in language or the ability to write effectively in the form of English expected in the academic and business community.

texts and non-white settler texts can be presented to students. When scoring wide-scale assessments such as the *Assessment for Learning*, scoring leaders can ensure that exemplars of written responses at all levels include both white settler English and non-white settler English student work. In pre-service teacher education programs, conscious attention to varieties of English and the validity of English varieties outside of white settler English can be paid. Ensuring that pre-service teachers are aware of the findings of this research and providing opportunities to share this research with practicing educators will also work to disrupting this discourse. To put all of these suggested practices in place would certainly require a great deal of effort on the part of educators both in classrooms and in the assessment world creating and scoring provincial assessments but the results could have significant impact on the way in which First Nations and Métis student work is evaluated and scored in a provincial context.

To counter the second discourse of the *Assessment for Learning* materials that values possession and demonstration of the sets of reading and writing strategies identified in the assessment materials as indicators of reading and writing ability, one must consider where this set of indicators originates. As outlined in chapter three, the measurement of reading and writing proficiency has evolved over the past half century from norm referenced testing that blatantly compared First Nations and Métis student performance to nationally established white settler norms, through the use of authentic assessments that were designed to appeal to the cultural backgrounds of students but, in most cases, appealed to predominantly white settler cultural backgrounds and then to the current system of measuring indicators as evidence of outcomes. In the current state, the

demonstration of knowledge and use of particular reading and writing strategies are recognized as indicators of reading and writing proficiency. The issue is not with the idea of indicators that reflect reading or writing proficiency but rather the determination of the indicators that do reflect proficiency and the exclusion of other indicators that reflect race, class and culture rather than reading or writing proficiency. Currently, the determination of which strategies might be considered valid indicators of proficiency, how one might recognize the application of said strategies, and what sorts of assessment items would elicit application of the strategies are all determined by members of the dominant white settler majority. It would be a good start to trouble this particular discourse by including a much broader group in determining these indicators and how to measure and recognize their use. Inclusion of a broader group would require more than an invitation to include token representation on committees or providing copies of draft (completed) work to individuals or groups for review. Inclusion of a broad group in determining what indicators of reading and writing proficiency should include requires authentic participation by members of non-white settler minorities in numbers great enough to have both individual and collective voice within the group. White settler voice would certainly be represented but in light of anticolonial thinking, the previously marginalized voices must be culturally grounded to center their perspectives to “create counter-hegemonic knowings which challenge mainstream media and culture” (Dei, 2009, p. 253).

To trouble the third discourse espousing a belief that all students at a particular grade level share a relatively common set of background knowledge and experiences is

somewhat more challenging than troubling the first two discourses. Part of the reason this discourse is more difficult to counter is that our realities are constructed from the discourses around us. It stands to reason that reality for the individuals creating the assessments, teaching the students and later scoring the assessments have been constructed from the discourses around them, namely those of white settler dominance in the province of Saskatchewan. In order to get a broader picture of what backgrounds and experiences students bring to their assessments it is necessary to know more about the diversity of students across our province. It would be interesting to see what students from white settler backgrounds would do with texts, questions and writing prompts that accessed background knowledge and experiences common to students living on Hutterian colonies or in remote northern communities. It is also necessary to look critically at each of the texts, the questions, the writing prompts, the scoring rubrics, the exemplars and the reporting tools to really know what assumptions are being made. Another way of troubling this particular discourse is to acknowledge that students do not share completely common backgrounds and experiences but we can work with the common provincial PreK-12 curriculum to access those elements that students in Saskatchewan classrooms have some background in. Assessments could be created using texts that reference curricular knowledge from previous grade levels that should be somewhat common to students who have had their recent educational experiences in Saskatchewan schools. For example, a grade 7 reading text might be a newspaper article about a political leader that relates to the grade 6 Social Studies outcome “Examine the relationship between an individual’s power and authority and the power and authority of

others” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009u, p. 23). We can also provide choice to students on assessments to allow them to select items to respond to that they find connection with. Instead of the current practice of providing a single open-response item to one of the three reading selections in a booklet, students could be given a choice of any one of three open-response items, one related to each of the three items in the booklet. Similarly, students could be given choice in writing prompts and writing forms (expository or narrative) in the writing assessment.

The fourth discourse within the assessment tools, that sees white settler English placed above all other varieties of English as the norm against which student work is evaluated is also difficult, but not impossible, to counter. Students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds often score low on the provincial Assessments for Learning, in part because of a tendency to use written language in the same way spoken language is used. If that language use includes word choice, cueing systems and conventions that differ from the white settler norm, there is an immediate judgement of the writing as being less than that of students who use word choice, cueing systems and conventions that match the dominant norm. One way to counter this discourse is to have student work scored by teachers who have been trained in the scoring process and who recognize local linguistic and cultural norms and can identify their use in students’ writing. A conscious effort on the part of scoring leaders to train scorers to separate poor writing from linguistic and cultural differences through the use of a wide variety of exemplars would begin to counter this discourse. An effort in school divisions and schools across the province as well as in pre-service teacher education programs to train all teachers to

separate poor writing from linguistic and cultural differences would further counter the privileging of the dominant norm. This type of scoring would be a radical departure from long established methods for some but may also be a welcome change from a too-restrictive scoring model for others.

Keeping the promises made to First Nations people through treaties in Saskatchewan, it is important to provide students with “opportunities to acquire the skills and knowledge that they need in order to participate effectively in the global economy (OTC, 1998, p. 53) while still retaining the knowledge and skills based in their own values and traditions. Elder James Ironeagle is quoted as saying “It is important that young people understand the culture. Education is necessary today. When you have the two you are strong because you are retaining your culture, your spirituality, and the language (OTC, 1998, p. 52). Providing the educational opportunities promised includes recognizing students’ need to acquire white settler English as a part of the culture of power in Saskatchewan. To ensure students are supported in their language learning, it is necessary to acknowledge the need for and provide the supports required for language acquisition.

#### 8.4 Recommendations

In addition to the suggestions made around troubling the discourses in the *Assessment for Learning* tools that privilege white settler students while marginalizing First Nation, Métis and other minority students, there are other recommendations that can be made to disrupt the status quo in wide scale assessments in Saskatchewan. The following section outlines 13 recommendations that could potentially improve the current

state when it comes to how we go about assessing and reporting on student achievement in reading and writing. There is a large body of research that would point out ways in which wide-scale assessment can negatively impact students, some of which has been reviewed in this thesis, and also a large body of research that advocates for the use of standardized assessment data to improve student achievement (Phelps, 2012). Since the scope of this thesis does not extend to examining the arguments for and against testing I will leave that to be explored in another study. While the idea of assessing and reporting on student achievement in reading and writing may seem at odds with the ideas presented in this research, the fact remains that, in Saskatchewan, our current education system is entrenched in a discourse of accountability that includes the use of wide-scale provincial assessments. These recommendations are made with a view to working within the current system to effect change. Some of the recommendations are relatively easy to enact while others require considerably more thought, resources and effort to put into effect. Some are able to occur in the short term but others require long term shifts in the way wide scale assessment operates in our province. The 13 recommendations are listed first and a discussion of the recommendations and how they might be implemented follows.

1. I recommend that the Ministry of Education engage First Nations and Métis stakeholders in developing a set of shared beliefs around what the goals of education are and how achievement of those goals should be assessed and reported on at a provincial level.
2. I recommend that the Ministry of Education engage First Nations and Métis stakeholders including the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (FSIN)

Education Secretariat in determining what the spectrum of indicators of reading and writing proficiency could be.

3. I recommend that input from First Nations and Métis stakeholders regarding indicators and measures of reading and writing proficiency, along with input from other minority groups as well as white settler stakeholders, be compiled and work be enacted to arrive at a mutually acceptable set of indicators and measures to use in reporting on student achievement in reading and writing in Saskatchewan.
4. I recommend that the assessment creators connect text passages and references to background knowledge and experience, to curriculum topics from other appropriate curricula rather than to topics simply assumed to be common to students at a particular level.
5. I recommend that assessments be constructed in a way that will allow students to respond to those questions that they connect with best and that the assessment tools be constructed to provide choice to students in responding to questions to allow them to connect more readily with a variety of texts provided.
6. I recommend training all teachers in looking for and recognizing connections, cues, conventions and symbolism from a variety of cultures and backgrounds.
7. I recommend the use of a scoring model that will allow input from classroom teachers , able to recognize connections, figurative language, symbolism and worldviews, especially those represented in their own classrooms, as primary scorers of student work.

8. I recommend that all teachers be provided with education and support in teaching language learners that will assist them in their support of students acquiring white settler English as an additional language and support the development of students' multilingualism.
9. I recommend the development of a tool or set of tools to be used in examining the discourses of all parts of the assessment materials for colonial knowledge production and power relations.
10. I recommend that the tools developed as per the previous recommendation be used following the creation of the assessment materials and before use of those materials with students. I also recommend that the tools be applied by a panel of individuals representing various stakeholder groups other than the item and assessment creators to allow for as much diversity as possible in the application of those tools.
11. I recommend seeking out exemplars of student work that contain non-white settler connections, figurative language, symbolism and worldviews to demonstrate the scoring guide application to a diverse body of high quality writing.
12. I recommend that the Ministry of Education review and revise curricula with a view to countering and troubling discourses found within the PreK-12 curriculum documents that are similar to those identified in the assessment materials.
13. I recommend that the Ministry of Education invest the time and research necessary into the development of pre-assessment, assessment, scoring, survey

and reporting materials that counter the discourses currently inherent in those materials.

The first three recommendations in the list deal with the idea of what we choose to assess and what we see as being indicators of those ideas in our wide-scale provincial assessments. Considerable attention has been given by elected officials to the ideas of improving student achievement on a provincial level and to the elimination of the gap between First Nations and Métis students and the province as a whole in terms of student achievement. To help achieve these two goals I recommend that the Ministry of Education engage First Nations and Métis stakeholders in developing a set of shared beliefs around what the goals of education are and how achievement of those goals should be assessed and reported on at a provincial level. Once a set of shared beliefs has been agreed upon, those beliefs should be communicated widely to educators and elected officials responsible for education across the province. Every teacher, administrator, school board member and education portfolio holder should be knowledgeable about the goals of education in Saskatchewan and what the indicators of achievement of those goals are.

Further to the goal of improving student achievement and eliminating the achievement gap and in order to ensure that assessing reading and writing proficiency is not actually assessing the class, race and culture of students, I recommend that the Ministry of Education engage First Nations and Métis stakeholders including the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (FSIN) Education Secretariat in determining what the indicators of reading and writing proficiency could be. I recommend that this

information along with input from other minority groups as well as from white settler stakeholders be compiled and work be enacted to arrive at a mutually acceptable set of indicators and measures to use in reporting on student achievement in reading and writing in Saskatchewan. Arriving at a mutually acceptable set of indicators and measures of student achievement in reading and writing could possibly be accomplished through authentic partnering among all stakeholders, perhaps using an interest-based problem solving process to ensure the interests of all stakeholders are represented, heard and honoured through the process.

The next two recommendations come from the evidence in the data that suggests students with white settler backgrounds and experiences are privileged for higher levels of success in the assessments than students with other backgrounds and experiences. In order to level the playing field and ensure that all students have opportunities to connect their reading and writing to their personal backgrounds and experiences there is a need to acknowledge the diversity of our provincial student population. By acknowledging that diversity and also the commonality of the provincially defined curriculum it is possible to provide more equity among students in the application of the assessment tools.

To ensure that assumed common background knowledge is indeed common, I recommend that the assessment creators connect text passages and references to background knowledge and experience to curriculum topics from other appropriate curricula rather than topics assumed to be common to students at a particular level. While this adds a level of complexity to the work of the assessment creators and while it can never be perfect in that each student has differing school experiences, it also serves to

underscore the importance of the entire Saskatchewan curriculum, not just the specific topics being assessed. If the reading selection students are being asked about references information that is included in the science curriculum they have recently studied, perhaps both students and teachers will see the interconnectedness of reading and writing to all parts of the educational experience.

Since not all students have the same level of engagement with the topics that are presented to them in their educational experiences, I recommend that assessments be constructed in a way that will allow students to respond to those questions that they connect with best. I recommend that the assessment tools be constructed to provide choice to students in responding to questions to allow them to connect more readily with a variety of texts provided as was described in the previous section about troubling the discourses of the *Assessment for Learning* tools.

The sixth and seventh recommendations deal with one of the areas where change could be made that would disrupt the discourses of the assessments that are used for colonial knowledge production – the scoring of the assessments. The scoring materials, including the rubrics and scoring guides have scorers looking for connections, for cues and conventions, and for symbolism. The issue of students from non-white settler backgrounds being scored by teachers with essentially white settler perspectives marginalizes those students on the basis of racial identity more than reading or writing proficiency. I recommend training all teachers in looking for and recognizing connections, cues, conventions and symbolism from a variety of cultures and backgrounds. I recommend the use of a scoring model that will allow input from

classroom teachers, able to recognize connections, figurative language, symbolism and worldviews, especially those represented in their own classrooms, as primary scorers of student work. In this model, the classroom teacher would score the student work first and submit that score to the ministry of education. A copy of the student's work would then be electronically shared with another grade-alike teacher within the province for a second scoring. By engaging in dialogue with the two scorers as needed, a consensus score could be reached or an adjudicated score could be awarded once the two original scorers had made their case for why their score should stand. This would allow for local teachers who have the potential to have better knowledge of their students' knowledge and experiences than anonymous scorers to have significant input into the overall score.

The eighth recommendation is that all teachers be provided with education and support in teaching language learners that will assist them in their support of students acquiring white settler English as an additional language and support the development of students' multilingualism. We need to acknowledge that students require proficiency in the form of English used in business, government and academia to achieve the qualifications necessary for gainful employment and post-secondary academic pursuits. Recognizing that for some students this is a different form of English from the English they have used in their homes and communities means that teachers can assist students in acquiring what amounts to a second language, white settler English. This in turn means that students are not being asked to abandon one language and culture to become assimilated into the culture represented by the language they are learning but rather they are supported in becoming multilingual learners with proficiency in the language of the

education system while still retaining and honouring their own linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

The next two recommendations are focused on maintaining attention to the discourses of the assessment materials as they are being produced. I recommend the development of a tool or set of tools for examining the discourses of all parts of the assessment materials for colonial knowledge production and power relations. Tools could potentially incorporate some of the techniques used in this research, adapted to be readily and consistently applied to assessment materials. Users of the tools would likely need to be trained in their use and the process of training initial users would likely result in refinement of the methods and the tools. Any tools developed should be used following the creation of the assessment materials to allow examination of the overall package of materials as well as individual items, and before use of those materials with students. It is also important that the tools be applied by a panel of individuals, trained in the use of those tools, representing various stakeholder groups other than the item and assessment creators, to allow for as much diversity as possible. One of the drawbacks to this process is the potential to create a new set of discourses (as Foucault was afraid of doing by defining and prescribing how to conduct discourse analysis) around the assessments that is yet another recontextualization of social events (Fairclough, 2003) with the creators and users of the tools the primary social actors in the process.

Also related to the assessment tools themselves are the exemplars of student work. Although it may be a time-consuming process, I recommend seeking out exemplars of student work that contain non-white settler connections, figurative language,

symbolism and worldviews to demonstrate the scoring guide application to a diverse body of high quality writing. One way of doing this is related to the recommendation of having classroom teachers score their students' own work. When work that exemplifies non-white settler connections, figurative language, symbolism and worldviews is encountered by a teacher, he or she can identify it to the scoring team for possible inclusion in the exemplar set. The teacher identifying the piece of work can also identify the connections, cues and conventions that are being made, and their significance in the particular context of the student's race, class, and culture.

The final two recommendations are broad based and require fundamental change at the provincial level. One of the main reasons that the Assessments for Learning are so reflective of white settler norms is that they measure the curriculum which is also a white settler curriculum. To truly change the discourses of the assessment materials I recommend that the Ministry of Education review and revise curricula with a view to countering and troubling discourses found within the PreK-12 curriculum documents that are similar to those identified in the assessment materials. This process could follow some of the techniques used in this research or it could make use of a form of the tools discussed in recommendation 8. I also recommend that the Ministry of Education invest the time and research necessary into the development of pre-assessment, assessment, scoring, survey and reporting materials that counter the discourses currently inherent in those materials.

I believe that by enacting these recommendations there is true potential to change the status quo of the wide scale assessment program in Saskatchewan. This does not

mean that changes will result in dramatic changes in student achievement scores, nor does it mean that achievement gaps will disappear. What it does mean is that we will be measuring student achievement in reading and writing rather than student class, race or abilities to assimilate to white settler norms. The information gleaned from those measurements can then be used by teachers, students and parents to improve individual student learning and, as a result, overall student achievement in Saskatchewan for all students.

#### 8.5 Further study

While the analysis of the discourses of the *Assessment for Learning* instruments provided a great deal of information regarding the current state of wide-scale assessment in Saskatchewan, like all research, it also posed further questions that require further study in order to answer. Because this study was limited to the publicly available documents associated with the *Assessment for Learning* program there was no opportunity to look at raw data. Further research into student-specific data, if available, could tie demographic information about knowledge and experiences such as communities lived in, schools attended, gender, ancestry and programs accessed to the raw data from the closed response items. By looking at those cross-tabulations in conjunction with information about the questions themselves and the discourses surrounding those questions and their related texts, the extent of the possible impact of the individual items could be investigated. This type of research could also provide baseline measures against which newly developed assessment tools could be held.

This study has been limited to the discourses of the *Assessment for Learning* program which, to this point, has remained a school level measure with very low stakes for students. One of the areas in which the achievement gap is highlighted in the province is in secondary marks and graduation rates. Since many of the First Nations schools in the province depend on departmental exams in the absence of accredited teachers, a similar study of the provincial grade 12 exams and their associated materials would be useful in determining to what extent the discourses of those higher stakes assessment privilege white settler students and marginalize First Nations and Métis students.

A third area for further investigation is the curriculum on which the *Assessment for Learning* program is built. The provincial PreK-12 curriculum provides the foundation for all of the assessment of student achievement done in the province whether it occurs at the classroom, school, school division or provincial level. An exploration of the discourses of the curriculum documents would help to identify to what degree the discourses identified in the assessment materials are also evident in the curriculum.

In addition to studying the curriculum on which the assessments are built, it is important to look carefully at the practices within the education system itself. Discourse is not limited to text and the discourses that have been identified in the text of the assessment materials may well exist in classrooms, schools, and teacher education programs across Saskatchewan. Further study of the broader discourses of teaching and education in the province would also be an important area for future work.

Throughout this study the focus has been on the *Assessment for Learning* program and its impact on students. Equally important and in need of further study is the impact of

the *Assessment for Learning* program on teachers – how teacher identities as educators are constructed based on the discourses of the assessment program and how that in turn affects their professional practice and their own marginalization or sense of belonging with the collective of Saskatchewan educators.

## 8.6 Conclusion

Throughout this study I have taken a critical look at the discourses of the text materials of the *Assessment for Learning* program in Saskatchewan. While the assessment tools have many good features and positive attributes in terms of their purpose and the way they have been used in the province; that was not the focus of this study. The focus of the study was on the discourses of the assessment materials and the impact of those discourses on student groups. The study revealed discourses within the assessment materials that have been made available for colonial knowledge production and power relations. The study also revealed discourses that privileged some students while marginalizing others, both through the discourses that stabilize white settler norms and through impacting the way in which students construct their identities as learners. Most importantly however, the study revealed those discourses and in doing so, brought them to light to face scrutiny and to be identified and labelled as marginalizing, privileging or otherwise negatively impacting students. It is the bringing to light of the issues within the assessment tools that provides opportunity for change. Change can be achieved through countering, troubling and ultimately disrupting the discourses that marginalize First Nations and Métis students and privilege white settler students. In doing so, we may not make overnight gains in student achievement or in reducing the

achievement gap but we will make substantive and long-lasting gains in actually helping students across the province to improve their achievement levels and gain confidence in their own abilities and status as learners, regardless of the cultural, linguistic or socioeconomic backgrounds they share. If this can be accomplished, improved student achievement scores and a reduction in any perceived achievement gap should follow naturally as we work to improve student learning across the province.

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## APPENDIX A: Text Type and Significance

Text	Text Type	Cultural Significance	Socio-Economic Significance
Michael Built a Bicycle (2005 Gr. 5)	Literary (poem)	None	None
Tortured for Toothpaste (2005 Gr. 5)	Literary (persuasive article)	None	None
Choosing the Best Backpack (2005 Gr. 5)	Literary (expository article)	White Settler	Middle and above
How to Toss Pizza Like a Champion (2005 Gr. 5)	Information (expository article)	White Settler	Middle and above
Great Ideas in Transportation (2005 Gr. 5)	Information (expository article)	None	None
Imagine That! (2005 Gr. 5)	Information (narrative article)	White Settler	None
Trip to the Seashore (2005 Gr. 7)	Literary (poem)	White Settler	None
The Vigil (2005 Gr. 7)	Literary (story segment)	None	None
Letters to the Editor (2005 Gr. 7)	Literary (persuasive letters)	White Settler	None
Attention Proud Canadians (2005 Gr. 7)	Informational (advertisement)	None	None
The Inuksuk: Symbol of the North (2005 Gr. 7)	Informational (expository article)	Inuit	None
Canada Gets a Flag (2005 Gr. 7)	Informational (narrative article)	None	None
Banishing Blemishes (2005 Gr. 10)	Literary (expository article)	None	Middle and above
A Tanned Version (2005 Gr. 10)	Literary (poem)	None	None
The Wired Teen (2005 Gr. 10)	Literary (narrative article)	White Settler	Middle and above
The Second Biggest Sport (2005 Gr. 10)	Informational (narrative article)	First Nations	None
Canadian Museum of Civilization (2005 Gr. 10)	Informational (brochure)	None	None
2 Letters about 16 year olds voting (2005 Gr. 10)	Informational (persuasive letters)	White Settler	None
Making Recycled Paper (2007 Gr. 4)	Informational (expository article)	White Settler	Middle and above
It Stings! Don't Panic (2007 Gr. 4)	Informational (expository article)	None	None
Lessons from Mother Earth (2007 Gr. 4)	Literary (story)	First Nations	None
Lizard (2007 Gr. 4)	Literary (poem)	None	None
Mysteries of the Desert (2007 Gr. 7)	Informational (expository article)	None	None
The Mystery of Rogue Waves (2007 Gr. 7)	Informational (expository article)	None	None
Why Do Young People Think that They Have to Look and Dress a Certain Way? (2007 Gr. 7)	Informational (persuasive letter)	White Settler	None
The Three Clues (2007 Gr. 7)	Literary (radio play)	White Settler	None

7)	segment)		
A Fight for Life (2007 Gr. 7)	Literary (narrative myth)	First Nations	None
The Visitor (2007 Gr. 7)	Literary (poem)	None	None
Aboriginal Veterans: Stories of Honour and Heroism (2007 Gr. 10)	Informational (expository article)	None	None
Teaching Children How to Fight (2007 Gr. 10)	Informational (narrative article)	White Settler	None
Bottled Water Creating Problems (2007 Gr. 10)	Informational (expository article)	White Settler	None
The Right to Human Dignity (2007 Gr. 10)	Literary (narrative article)	White Settler	None
The River's Story (2007 Gr. 10)	Literary (poem)	None	None
Past Perfect (2007 Gr. 10)	Literary (dramatic script segment)	None	None
Snow Day (2009 Gr. 4)	Literary (poem)	White Settler	None
Best Friends (2009 Gr. 4)	Literary (story)	White Settler	None
Métis Symbols (2009 Gr. 4)	Information (expository article)	None	None
Building an Ant Farm (2009 Gr. 4)	Information (expository article)	None	Middle and above
Only the Nose Knows (2009 Gr. 7)	Literary (dramatic script)	White Settler	Middle and above
Peculiar Pumpkin (2009 Gr. 7)	Literary (poem)	None	None
Wake of the Stranger (2009 Gr. 7)	Literary (story)	First Nations	None
The Five Minute Omelette (2009 Gr. 7)	Informational (expository article)	White Settler	Middle and above
Treaties (2009 Gr. 7)	Informational (expository article)	White Settler	None
School Uniforms? (2009 Gr. 7)	Informational (expository article)	White Settler	None
Defining Freedom (2009 Gr. 10)	Literary (poem)	None	None
Plot 23, Row A, Grave 5 (2009 Gr. 10)	Literary (narrative article)	None	None
On the 60 <sup>th</sup> (2009 Gr. 10)	Literary (story)	White Settler	None
Cyber Crime (2009 Gr. 10)	Informational (expository article)	None	Middle and above
Reporting Vehicle Accidents (2009 Gr. 10)	Informational (expository article)	None	None
The Case for a National Service Program (2009 Gr. 10)	Informational (persuasive article)	White Settler	None

## APPENDIX B: Only the Nose Knows

### Only the Nose Knows

Sometimes, the way people live pollutes the environment. For example, you surely notice the bad odour of exhaust fumes or spoiled garbage. There are less obvious ways that people might pollute the air around them...

*Two friends meet in a café.*

ROBERT: Hi Mel! Great idea to meet here. What's happening?

5 MELANIE: Nothing too exciting. Although I did go shopping at this amazing new mall in Calgary and I bought myself a lot of nice things. Then I spent the last month in Waskesiu where I learned how to fish. It gives me a legitimate excuse to laze around on the lake, read, relax and take in some rays.

ROBERT: Consider yourself fortunate - it must be nice to just laze around soaking up the sun.

10 MELANIE: Yes, I am fortunate. Life is good!

ROBERT: Oh, by the way, Carla came by work yesterday and told me you two haven't been talking since the last day of school.

MELANIE: Yeah...I hoped she would talk to you while I was away and you could figure out what was going on. Did she ask if we could get together?

15 ROBERT: Sort of. She asked whether or not you like soccer.

MELANIE: That's weird, why?

20 ROBERT: Well, my sister is in the same league as she is and I go to all the games and tournaments. After standing alone in a scorching kitchen flipping burgers all day, I absolutely have to be around people. I like to be with my friends and catch up on all the latest.

MELANIE: So, are you hanging out with her now?

25 ROBERT: Now and then, even though she and I don't have that much in common, you can consider me your go-between.

30 MELANIE: *Sighing.* I would like to have her over for a sleepover so we could talk things out. What else did she say?



ROBERT: She wants you to give her a call or to come out to a soccer game.

MELANIE: She prefers a phone call or meeting at a soccer field to having lunch together or coming to my house?

35 ROBERT: It's reasonable considering....

MELANIE: Considering what?

ROBERT: The circumstances.

MELANIE: What circumstances?

40 ROBERT: Well, she explained to me that having a decent conversation with you inside the school was like mission impossible.

MELANIE: That's true. We hardly get three words out before she starts sneezing and wiping her eyes. What's wrong with her? Is she sick?

ROBERT: If you come to her game tonight, you'd be able to talk to her.

45 MELANIE: Great, I can do that, my family's not going back to the lake until tomorrow. Hey, guess what I picked up in Calgary? Actually, I'm wearing it right now.

ROBERT: You're always getting something new. What is it? Shoes? Shirt? What?

MELANIE: No. It's something personal.

50 ROBERT: Something personal? I have no idea what it could be. You'll have to tell me.

MELANIE: It's perfume! It's called "Good Times!" Their slogan is, "For a scent of fun."

55 ROBERT: Well, you do realize that the smell of perfume is almost impossible to detect when you're outside, don't you? And, by the way, do you also know that perfume contains lots of different chemicals?

MELANIE: Yes. Everything's full of chemicals these days. What's that got to do with anything?

60 ROBERT: Carla told me perfume contains ethyl acetate. When I looked it up on the Internet, it said perfume irritates the eyes and respiratory tract.

*Melanie sighs and rolls her eyes.*



MELANIE: That's just soooo interesting!

65 ROBERT: There's another chemical Carla mentioned. She says perfume contains camphor. I found out it also irritates the respiratory tract, especially when you inhale the fumes.

MELANIE: Enough with the science lesson already Robert. Tell Carla if she wants to see me that I refuse to talk about chemicals.

ROBERT: That's not all she wants to talk with you about. That's why she's asked me to be the go-between.

70 MELANIE: Well, I wear perfume every day. In fact, I carry a spray bottle in my purse to apply as needed.

ROBERT: I know!

*Robert pretends to gag.*

MELANIE: Well, perfume never bothers me. I just don't understand Carla.

75 ROBERT: I have to get back to work now, Mel. Really think about what I just told you. See you later!

## APPENDIX C: The Wired Teen

**The Wired Teen**

1           The boy at the center of one of  
Canada's teen-hacker dramas was almost  
too perfect a stereotype. A Montreal  
computer whiz-kid pleaded guilty to  
playing havoc with data systems at  
NASA, Harvard and the Massachusetts  
Institute of Technology. The 17-year-  
old former Boy Scout revealed in court  
that, since quitting school, he had spent  
up to 15 hours a day on the Internet on  
his home computer.

2           This fuels a popular image: the  
teenage loner who takes refuge in  
cyberspace, unable to resist the allure of  
the Net's evil subcultures. But is he  
representative of Canada's teen Internet  
users? The answer, according to a  
survey on young people and the Internet  
is, emphatically, *no*. In fact, the study  
found that teenagers aged 12 to 17 who  
regularly go online are pretty normal—  
they hold a broad range of interests, play  
sports, listen to the radio, read  
magazines and value friendships. As  
well, they say they use the net for  
relatively harmless purposes like  
chatting with their friends, getting the  
scoop on their favourite celebrities and  
doing their homework.

3           According to the survey,  
designed by Northstar Research Partners  
for Youth Culture Inc., a Toronto-based  
media and research firm, boys go online  
for more than 10 hours a week, girls for  
eight hours.

4           But far from isolating teens in a cyber-  
netherworld, the Net has become a tool for

expanding and enhancing most young  
people's social connections. Instant  
messaging services like icq (for "I seek  
you") allow users to get around the  
limitations of both telephone and e-  
mail with a chat room-like format in  
which numerous people congregate.

5           Instant messaging programs  
differ from chat-room websites in that  
users exercise more control over whom  
they communicate with by creating  
personalized chat lists. While many  
teens enjoy chatting with strangers, a  
surprising number simply want to talk to  
their friends.

6           Moreover, the image of teens  
wandering aimlessly around the Web,  
tripping onto sinister sites and bumping  
into shady characters, may be misleading.  
Outside of socializing through e-mail, icq  
and chat rooms, the Youth Culture Survey  
found that doing homework is the single  
most popular reason teens identify for  
going online.

7           This creative, two-way  
relationship with the Net may be behind  
one of the survey's most surprising  
findings: teens who use it are about as  
likely to click on the Net as they are to  
flick on the TV. While they tend to  
perceive television as relaxing, they also  
complain it can be a waste of time.  
Young people think of the Net, on the  
other hand, as a trendsetting medium  
that offers plenty of amusement.

8 Patrick Thoburn, director of Internet strategy at Youth Culture, believes that young people’s identification with the Net is not just a phase they will outgrow. Rather, it represents a true generational shift. With the teen population—largely the “echo” children of the baby boomers—increasing 10 percent faster than Canadians overall, businesses face a challenge. Currently television swallows up 40 percent of the approximately \$11 billion Canadian companies spend on advertising. Only a

fraction of a per cent makes it to the Net. If advertisers want to reach teens, they need to radically rethink their habits.

9 The same goes for purchases online. Teens browse the Net to find out information about products, but only about 10 per cent have actually purchased something. “It’s just a lot easier going to the mall,” says Tom Clarke, a Toronto 12-year-old. “You go with all your friends. You’re not just sitting at home.” Teens, it seems, are still teens—on and off the Net.



What They Do on the Net	Teens	Parents
Research (homework, business)	93%	67%
Get information on favourite performing artists	80%	37%
Play games	75%	38%
Listen to music or download MP3 files	74%	34%
Get music lyrics or scores	72%	33%
Get information on favourite celebrities	69%	26%
Join chat sessions or discussion groups	68%	27%
Download software	59%	62%
Use instant messaging	59%	29%
Get sports information	57%	39%
Browse or get product information	46%	75%
Buy products online	10%	36%

APPENDIX D: Grade 7 Reading Table of Specifications



## APPENDIX E: Sample Summary Report

2009 Reading Assessment Division Summary Report

Grade 04 Results

Report generated on: Oct-22-2009

### Somewhere School Division Grade 4 Summary Report

A Summary Report of the 2009 Reading Assessment for Learning Project

**Purpose:** *To use assessment data to plan for improvement in student reading skills*

#### Notes, Considerations, and Cautions:

The purpose and nature of this report ...

*- This report provides a summary of key findings for your division derived from the provincial participation of about 11,000 Grade 4 students during April 2009. This report is written primarily for school-based administrators, teachers, and School Community Council members.*

*- Because this is a summary report, the data reported are selective in content and detail. When planning for improvement, the Assessment for Learning Program recommends that educators and other participants consider multiple measurements, more detail and several perspectives (lenses), both from this Assessment and other data sources.*

**- For further detailed results, please refer to your Detailed Division Report.**

Results from a large-scale assessment are a **snapshot** of student performance.

*- The results are not definitive. They do not tell the whole story. They need to be considered along with other sources of information available at the division.*

*- The results are more reliable when larger number of students participate and when aggregated at the provincial and division level, and should be considered cautiously at the school level. Individual student mastery of learning is best determined through effective and ongoing classroom-based assessment.*

Please note that if there are fewer than 5 students participating in a component of the assessment, results for that component are suppressed and show as 'nr' or #N/A in the charts and graphs.

#### What data are collected and reported?

Five broad student performance outcome areas were measured:

- **Reading Comprehension Skills:** *60-item multiple-choice test, organized by reading strategies and categorized as follows:*
  - *Using Cueing Systems*
  - *Connecting to Prior Knowledge*
  - *Making Inferences/Predictions*
  - *Noting Key Ideas & Finding Support*
  - *Summarizing/Recalling/Drawing Conclusions*
  - *Recognizing Author's Message & Craft*
- **Explicit Comprehension:** *a subset of the 60-item multiple-choice test involving responses to ideas and/or information stated directly in the text*
- **Implicit Comprehension:** *a subset of the 60-item multiple-choice test requiring the reader to apply background knowledge to interpret or infer ideas and/or information in the text*
- **Critical Comprehension:** *a subset of the 60-item multiple-choice test involving responses to ideas and/or information that require inferences and critical analysis*
- **Reader Response:** *two written-response questions assessing students' ability to make meaning from text by making connections to personal knowledge or experience (extending and applying new understandings)*

Opportunity-to-Learn (OTL) measures were derived from:

*- Student questionnaire responses provided measures across 5-level scales in three OTL elements (student preparation and commitment to learn; student knowledge and use of reading strategies; and home support for reading).*

*- Teacher questionnaire responses provided measures across 5-level scales in two classroom-related OTL elements (availability and use of resources; and, instruction and learning). Only division-level (and higher) data are available for these measures.*

## Summary of Results

Please note that the definition of **meaningfully higher** is provided in a text box on page 4 of this report. Also note that if printing on a black & white printer, references to green shading appear light-grey and references to red shading appear dark-grey.

### Reading Performance Results

The first summary chart shows results for the five measures related to overall reading performance, and the second summary chart shows results for the six reading strategy areas comprising the set of reading comprehension skills. Percentages indicate the proportion of students achieving at least the adequate standard of performance for the particular measure. Any percentage highlighted with green (light-coloured) shading indicates performance for that measure is meaningfully higher than that of the province. Percentages highlighted with red (dark-coloured) shading indicate performance meaningfully lower than the province. Percentages not shaded indicate results were similar to the provincial results.

The last column of each chart provides one indicator of possible overall improvement since 2007. The symbol  $\Delta$  indicates results have improved meaningfully compared to the change in overall provincial results from 2007 to 2009, whereas the symbol  $\nabla$  indicates results have meaningfully lowered relative to the provincial results. The symbol  $\leftrightarrow$  means there has been similar relative change in performance compared to the province. Areas of relative strength are indicated by high percentages, green shading and/or 'up' triangles. Areas to consider for improvement are characterized by low percentages, red shading, and/or 'down' triangles.

#### Summary Chart 1: Overall Reading Performance Results

Performance Area	% Achieving Adequate Standard	Impr?
Reading Comprehension Skills .....	88%	$\leftrightarrow$
Explicit Comprehension .....	94%	$\leftrightarrow$
Implicit Comprehension .....	82%	$\leftrightarrow$
Critical Comprehension .....	91%	$\leftrightarrow$
Reader Response .....	77%	$\leftrightarrow$

#### Summary Chart 2: Reading Strategies Performance Results

Performance Area	% Achieving Adequate Standard	Impr?
Using Cueing Systems .....	91%	$\leftrightarrow$
Connecting to Prior Knowledge .....	87%	$\leftrightarrow$
Making Inferences/Predictions .....	89%	$\leftrightarrow$
Noting Key Ideas and Finding Support .....	81%	$\leftrightarrow$
Recall/Paraphrase/Summarize/Synthesize/Conclude .....	92%	$\leftrightarrow$
Recognizing Author's Message & Craft .....	93%	$\leftrightarrow$

Please see the text box note on page 5 for further information on the interpretation of the improvement symbols ( $\Delta$ ,  $\nabla$ , and  $\leftrightarrow$ ) used in these charts, and see a more detailed explanation and examples at <http://www.education.gov.sk.ca/AFL>.

### Opportunity-to-Learn (OTL) Results

The adjacent chart is structured similarly to the charts above, only they show the percentages of students indicating opportunity consistent with at least the sufficient standard. Shading of percentages indicate meaningful (higher, lower or similar) comparisons with the provincial results, and the symbols in the last column indicate whether opportunity has changed meaningfully relative to the change of overall provincial opportunity for the specified measures.

#### Summary Chart 3: Opportunity-to-Learn Measures

Opportunity Element	% Achieving Sufficient Standard	Impr?
<b>Readiness &amp; Support-Related, Division Results</b>		
Prep. & Commitment to Learn .....	85%	$\leftrightarrow$
Knowledge & Use of Reading Strategies .....	66%	$\leftrightarrow$
Home Support for Reading .....	82%	$\leftrightarrow$
<b>Classroom-Related, Division Results</b>		
Avail. & Use of Resources .....	34%	$\nabla$
Instruction & Learning .....	59%	$\leftrightarrow$

#### What other reports related to the Reading Assessment are available? What information do they contain?

**Detailed School Report** provides, among other data, more detailed information related to:

- standards for achievement and opportunity-to-learn;
- percentage distributions and average levels for opportunity-to-learn measures at the school, division, and province levels;
- average percent correct for each subcomponent of the Reading Comprehension Skill area (categorized by reading strategy and by text type), and average performance level for each aspect in the Reader Response area (at the school, division, and province levels);
- detailed item analysis for multiple-choice items and reader-response questions;
- gender comparisons for opportunity-to-learn elements and selected assessment subcomponents; and,
- comparisons of performance in selected areas between high-opportunity and low-opportunity student groups.

**Summary and Detailed Division Reports** are similar to those for the school except they feature division data.

**Division Questionnaire Reports** provide percentage distributions for all questionnaire items (division and provincial profiles).

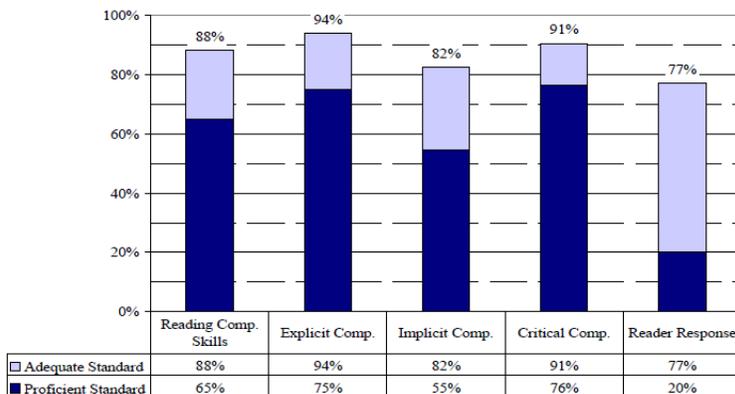
**Division Subpopulation Reports** provide summary results for male, female, First Nations & Métis, French Immersion, and Community School students in the division with provincial comparative information.

## Student Performance Outcomes

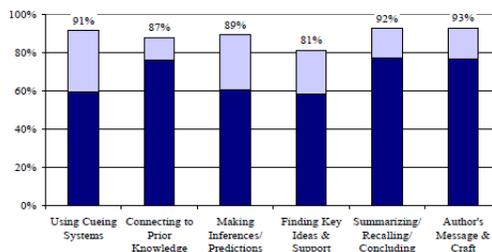
### What are the results? How are performance standards being met?

Figure 1.1 shows, for each of the five performance areas, the percentage of Grade 4 students achieving the adequate standard or higher and the percentage achieving the proficient standard. The standards help adjust for perceived differences in difficulty and serve to help interpret which performance areas were met with greatest success. The performance area with the highest percentage of students achieving the adequate (or higher) standard represents the performance area of greatest relative strength. Figure 1.2 shows a breakdown of how students did on the subcomponents (reading strategy subsets) that comprise the Reading Comprehension Skills area of the Assessment.

**Figure 1.1: Percentage of Grade 4 Students Achieving Adequate and Proficient Standards, Division**



**Figure 1.2: Reading Strategies - Percentage of Students Achieving Adequate and Proficient Standards**



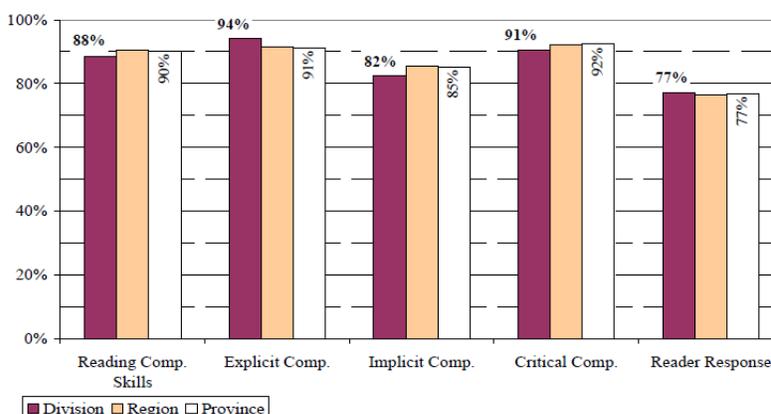
Standards (shown in the adjacent chart) were set during a three-day session by a panel of teachers and academics with language arts and reading skill development and teaching expertise. The panel deliberated over the nature and difficulty of aspects of the assessment tasks, considered the learning environment and assessment context, and discussed rationale for their judgments. To help interpret how well students did in performance areas, two standards were set: one for adequate or higher performance, and one for proficient or higher performance.

Performance Measure		Standards: Required Level for ...	
		Scale	Proficiency
Reading Comprehension Skills	Percentage	52%	73%
Explicit Comprehension	Percentage	55%	76%
Implicit Comprehension	Percentage	52%	73%
Critical Comprehension	Percentage	52%	72%
Reader Response	5-level	3.00	4.00
<b>Strategies Within Reading Comprehension Skills</b>			
Using Cueing Systems	Percentage	54%	75%
Connecting to Prior Knowledge	Percentage	56%	74%
Making Inferences/ Predictions	Percentage	49%	71%
Finding Key Ideas & Support	Percentage	53%	75%
Summarizing/ Recalling/ Concluding	Percentage	49%	68%
Author's Message & Craft	Percentage	51%	73%

**How do the division results compare to provincial results?**

Figure 2.1 shows, for each of the five performance areas, a comparison between the percentage of Grade 4 students in the division who achieved the adequate standard or higher compared to similarly achieving students in the division and in the province. Figure 2.2 identifies all the performance areas where differences between the division and province are deemed to be meaningfully higher or meaningfully lower. This figure also includes the instances where there is a meaningful difference within the various reading strategy skill areas. Please keep in mind that if the division results are based on small participation numbers, there can be great fluctuation from one year's Grade 4 students to the next, and these meaningful differences may disappear with the next group.

**Figure 2.1: Percentage of Grade 4 Students Achieving Adequate or Higher Performance, Division, Region, and Province**



**Figure 2.2: Meaningful Differences in Performance**

	meaningfully higher than the Province	meaningfully lower than the Province
Of the five major performance areas, the division performed ...	-	-
For the specific reading strategy areas, the division performed ...	-	-

When making comparisons between results, the terms 'meaningfully higher', 'meaningfully lower', and 'similar to' are used. Differences were arbitrarily set as meaningful if there was more than an 8% difference and at least a 2 percentage point difference between the school and provincial profiles. For example, if the school achieved 55% of students with at least adequate performance compared to 50% for the province, then the school's results would be meaningfully higher than the province, because 55% is 10% higher than 50% (i.e.,  $55\%/50\%=1.1$  or 110%) and 55% is 5 percentage points more than 50% (i.e.,  $55\%-50\%=5\%$ ).

Comprehensive results are located in the Detailed Report on the following pages:  
 - **Reading Comprehension Skills** in Section 2 including results for various reading strategies and text types (Tables disaggregate results in the areas of **Explicit Comprehension**, **Implicit Comprehension**, and **Critical Comprehension**); and,  
 - **Reader Response** in Section 3.

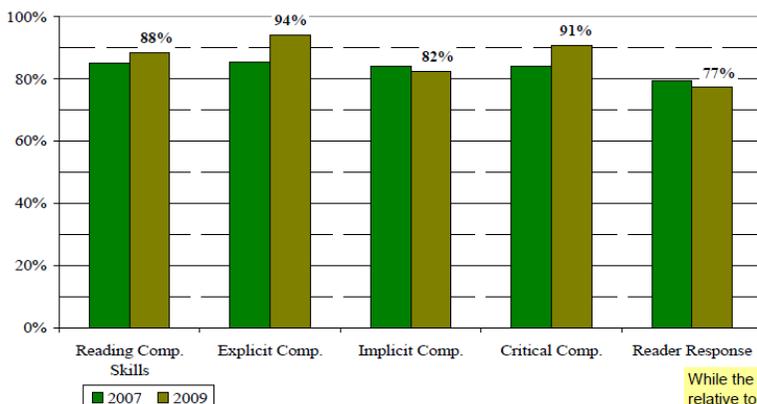
### Have the division's results changed over time?

Often it is difficult, based on just the provincial assessment, to determine whether performance outcomes at the division level have changed over time. There are a couple of reasons for this difficulty. First, a couple of years of assessment data (2007 and 2009) offer a short period of time over which improvement is made and tracked. Second, each year's assessment is unique with different reading passages and test items, and although the assessment is designed to be consistent and the standard-setting process offers a framework to 'scale for difficulty', there remains some uncertainty in year-to-year comparisons. Nonetheless, bearing in mind these caveats, it is worthwhile to review the data available to see how results compare.

Figure 3.1 shows the percentage of students achieving adequate or higher performance in the five reading performance areas for each of 2007 and 2009. Results for previous years are scaled and restated to adjust for any differences in levels of difficulty with the 2009 assessment components (through the standard-setting process).

Figure 3.2 shows how division results have changed over time by tracking how consistently the division's results have been meaningfully higher than, meaningfully lower than, or similar to the provincial results. An increased number of green boxes (or light-shaded boxes in the case of a black-and-white printout) and a decreased number of red boxes (or dark-shaded boxes in the case of a black-and-white printout) indicates that the division's results are improving more strongly than those of the province. The symbols in the last column of Figure 3.2 indicate whether there has been meaningful improvement relative to the province, comparing 2009 results with 2007.

**Figure 3.1: Percentage of Students Achieving Adequate or Higher, Change Over Time**



The heights of the achievement bars of Figure 3.1 help inform whether improvement has been made; however, because difficulty levels of assessment items vary from one assessment to the other, and standards may only partially control for these differences, it is useful to seek other indicators of improvement. Figure 3.2 uses comparisons with the provincial results and how they change from one assessment to the other to see if results are improving relative to the province. The symbols (Δ, ∇, and ↔) in the last column of Figure 3.2 compare 2009 results to 2007.

**Figure 3.2: Comparison of Division and Province Performance Over Time**

	2007	2009	Improvement?
Reading Comp. Skills		88%	↔
Explicit Comp.		94%	↔
Implicit Comp.		82%	↔
Critical Comp.		91%	↔
Reader Response		77%	↔
Using Cueing Systems		91%	↔
Connecting to Prior Knowledge		87%	↔
Making Inferences/ Predictions		89%	↔
Finding Key Ideas & Support		81%	↔
Summarizing/ Recalling/ Concluding		92%	↔
Author's Message & Craft		93%	↔

Legend: Division results are:  
 □ meaningfully higher than the province  
 ■ meaningfully lower than the province  
 □ similar to the province

Δ meaningful improvement was made...  
 ∇ deterioration in results has been meaningful...  
 ↔ no meaningful improvement ...  
 ... relative to overall provincial changes (2009 relative results compared to 2007).

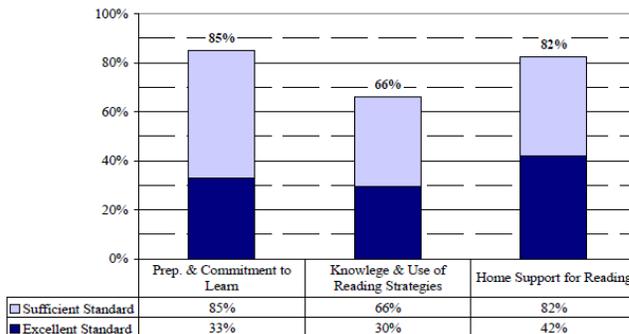
While the coloured shading indicates performance relative to the province for each of the specified years, the improvement symbols indicate whether performance has changed more than overall provincial performance. To be meaningful, change relative to the province must be at least a 4 percentage point difference, and the ratio of the school to the province in 2009 must be at least 10% higher or lower than the ratio of the school to the province in the previous comparative year. Please note that there can be a 'ceiling' effect for performance of a high-performing school (i.e., if the school has consistently had very high results and is meaningfully higher than the province, it is more difficult for the school to raise its results more than does the province). Please see <http://www.education.gov.sk.ca/AFL> for further explanation and examples.

## Students' Opportunities to Learn

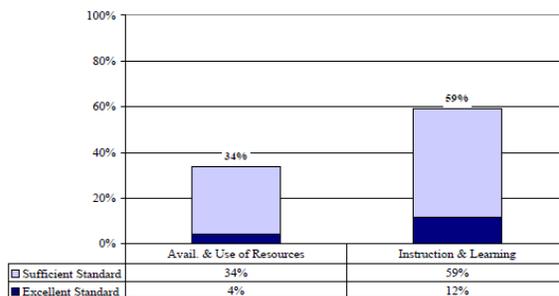
### What are the results? How are opportunity-to-learn standards being met?

Figure 4.1 shows, for each of the two student readiness-related and one home support-related opportunity-to-learn (OTL) elements, the percentage of Grade 4 students in the division with at least sufficient opportunity and those with excellent opportunity (as determined through the standard-setting process). A five-level scale (rubric) is used to describe the characteristics typical of low (Level 1) to high (Level 5) opportunity. Figure 4.2 shows division results for the two classroom-related OTL elements. Tracking and discussing student opportunity-to-learn with OTL rubrics (available on-line at <http://www.education.gov.sk.ca/AFL>) and actively creating student opportunities to learn should contribute well to improved students outcomes.

**Figure 4.1: Percentage of Grade 4 Students With at Least Sufficient or Excellent Opportunity-to-Learn, Division**



**Figure 4.2: Percentage of Elementary Language Arts Classrooms in the Division With Sufficient and Excellent Opportunity to Learn**

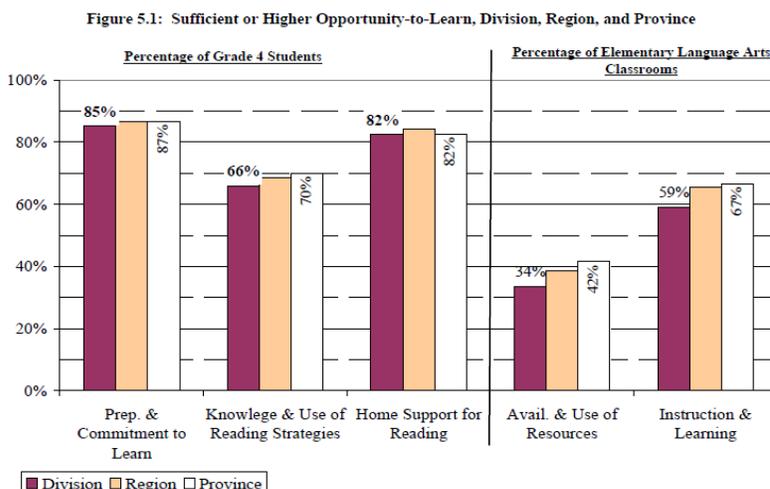


Standards (shown in the adjacent chart) were set for five opportunity-to-learn measures by the panel of teachers and academics. Two levels of standards were set: one for sufficient or higher opportunity, and one for excellent opportunity.

Opportunity Measure	Standards: Required Level for ...		
	Scale	Sufficiency	Excellence
Students ...			
Preparation and Commitment to Learn	5-level	2.80	4.03
Knowledge and Use of Reading Strategies	5-level	2.74	3.84
Home Support for Learning and Reading	5-level	2.76	3.83
Language Arts Classrooms ...			
Availability and Use of Resources	5-level	3.43	4.43
Instruction and Learning	5-level	3.23	4.32

**How do the division opportunity-to-learn results compare to provincial results?**

Figure 5.1 shows a comparison among division and provincial opportunity-to-learn results. For the first three OTL elements, the percentage of Grade 4 students who had sufficient or higher opportunity-to-learn are shown, and for the last two OTL elements, the percentage of elementary language arts classrooms with sufficient or higher opportunity-to-learn are shown. Figure 5.2 identifies all the OTL elements where differences between the division and province are deemed to be meaningfully higher or meaningfully lower.



**Figure 5.2: Meaningful Differences in Opportunity**

	meaningfully higher than the Province	meaningfully lower than the Province
For the readiness- and support-related OTL elements, the division results were ...	-	-
For the classroom-related OTL elements, the division results were	-	<i>Avail. &amp; Use of Resources</i> <i>Instruction &amp; Learning</i>

Comprehensive opportunity-to-learn results are located in Section 1 of the **Detailed Report**. In addition, the **Detailed Report** shows gender comparison information for these opportunity-to-learn measures, as well as comparisons in performance between those in the 'high opportunity' group and those in the 'low opportunity' group (Section 4).

### Have division opportunity-to-learn results changed over time?

Figure 6.1 shows the percentage of students in the division with sufficient or higher levels of opportunity-to-learn for three readiness- or support-related elements for each of the years 2007 and 2009. The last two sets of bars present the percentage of elementary language arts classrooms in the division indicating sufficient or higher classroom-related opportunity-to-learn. Drawing conclusions about student opportunity-to-learn will be limited using just these couple of years of data, but other sources of information and discussions in the school community and within the division related to the teaching and learning process might be enhanced by these data.

Similar to the portrayal on page 5, Figure 6.2 shows division opportunity-to-learn results and how consistently these results have been meaningfully higher than, meaningfully lower than, or similar to the provincial results, and whether improvement is being made relative to provincial results (see the text box on page 5 or refer to <http://www.education.gov.sk.ca/AFL> for further explanation and/or examples). An increased number of green boxes (or light-shaded boxes in the case of a black-and-white printout) and a decreased number of red boxes (or dark-shaded boxes in the case of a black-and-white printout), and a large number of 'up' triangles indicate that the division's results are improving more strongly than those of the province.

Figure 6.1: Sufficient or Higher Opportunity-to-Learn, Change Over Time

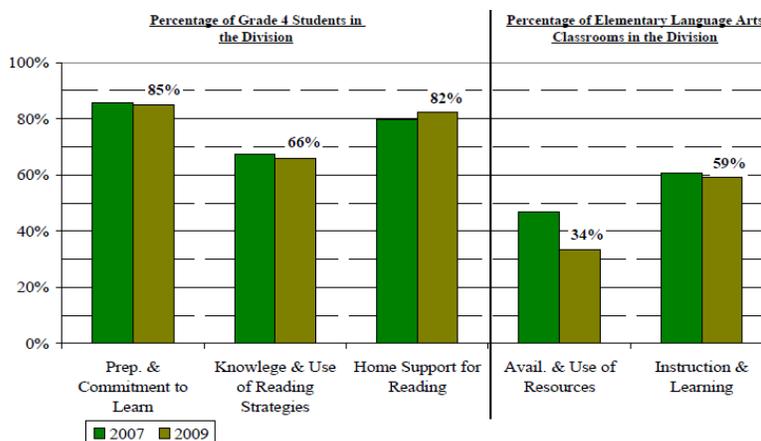


Figure 6.2: Comparison with Provincial Opportunity-to-Learn Over Time

Category	2007		2009		Improvement?
	Meaningful	Similar	Meaningful	Similar	
Prep. & Comm. to Learn					↔
Know & Use Reading Strategies					↔
Home Support for Reading					↔
Avail. & Use of Resources			34%		▽
Instruction & Learning			59%		↔

Legend: Division results are:

- meaningfully higher than the province
- meaningfully lower than the province
- similar to the province
- △ meaningful improvement was made...
- ▽ deterioration in results has been meaningful...
- ↔ no meaningful improvement ...

...relative to overall provincial changes (2009 relative results compared to 2007).

## APPENDIX F: Treaties

## Treaties

Many of us are used to “making deals” with friends or family members. What kind of deals or agreements have you made? Do you honour your agreements? What kinds of deals could nations make between each other?

**“A treaty is an agreement negotiated between two or more nations.”<sup>1</sup>**

If you were asked, “Who benefits from the treaties signed in Saskatchewan,” how would you answer? There are many misunderstandings about the treaties. It is important for all of us who live in this province to know what the treaties are, why they were created, and who benefits from them.

In 1763, King George III of Britain issued a Royal Proclamation. That Proclamation said that the Crown (the government) had to sign a treaty to obtain access to, or pay the First Nations people for, their lands. This had to happen before any settlers could live on the First Nations lands in the West.

10 In the late 1800’s First Nations and the government of Canada began to sign treaties in Saskatchewan. The Cree, Saulteaux, Assiniboine, and Dene people all signed treaties. The Crown and First Nations people had very different reasons for agreeing to sign treaties with each other.

15 The government viewed the treaties as straight-forward legal transactions. For the government, this meant that in return for their promises of payments and services, the First Nations gave up ownership of the land. From a traditional First Nations perspective, land cannot be bought or sold; it belongs to the Creator. Thus, they are the guardians of the land, not the owners. First Nations people viewed treaties as a sacred agreement to share the land and its resources.

20 In Canada, First Nations leaders recognized that their way of life was changing. Game was becoming scarce in the north and the buffalo were disappearing on the plains. Consequently, many First Nations people were starving. In spite of all of these changes, they wanted to retain their culture, lifestyles, and traditions. They believed the treaties would guarantee that.

25 The treaties in Saskatchewan varied from one to the other. Some of the rights for First Nations people contained in the treaties include the following.

- to be given lands in their traditional home areas as reserves
- to be able to hunt, fish, and trap on unoccupied lands
- to have a teacher and a school
- 30 • to have farming tools and livestock
- to receive annual payments from the government
- to have protection from alcohol traders
- to receive medical assistance

35 The First Nations people who signed the treaties were told that these rights were to last forever – “as long as the sun shines and the grass grows.” However, there is disagreement about whether or not these promises have actually been kept.

40 In return for these rights, the government of Canada was given access to lands. Those lands would be used for settlement as well as for agriculture and resource development.

All of us who live in Saskatchewan benefit from the treaties. We need to learn about these treaties and support their discussion and settlement.

---

<sup>1</sup>*Frequently asked questions about treaties.* (n.d.). Retrieved February 15, 2008, from <http://www.otc.ca/FAQ.htm>

Source: Adapted from materials created by the Office of the Treaty Commissioner

**MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS – “Treaties”**

Choose the **BEST** answer.

1. What is a treaty?
  - A. a(n) resource
  - B. a(n) tradition
  - C. a(n) agreement
  - D. a(n) payment
  
2. Why does the author include a question in lines 2 and 3?
  - A. to inform the audience
  - B. to get the reader’s attention
  - C. to summarize the article
  - D. to test the reader
  
3. What could be an example of a treaty in your own life?
  - A. a part-time job at the local fast-food restaurant
  - B. an action plan to eat more nutritiously
  - C. a contract with your teacher
  - D. a research project on First Nations people
  
4. Which statement from the article indicates that the traditional way of life of First Nations people changed with the arrival of European settlers?
  - A. There was not enough food and many First Nations people were starving to death.
  - B. Very little land remained for agriculture after the settlers claimed what they wanted.
  - C. The First Nations people could not retain their culture with the new settlers moving onto the land.
  - D. The settlers used force to move First Nations people off their traditional lands.
  
5. Why might the First Nations people have considered the treaties to be good for their people?
  - A. They felt the treaties would help them get along with settlers.
  - B. They felt the treaties would give them more freedom.
  - C. They felt the treaties would assure peace among the tribes.
  - D. They felt the treaties would help them preserve their customs.

6. The bullets in paragraph six (lines 25-33) are used to
- A. summarize the ideas of this article.
  - B. explain the responsibilities of the Canadian government.
  - C. list the rights of First Nations people in treaties.
  - D. describe the events leading up to the treaties.
7. What information in the text allows us to predict settlement in the West?
- A. The treaties gave settlers access to the land.
  - B. Treaties are straight-forward legal transactions.
  - C. First Nations people were given the right to hunt, fish, and trap.
  - D. The land belonged to the Creator.
8. Which sentence best summarizes paragraph seven (lines 34-37)?
- A. The government promised that the rights set out in the treaties would always be there.
  - B. First Nations people are happy with the way treaty matters have been handled.
  - C. The government is trying its best to keep the promises it made years ago.
  - D. People in Saskatchewan should learn about the treaties and promote their discussion and settlement.
9. Which of the following sentences BEST describes what happened when the treaties were signed?
- A. One side was forced to sign the agreement by the other.
  - B. The two sides gave up something to gain something else.
  - C. The two sides were not in agreement.
  - D. The agreement was signed to avoid any fighting.
10. What type of text is "Treaties"?
- A. a(n) novel
  - B. a(n) diary entry
  - C. a(n) adventure story
  - D. a(n) history article

## APPENDIX G: Grade 7 Informational Text Coding Guide

## APPENDIX H: Reader Response Exemplars

<b>Making Connections</b>	<b>W</b>
Addressing the Prompt	R
Understanding	W
Providing Support	W

The author of "School Uniforms?" believes that there are both advantages and disadvantages in adopting school uniforms for students of all ages.

Respond to each of the following in complete sentences.

1. How do you regard people, such as team members, police, medical, or military personnel who wear uniforms? Why?
2. According to the article, what are at least 2 positive and 2 negative effects of wearing uniforms?
3. What actions might you take either to support or to oppose wearing school uniforms at your school? Why?

Knowing who is on your your team, force, ect. A feeling of belonging, so proper dress is acquired, to look more professional or to look important, and look like they know what they're doing, people will know what their profession is by the uniforms. The negative effects would include not being able to tell them apart, or mistaking them for someone else. A negative police uniform example would be chasing a criminal who might not think a person would be a part of the police force if they didn't wear a uniform. A negative team uniform example would be mistaking your team for a different

continued

team. People who wear uniforms give off a sense of safety, or knowing what they are doing. Police, for example, make people feel safe. People know which people are police, by their uniforms. You know what team to cheer for, when each team is wearing different colours, or uniforms. A person could tell doctors and nurses apart by the way they dress in uniforms. I would support and oppose wearing school uniforms. I would oppose because sometimes it's fun picking your wardrobe every morning, and wearing clothes of your choice often shows your personality. Showing your personality through clothes helps you meet new people. Wearing clothes of your choice also might make a school look more interesting, or brighter. Looking at or wearing

continued

different clothes might show your mood, or put you in a mood. I would support uniforms because people wouldn't be teased by what kind of clothes they wear, what their clothes look like, how they wear, or style their clothes, or what kind of clothing brands they buy. Wearing uniforms would create a sense of belonging to some people. If we wore uniforms we wouldn't take as long to get ready in the morning. Wearing school uniforms would solve, and create problems for everyone.

### Justification

**Prompt** – states and explains own view of people who wear uniforms, provides over 4 effects of wearing uniforms, 1 general 'I would support because...' and 1 specific 'picking own wardrobe' action (R).

**Understanding** – perceptive on first page, thorough thoughtful discussion of both sides of the school uniform issue, specific evidence of understanding the text, refers to sense of belonging and professionalism (W).

**Support** – several specific references to the text (W).

**Connections** – shows complex connections to the text (personality shown through clothes, clothes affect mood) (W).

## APPENDIX I: Sample Detail Report

2009 Reading Assessment School Detailed Report: **Anonymous School**

Grade 10 Results

Report generated on: Oct-22-2009

## 2009 Reading Assessment for Learning Project

### Anonymous School Grade 10 Report

**Purpose:**

The purpose of the 2009 Reading Assessment for Learning (AFL) Project is to gather data about student reading proficiency and opportunity, which schools and school divisions can use for improving student learning. Ways that the AFL Program can support improved learning outcomes include:

- informing discussion around student performance;
- helping to identify areas of focus for instructional and program planning;
- promoting and supporting teaching/learning communities across grade levels; and,
- strengthening assessment literacy and capacity to use data for improvement.

**Principles:**

1. Cooperation and shared accountability
2. Equity and fairness
3. Comprehensiveness (broad range of performance indicators - context, processes, and outcomes)
4. Continuous improvement toward quality and excellence (throughout the entire education system)
5. Teacher professionalism (respect for, and responsibility of)
6. Authenticity and validity
7. Honesty and openness (reporting strengths and weaknesses)

**Data Collection:**

The AFL Reading Assessment is designed to gather data and report on aspects of student opportunity-to-learn and reading performance outcome measures.

- Opportunity-to-Learn (OTL) measures were derived from responses to student and teacher questionnaires. Opportunity-to-learn data provides indicators about student practices and knowledge and use of reading strategies, about home support for learning and reading development, and about resources and classroom instruction and learning that supports reading development.
- Student performance outcome measures were derived from an assessment instrument consisting of four reading passages with 80 multiple-choice items and two written response items, designed to assess student reading strategies and proficiency related to different types of text.

The Assessment was administered in April 2009 to almost 12,000 Grade 10 students in 29 school divisions (about 280 schools).

**Considerations and Cautions:**

**Large-scale assessment data are only snapshots of student performance at a given point in time.**

- Assessment results are important indicators of student learning, but they are only one indicator. Large-scale assessment data should be considered along with information from ongoing classroom assessments as points for reflection and further investigation.
- The results are most reliable when provided at the provincial, regional, and division level, and depending on the size of the tested population, should be cautiously considered at the school and, particularly, at the individual level.

**The reliability of assessment data is affected by the size of the tested population.**

- The larger the population, the more reliable the data will be. Results derived from a small population will be unduly affected by a few low or high scores. Provincial results will be more reliable than division results and, in turn, division results will be more reliable than school results.
- For schools with small populations, care should be taken in interpreting the results. Attempts to compare results from one school to the next or from one year to the next must consider that much of the variation can be due to differences between the groups (and only some of the variation due to interventions made in the learning program). One might expect significant variation from one year to the next, and it is only after several years that testing might show 'school differences' among small schools. The school and teachers will judge effectiveness of interventions through their ongoing assessment of students and programs.

**Large-scale assessments cannot measure all aspects of learning to read.**

*- Reading is a complex developmental process that requires the flexible use of many strategies. No single instrument can assess all of the elements of learning to read. The reading strategies and learning outcomes linked to this assessment reflect only a fraction of the skills and processes necessary for learning to read. A balanced program of classroom assessment and instruction based on Saskatchewan curricula is the best tool for ensuring student growth in reading.*

*- Although the Assessment provides useful data at the provincial, division, and school levels, the Assessment is limited in providing information on individual student reading strategies and proficiency. Ongoing, high-quality classroom-based assessment is effective in determining individual student reading proficiency and for planning to meet the individual reading needs of individual students.*

**Teaching reading is a shared responsibility.**

*- Student achievement in reading in any given grade is the product of the cumulative effects of previous teaching and learning. Teachers at all grade levels and in all subject areas share responsibility for helping students become more proficient readers. Simply providing opportunities to read will not ensure that students become better readers; reading must be explicitly taught at all grade levels. Students need to learn how to be metacognitive about their strategy use. Reading and writing instruction needs to be incorporated into all courses of study. In addition, the conditions of student preparation and commitment to learn, home support, and school support all contribute to the process of learning to read.*

*- It is recommended that leadership teams from schools and school divisions use this data, along with other data they have collected to discuss the overall strengths and needs of their students as they plan instruction and programs.*

**Judging the Adequacy of the Results:**

There are at least five ways that data can be viewed to contribute to the investigation of whether students are developing reading proficiency consistent with expectations. It is best to use a combination of comparators to inform the investigation.

**1 - Criterion-referenced - Compare how students performed relative to curriculum outcomes, level attribution criteria (for reader response items), and the level of difficulty inherent in the assessment items. If low percentages of students are succeeding with respect to specific reading strategies or text types, this may be an area for further investigation, and for planning intervention to improve student reading.**

Tables in the report provide some information to help readers make criterion-referenced adequacy judgements. These include identification of reading strategies tested (Table 10.8) and distributions and coding related to the written reader-response items (Tables 10.7 and 10.8). Readers are invited to explore in depth other information to help inform how students are achieving expected criteria (found at <http://www.education.gov.sk.ca/AFL>). These include reviewing actual test items, scoring information and rubrics, and reviewing opportunity-to-learn rubrics. In this way, readers can understand better what was required of students, judge the validity of assessment measures, and use this knowledge to help plan areas for focus and improvement.

**2 - Standards-referenced - Compare how students performed for each performance or opportunity-to-learn area on the assessment against a set of standards developed through deliberation by teachers and academics with expertise in language arts and reading development. Results can be compared to these standards to help identify key areas for investigation and intervention.**

Understanding the criteria established for the assessment, and the extent to which the assessment validly describes student learning and performance against the criteria are important initial steps in formulating expectations for student performance related to the assessment. It can be useful to meet with colleagues to share and discuss aspects of the assessment and the factors that contribute to student learning and performance and to engage in establishing a formal set of expectations for the school or the division. This formal process respects different perspectives and provides opportunity to build common understanding. This report compares results against standards in many tables and graphs (e.g., Figure 10.2a, Figure 10.3b, Table 10.3b, Table 10.4b, Table 10.5b, and many others).

**3 - Experience-referenced - Compare how students performed relative to the strengths and weaknesses identified during ongoing student assessment in the classroom. Where discrepancies occur, further investigation or possible intervention might be considered.**

Assessment results in this report may confirm or challenge the understandings of student learning and performance gained through assessment in the classroom or data from other sources. It is recommended that both sets of results be considered in the planning process, and that through discussion with colleagues, judgements be made about where to focus celebration and improvement efforts based on all data sources and the general consensus of the school staff.

**4 - Norm-referenced - Compare how students in the school performed in each area relative to performance of students in the division or province. Bearing in mind notes and cautions introduced at the beginning of the report (particularly for small groups of students), areas where there was significant underperformance (percent will depend on school size and other factors), then this strand or area may require further investigation or intervention.**

In most of the tables and graphs of this report, school profiles are shown in the context of division and provincial results. These comparisons are often quick and easy to make, and they can be useful in identifying areas of strength and areas for improvement. Although useful in initially identifying these areas (while recognizing the Considerations and Cautions on pages 1 and 2), norm-referenced comparisons contribute minimally to how to use the assessment information to make improvements. Instead, more detailed and intensive work undertaken in criterion-referenced analysis is necessary to understand the results and how to use any knowledge gained through the assessment to plan for specific interventions.

**5 - Longitudinal-referenced** - Compare how students performed relative to earlier years' performance. Viewed across several years, assessment results and other classroom, school, and division evidence can identify trends and improvements in student learning, and guide what further intervention might be helpful.

Several tables and figures in this report show 2009 results compared to previous (2007) assessment results (e.g., Table 10.1, Figure 10.2d, Figure 10.2e, Figure 10.3-5)a, etc.). Comparisons between the 2009 assessment results and previous assessment results must account for possible differences in levels of difficulty of the items used in the assessments. Although created from the same table of specifications and field-tested to monitor levels of difficulty, results from past assessments are adjusted and related to account for differences in difficulty as adjudicated by a standard-setting panel of teachers and academics. Also, comparisons can be made indirectly based on the school's relative strength compared to the province over several years.

In summary, using all five of these 'lenses' to consider and study opportunity and performance results can help focus planning and action on key areas for improvement. Engaging school or division staff and/or community in a process of discussion and deliberation around expectations and targets for improvement can be useful to these improvement efforts.

### Interpreting Symbols in This Report

To help indicate whether there are significant or meaningful differences when considering normative or longitudinal comparisons, several symbols are used in tables and figures designed to feature those comparisons. Below is a brief description to help interpret these symbols. A more detailed explanation and examples of these symbols can be found at the AFL website (<http://www.education.gov.on.ca/AFL>).

In Tables 10.1a, 10.1b, and 10.1c, a summary of overall results is provided with comparisons to the division, province, and to how the school did in the previous (2007) reading assessment. There are two sets of symbols used, one set to show if any differences in results are statistically significant (assuming this year's results are a sample of five years' worth of results), and the other set of symbols to show whether any differences in results are meaningful. These are shown below:

The three possible symbols to indicate there is **statistically significant** distinction between the comparison groups are as follows:

- ▲ - Indicates the school (or division) results are statistically significantly **higher than** the comparison group;
- ▼ - Indicates the school (or division) results are statistically significantly **lower than** the comparison group; and,
- - Indicates the school (or division) results are statistically **similar to** the comparison group.

Three different symbols indicate whether there is a **meaningful distinction** between the two comparison groups, as follows:

- ▲ - Indicates the school (or division) results are meaningfully **higher than** the comparison group;
- ▼ - Indicates the school (or division) results are meaningfully **lower than** the comparison group; and,
- ± - Indicates the school (or division) results are meaningfully **similar to** the comparison group.

In Figures 10.2d, 10.2e, 10.3-5)a, 10.3-5)b, 10.7b, and 10.7c, coloured or shaded cells are used to show if there is a meaningful distinction between school (or division) results and the province for this 2009 assessment and the previous 2007 reading assessment. Also, these figures (charts) use a set of symbols to indicate whether there has been meaningful relative improvement for the school (or division) relative to the province. These are shown below:

The three colours (shadings) used to indicate **meaningful distinction** between the comparison groups are as follows:

- - Indicates the school (or division) results are meaningfully **higher than** the province;
- - Indicates the school (or division) results are meaningfully **lower than** the province; and,
- - Indicates the school (or division) results are meaningfully **similar to** the province.

Three symbols used to indicate meaningful change for the school (or division) relative to the province are as follows:

- △ - Indicates the school (or division) results are meaningfully improved **relative to the province**;
- ▽ - Indicates the school (or division) results are meaningfully down relative to the province; and,
- ± - Indicates the school (or division) results have **not changed** meaningfully relative to the province.

**What constitutes a meaningful distinction between comparison groups?**

An arbitrary rule was established in which distinctions were meaningful if one group was at least 8% higher than or lower than another group (and there was a minimum percentage point difference of 2%). As an example, a score of 55% would be meaningfully higher than a score of 50%, because it is 10% higher than 50% ((55%-50%)/50%) and 55% is 5 percentage points higher than 50%.

**What determines whether results show a meaningful improvement over time?**

Meaningful improvement from one AFL cycle to the next can be difficult to gauge because difficulty levels of assessment items, scoring procedures, and other aspects of the assessment can vary, and the standard-setting panel may only partially control for these differences. One way to consider the extent (or lack) of improvement is to determine whether the gap between school (or division) results and provincial results is narrowing or extending by a meaningful amount. A school can have results that are meaningfully lower than the province both in 2007 and 2009, but it may have narrowed the gap by a meaningful amount, and thus there is an indication of improvement. Inversely, a school can have results that are meaningfully higher than the province both in 2007 and 2009, but its results advantage might be much less, and thus there is an indication of deterioration (i.e., the province is 'catching up' to the school).

There are many possibilities (extending an advantage, narrowing an advantage, narrowing a disadvantage, extending a disadvantage, maintaining a gap, etc.). It may be useful to note that there can be a 'ceiling' effect for performance of a high-performing school (i.e., if the school has consistently had very high results and is meaningfully higher than the province, it is more difficult for the school to raise its results more than does the province).

An arbitrary rule was established to determine if relative change between the school (or division) and province constituted meaningful improvement or meaningful deterioration. To be meaningful, change relative to the province must be at least a 4 percentage point difference, and the ratio of the school to the province in 2009 must be at least 10% higher or lower than the ratio of the school to the province in the previous comparative year.

For example, if in 2007, 50% of students in the school and 70% of students in the province achieved adequate results for a measure, and in 2009, the results for this same measure were 48% for the school and 60% for the province, the following calculation would be used to determine that the school results were meaningfully improved relative to the provincial results:

... (2009 school result - 2007 school result) - (2009 provincial result - 2007 provincial result) = (48%-50%) - (60%-70%) = 8 percentage point difference, which is greater than the 4 percentage point difference; and,

... (2009 school result divided by the 2009 provincial result) ratio divided by (2007 school result divided by the 2007 provincial result) = (48%/60%)/(50%/70%) = 112% or 12% higher, which is greater than the 10 percent higher ratio, so ...

the school results have improved meaningfully from 2007 to 2009 relative to the province (i.e., even though the school results remain meaningfully lower than the province, the school has meaningfully narrowed the gap), and the symbol  $\Delta$  would be placed in the chart.

An example where school results deteriorated relative to the province would be: in 2007, 50% of students in the school and 70% of students in the province achieved adequate results for a measure, and in 2009, the results for this same measure were 40% for the school and 65% for the province, the following calculation:

... (2009 school result - 2007 school result) - (2009 provincial result - 2007 provincial result) = (40%-50%) - (65%-70%) = -5 percentage point difference, which is greater than the 4 percentage point difference; and,

... (2009 school result divided by the 2009 provincial result) ratio divided by (2007 school result divided by the 2007 provincial result) = (40%/65%)/(50%/70%) = 86.2% or 13.8% lower, which is more than the 10 percent lower ratio, so ...

the school results have deteriorated meaningfully from 2007 to 2009 relative to the province (i.e., the school has meaningfully extended the gap in the negative direction), and the symbol  $\nabla$  would be placed in the chart.

## Opportunity-to-Learn and Performance Standards:

Student performance in a large-scale assessment is dependent on many factors, including:

- the knowledge and proficient use of reading strategies acquired by the student;
- the effort undertaken by the student;
- the conditions in which the assessment is administered; and,
- the level of difficulty of the assessment items.

Each year following the release of assessment results, the assessment tests are posted so that the nature of the assessment items and their difficulty might be part of discussions in planning for improvement. Consequently, new assessments are developed and used in subsequent years. This presents the challenge of how to effectively account for any differences in difficulty levels and to enable comparisons from one year to another to see what improvement might be indicated.

To help make meaningful longitudinal comparisons, three main processes are implemented. First, assessment items will be developed for each assessment cycle using a consistent table of specifications. These specifications detail the types of questions, the text types and reading strategies, and the levels of difficulty to be considered in the construction of the items. Second, the assessment items undergo 2 to 3 rounds of field-testing. The third main process involves the setting of standards for each of the assessment items, so that any differences in difficulty between two assessments are accounted for by varying standards for the two assessments.

- For instance, if an assessment is 'deemed easier' than a previous assessment, then the standards for performance in that assessment would be higher than those of the previous assessment. It would be possible to compare the current assessment's results with a restated set of results from the previous assessment that takes into account the different standards set for the two assessments.

In order to establish Opportunity-to-Learn and Performance standards for the 2009 Reading Assessment, three panels were convened (one for each assessed grade), consisting of teachers and post-secondary academics including Education faculty. The panelists studied each assessment item from the 2007 and 2009 assessments in significant detail and engaged in a process involving numerous judgements and discussions to make final deliberations regarding levels of difficulty for each assessment item. The detailed process undertaken resulted in the establishment of cut-scores for each of the assessment components.

Two levels of cut-scores were established in each performance component: one that defined performance on the assessment expected for students on the threshold of adequacy, and a second that defined performance on the assessment expected for students on the threshold of proficiency. For the opportunity-to-learn measures, the two levels of standards were described as sufficient level of opportunity and excellent level of opportunity. The following two tables show the standards set for the various assessment components.

**Table 10.0a: Opportunity-to-Learn Standards, Cut-Scores for Excellent and Sufficient**

Opportunity-to-Learn Elements	Average Level		Excellent Standard Range		Sufficient Standard Range	
	Excellent Standard	Sufficient Standard	Low	High	Low	High
Preparation for and Commitment to Learn	4.74	3.98	4.50	4.05	3.15	3.50
Knowledge and Use of Reading Strategies	4.50	2.93	4.15	4.05	2.00	3.33
Home Support for Reading	4.98	3.14	4.08	4.50	3.00	3.50
Availability and Use of Resources	4.58	3.50	4.50	4.73	3.50	3.90
Classroom Instruction and Learning	4.54	3.58	4.43	4.73	3.40	3.70

Note: Opportunity-to-Learn levels are reported on a five-level scale (1-low to 5-high). The standards used in this report are shown in the first two columns, representing the average of the judgements of standard-setting panels. The ranges shown in the last four columns of the table indicate differences of judgement by panels (25th percentile-low to 75th percentile-high judgements).

**Table 10.0b: Performance Standards, Cut-Scores for Threshold of Proficiency and Threshold of Adequacy**

Performance Component	Cut-Score		Proficient Standard Range		Adequate Standard Range	
	Proficient Standard	Adequate Standard	Low	High	Low	High
Reading Comprehension Skills	68%	49%	61%	72%	41%	50%
by comprehension type ...						
Explicit Comprehension	71%	51%	65%	81%	54%	58%
Implicit Comprehension	66%	47%	63%	73%	47%	54%
Critical Comprehension	57%	40%	61%	74%	49%	55%
by reading strategy ...						
Using Cueing Systems	69%	48%	65%	79%	47%	55%
Connecting to Prior Knowledge	73%	56%	69%	82%	55%	65%
Making Inferences/ Predictions	66%	49%	63%	74%	49%	54%
Noting Key Ideas and Finding Support	67%	48%	64%	75%	50%	54%
Summarizing/ Recalling/ Drawing Conclusions	66%	46%	63%	71%	46%	50%
Recognizing Author's Message and Craft	65%	46%	59%	78%	44%	52%
by text ...						
Defining Freedom (Literary text)	52%	32%	46%	61%	29%	36%
Plot 23, Row A, Grave 5 (Literary text)	54%	45%	50%	73%	40%	50%
On the 60th (Literary text)	66%	48%	65%	75%	47%	55%
Cyber Crime (Informational text)	72%	54%	67%	81%	54%	60%
Reporting Vehicle Accidents (Informational text)	75%	55%	70%	86%	55%	63%
Case for a National Service Program (Inform'l text)	78%	58%	69%	86%	59%	67%
Reader Response (overall level)	4.00	3.00	-	-	-	-
On the 60th (Informational text) - reader response	3.80	2.70	-	-	-	-
National Service Program (Inform'l text) - reader resp.	3.80	2.70	-	-	-	-

Note: Performances in reader response items are reported on a five-level scale (1-low to 5-high). Other performance components (shown as percentages in the table above) represent the percentage correct required to reach the adequate or proficient standard. The standards used in this report are shown in the first two columns, representing the average of the judgements of standard-setting panels. The ranges shown in the last four columns of the table indicate differences of judgement by panels (25th percentile-low to 75th percentile-high judgements).

## Notes:

- 'N/A' or 'na' entry in a table cell indicates that measurement is non-applicable or not available.
- 'nr' entry in a table cell indicates that the data are not released for this measure. In other words, the data are suppressed because the number of students at the grade were too few (less than 5). Results based on few students will fluctuate significantly from one assessment to the next. Also, the anonymity of the students is placed in jeopardy when too few students are the basis for the measure. For these same reasons, classroom OTL measures are suppressed at the school level, and only become available at the division level.
- The numbers of students or teachers that contribute to a measure at the school, division, and provincial levels are reported as footnotes to the tables. These numbers should be considered when judging the relevance of the data for planning purposes.
- Data shown in this report are a small part of the data that were generated from this Assessment.

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## Summary Overview of Results

This summary overview of results attempts to inform discussion around commonly asked questions such as: what were our results?, how do they compare with others' results (division and provincial profiles)?, are they improving (longitudinal comparison)?, This section reports averages and the percentages of students that attained standard levels (as described on pages 3-4 of this report). The comparisons with division and provincial results are shown as symbols, described in the next paragraph. Actual division and provincial results are found later in the report (page number references are provided in the last column of these three tables).

Two comparator symbols occur in each of the comparator cells. The first symbol (in a cell) represents how the results compare, treating the tested population as random samples of five years of students to accommodate some of the variability that occurs from one year's class to the next, particularly for small student populations. The three possible symbols to indicate there is statistically significant distinction between the comparison groups are as follows:

- ▲ - Indicates the results shown in the first column are statistically significantly **higher than** the comparison group;
- ▼ - Indicates the results shown in the first column are statistically significantly **lower than** the comparison group; and,
- indicates the results shown in the first column are statistically **similar to** the comparison group.

The second symbol (in a cell) represents how the results compare in terms of meaningful distinction between the two comparison groups. A meaningful distinction between comparison groups was determined by arbitrarily choosing to see if one group was 8% higher than or lower than another group (and required that there must be a minimum percentage point difference of 2%). As an example, a score of 55% would be meaningfully higher than a score of 50%, because it is 10% higher than 50% ((55%-50%)/50%) and 55% is 5 percentage points higher than 50%. For low scores, it requires less difference to trigger meaningful distinction. The three possible symbols to indicate there is a meaningful distinction between the comparison groups are as follows:

- ⬆ - Indicates the results shown in the first column are meaningfully **higher than** the comparison group;
- ⬇ - Indicates the results shown in the first column are meaningfully **lower than** the comparison group; and,
- ↔ - Indicates the results shown in the first column are meaningfully **similar to** the comparison group.

It is expected that for small student populations, fewer occurrences of statistically significant distinctions and more occurrences of meaningful distinctions would occur, and that it would tend to be opposite for large student populations. Both these comparator types should be considered when reviewing the results.

Tables 10.1a, 10.1b, and 10.1c provide a condensed overview of results and comparisons to indicate how well students can read. To gain better insight as to what students know and can do, much more detail is provided in the many tables and charts throughout this report. Readers can explore the results relative to curriculum outcomes and assessment rubrics, and can consider other data and evidence from the classroom, school, and division, as they plan for improvement.

Table 10.1a: Average Scores and Relative Performance, Opportunity-to-Learn and Performance Elements

Assessment Elements	Average Level/ Score (School)	Results Relative to:			Comparator Results Reported on:
		Division	Province	School (2007)	
Preparation for and Commitment to Learn	3.1	- ↔	- ↔	▲ ⬆	Page 9
Knowledge and Use of Reading Strategies	2.5	- ↔	- ↔	- ↔	Page 9
Home Support for Reading	2.8	- ↔	- ↔	- ↔	Page 9
Availability and Use of Resources	na	na	na	na	Page 9
Classroom Instruction and Learning	na	na	na	na	Page 9
Reading Comprehension Skills	70%	- ↔	▼ ⬇	▲ ⬆	Pages 12-17
by comprehension type ...					
Explicit Comprehension	66%	- ↔	▼ ⬇	▲ ⬆	Pages 12-13
Implicit Comprehension	73%	- ↔	▼ ⬇	▲ ⬆	Pages 12-13
Critical Comprehension	69%	- ↔	▼ ⬇	▲ ⬆	Pages 12-13
by reading strategy ...					
Using Cueing Systems	71%	- ↔	▼ ⬇	▲ ⬆	Page 15
Connecting to Prior Knowledge	79%	- ↔	▼ ⬇	- ⬇	Page 15
Making Inferences/ Predictions	70%	- ↔	▼ ⬇	▲ ⬆	Page 15
Noting Key Ideas and Finding Support	73%	- ↔	▼ ⬇	▲ ⬆	Page 15
Summarizing/ Recalling/ Drawing Conclusions	63%	- ↔	▼ ⬇	- ↔	Page 15
Recognizing Author's Message and Craft	63%	- ↔	▼ ⬇	▲ ⬆	Page 15
by text ...					
Defining Freedom (Literary text)	67%	- ↔	▼ ⬇	▲ ⬆	Page 17
Plot 23, Row A, Grave 5 (Literary text)	68%	- ↔	▼ ⬇	▲ ⬆	Page 17
On the 60th (Literary text)	76%	- ↔	▼ ⬇	▲ ⬆	Page 17
Cyber Crime (Informational text)	72%	- ↔	▼ ⬇	- ↔	Page 17
Reporting Vehicle Accidents (Informational text)	67%	- ↔	▼ ⬇	- ↔	Page 17
Case for a National Service Program (Inform'l text)	67%	- ↔	- ↔	- ↔	Page 17
Reader Response (overall level)	3.1	- ↔	▲ ⬆	- ↔	-
On the 60th (Informational text) - reader response	3.2	- ↔	▲ ⬆	▲ ⬆	Page 23
National Service Program (Inform'l text) - reader resp.	2.7	- ↔	▲ ⬆	- ↔	Page 23

Note: Performances for reader response items and opportunity-to-learn elements are reported on a five-level scale (1-low to 5-high). Other performance components (shown as percentages in the table above) represent the percentage correct average. The normative comparator symbols presented in the middle columns of the table indicate how the average levels or scores compare with the division and province profile.

Note: 'na' values in the table mean that the information on which to base a comparison is not available.

## Summary Overview of Results (continued)

Table 10.1b: Proficient or Higher Performance, Relative Comparisons, Opportunity-to-Learn and Performance Elements

Assessment Elements	% of Students Attaining Proficient or Higher Performance (School)	Results Relative to:			Comparator Results Reported on:
		Division	Province	School (2007)	
Preparation for and Commitment to Learn	12%	▲	▲	▲	Page 10
Knowledge and Use of Reading Strategies	5%	▼	▼	▼	Page 10
Home Support for Reading	11%	- **	▼	-	Page 10
Availability and Use of Resources	na	na	na	na	Page 10
Classroom Instruction and Learning	na	na	na	na	Page 10
Reading Comprehension Skills	54%	▼	▼	▲	Pages 13-18
by comprehension type ...					
Explicit Comprehension	48%	▼	▼	▲	Pages 13-14
Implicit Comprehension	76%	▲	▲	▲	Pages 13-14
Critical Comprehension	63%	- **	- **	▲	Pages 13-14
by reading strategy ...					
Using Cueing Systems	68%	- **	- **	▲	Pages 15-17
Connecting to Prior Knowledge	69%	- **	- **	▲	Pages 15-17
Making Inferences/Predictions	76%	▲	▲	▲	Pages 15-17
Noting Key Ideas and Finding Support	84%	▼	▼	▲	Pages 15-17
Summarizing/ Recalling/ Drawing Conclusions	51%	▼	▼	▼	Pages 15-17
Recognizing Author's Message and Craft	54%	▼	▼	▲	Pages 15-17
by text ...					
Defining Freedom (Literary text)	73%	▼	▼	▲	Page 18
Plot 23, Row A, Grave 5 (Literary text)	70%	- **	- **	▲	Page 18
On the 60th (Literary text)	83%	- **	▲	▲	Page 18
Cyber Crime (Informational text)	65%	- **	- **	▲	Page 18
Reporting Vehicle Accidents (Informational text)	42%	▼	▼	- **	Page 18
Case for a National Service Program (Inform'l text)	53%	▲	▲	▲	Page 18
Reader Response (overall level)	30%	- **	▲	- **	Page 24
On the 60th (Informational text) - reader response	40%	▲	▲	▲	Page 24
National Service Program (Inform'l text) - reader resp.	26%	- **	- **	▼	Page 24

Table 10.1c: Adequate or Higher Performance, Relative Comparisons, Opportunity-to-Learn and Performance Elements

Assessment Elements	% of Students Attaining Adequate or Higher Performance (School)	Results Relative to:			Comparator Results Reported on:
		Division	Province	School (2007)	
Preparation for and Commitment to Learn	61%	- **	- **	▲	Page 10
Knowledge and Use of Reading Strategies	54%	▲	▲	▲	Page 10
Home Support for Reading	52%	▼	▼	▼	Page 10
Availability and Use of Resources	na	na	na	na	Page 10
Classroom Instruction and Learning	na	na	na	na	Page 10
Reading Comprehension Skills	97%	▲	▲	▲	Pages 13-18
by comprehension type ...					
Explicit Comprehension	89%	- **	- **	▲	Pages 13-14
Implicit Comprehension	100%	▲	▲	▲	Pages 13-14
Critical Comprehension	100%	▲	▲	▲	Pages 13-14
by reading strategy ...					
Using Cueing Systems	91%	- **	- **	▲	Pages 15-17
Connecting to Prior Knowledge	91%	▲	▲	▲	Pages 15-17
Making Inferences/Predictions	96%	▲	▲	▲	Pages 15-17
Noting Key Ideas and Finding Support	98%	▲	▲	▲	Pages 15-17
Summarizing/ Recalling/ Drawing Conclusions	92%	▲	▲	▲	Pages 15-17
Recognizing Author's Message and Craft	90%	▲	▲	▲	Pages 15-17
by text ...					
Defining Freedom (Literary text)	96%	- **	- **	▲	Page 18
Plot 23, Row A, Grave 5 (Literary text)	94%	- **	- **	- **	Page 18
On the 60th (Literary text)	94%	▲	▲	▲	Page 18
Cyber Crime (Informational text)	88%	▲	▲	▼	Page 18
Reporting Vehicle Accidents (Informational text)	91%	▲	▲	▲	Page 18
Case for a National Service Program (Inform'l text)	70%	- **	▼	- **	Page 18
Reader Response (overall level)	70%	▼	- **	▲	Page 24
On the 60th (Informational text) - reader response	79%	- **	- **	▲	Page 24
National Service Program (Inform'l text) - reader resp.	61%	▼	▼	▼	Page 24

Note: For the above two tables, percentages indicate the proportion of students who achieved performance levels or scores higher than the standard for threshold of proficiency (Table 10.1b) and the threshold of adequacy (Table 10.1c). Please see notes and results on pages 3-4 of this report for explanation of these standards. The normative comparator symbols presented in the middle columns of the table indicate how the proportion of students achieving at least adequate performance compares with the division and province profile.

Note: 'na' values in the table mean that the information on which to base a comparison is not available.

### Opportunity-to-Learn Results for the Secondary Level - Section 1

Student achievement outcomes are affected not only by student ability, but also by differences in student experiences. Students' opportunities to learn reading strategies and develop reading proficiency are dependent on the learning experiences in the school and classroom, on the preparation and commitment of the student to engage in these experiences, and also on the supports provided to students outside the school environment. Providing opportunity to learn is a shared responsibility.

Five elements of opportunity-to-learn (OTL) were measured using a five-level rubric to build an index. Data derived from teacher responses to a survey of classroom practices and instructional approaches served to inform two classroom-related OTL indicators (availability and use of resources, and classroom instruction and learning). Student responses to a questionnaire provided data for the two readiness-related OTL indicators (preparation for and commitment to learn, knowledge and use of reading strategies) and for the one home support-related OTL indicator (home support for learning and reading development).

Learning is a complex process that takes on a variety of forms dependent on the interactions between the participants. These five OTL indicators serve to describe aspects of the learning process to invite reflection and discussion around instructional practice, engagement of students in learning and the role of the family in that learning. As such, the value of these measures is in the discussion around these topics, and should not be interpreted as a definitive set of measures of opportunity.

**Table 10.2a: Opportunity-to-Learn, School Results**

Elements	Percentage at Specified Level or Above					Average Level
	Level 1 or above	Level 2 or above	Level 3 or above	Level 4 or above	Level 5	
OTL-1: Preparation for and Commitment to Learn	100%	100%	84%	19%	10%	3.1
OTL-2: Knowledge and Use of Reading Strategies	100%	87%	52%	10%	0%	2.5
OTL-3: Home Support for Reading Development	100%	87%	58%	16%	3%	2.6

Note: Number of ... Participating Students: 32

**Table 10.2b: Opportunity-to-Learn, Division Results**

Elements	Percentage at Specified Level or Above					Average Level
	Level 1 or above	Level 2 or above	Level 3 or above	Level 4 or above	Level 5	
OTL-1: Preparation for and Commitment to Learn	100%	99%	78%	22%	3%	3.0
OTL-2: Knowledge and Use of Reading Strategies	100%	81%	42%	11%	3%	2.4
OTL-3: Home Support for Reading Development	100%	91%	64%	17%	3%	2.7
OTL-4: Availability and Use of Resources	100%	90%	80%	30%	0%	3.0
OTL-5: Classroom Instruction and Learning	100%	100%	73%	36%	9%	3.2

Note: Number of ... Participating Students: 142, Participating Teachers: 12

**Table 10.2c: Opportunity-to-Learn, Provincial Results**

Elements	Percentage at Specified Level or Above					Average Level
	Level 1 or above	Level 2 or above	Level 3 or above	Level 4 or above	Level 5	
OTL-1: Preparation for and Commitment to Learn	100%	97%	79%	22%	3%	3.0
OTL-2: Knowledge and Use of Reading Strategies	100%	84%	48%	12%	4%	2.5
OTL-3: Home Support for Reading Development	100%	92%	64%	19%	5%	2.8
OTL-4: Availability and Use of Resources	100%	92%	68%	21%	3%	2.9
OTL-5: Classroom Instruction and Learning	100%	94%	70%	21%	2%	2.9

Note: Number of ... Participating Students: 2006, Participating Teachers: 194

### Opportunity-to-Learn Results for the Secondary Level (Section 1 continued)

Figure 10.2a - Percentage of Students Achieving Excellent and Sufficient Standards of Opportunity, School Results (over time)

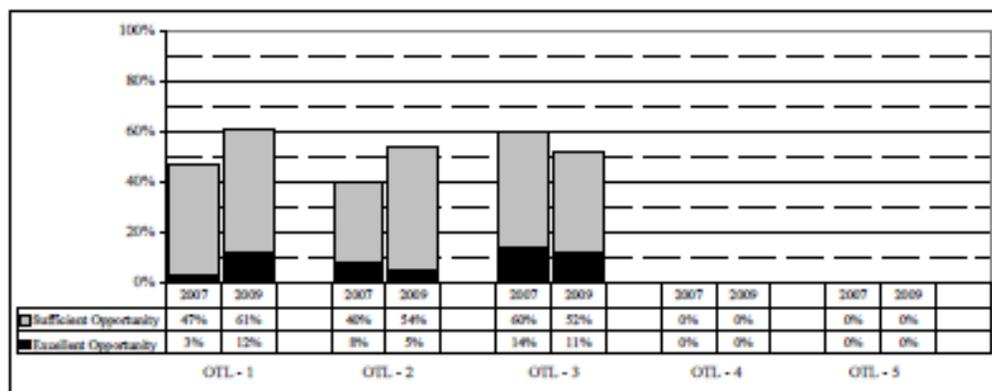


Figure 10.2b - Percentage of Students Achieving Excellent and Sufficient Standards of Opportunity, Division Results (over time)

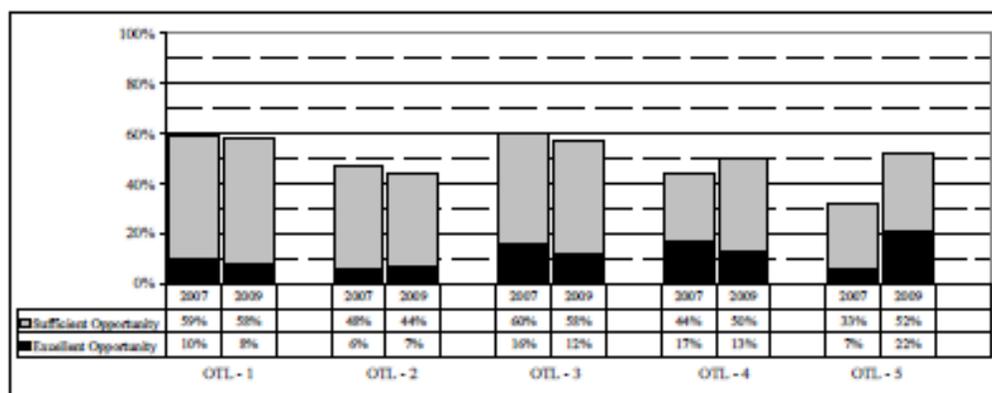
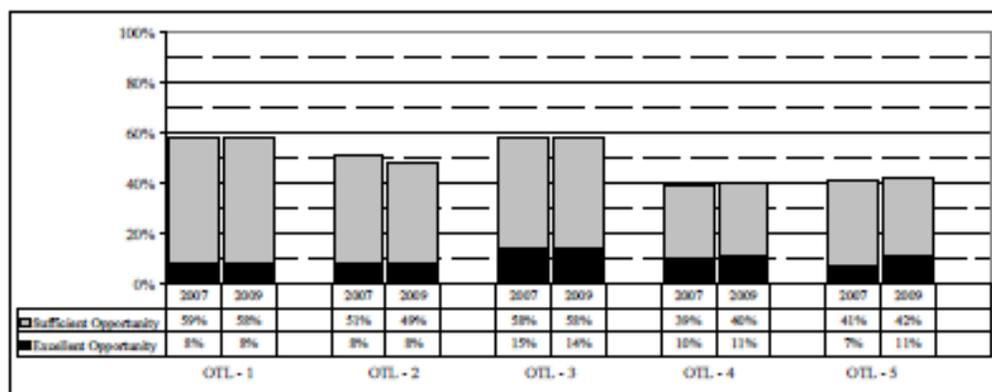


Figure 10.2c - Percentage of Students Achieving Excellent and Sufficient Standards of Opportunity, Provincial Results (over time)



**Note:** OTL elements numbered in the above graph refer, in order, with the opportunity-to-learn elements labelled in Table 10.2c (i.e., OTL-1 is the indicator of student preparation for and commitment to learn, OTL-2 is knowledge and use of reading strategies, etc.). The total height of the stacked bars in the graphs indicate the percentage of students with at least sufficient opportunity to learn, as defined by the standards (i.e., it is the sum of the percentages of students with sufficient opportunity and those with excellent opportunity).

### Opportunity-to-Learn Results for the Secondary Level (section 1 continued)

Figures 5.2d (excellent standard) and 5.2e (sufficient standard) show how opportunity-to-learn results have changed over time relative to the province. Shaded cells indicate instances when results have been meaningfully distinct from the province: light-green shading indicating meaningfully higher results, red shading indicating meaningfully lower results, and white cells indicating similar results. Percentages in the 2009 column represent the percentages of students in the school achieving the standard for 2009.

In the last column, the symbols  $\Delta$ ,  $\nabla$ , and  $\leftrightarrow$  indicate whether meaningful improvement or deterioration has occurred (as described in the legend), comparing 2009 results relative to the province with 2007 results relative to the province. See pages 3-4 for discussion and examples about these comparisons.

Generally, an improvement trend is evident if several  $\Delta$  appear in the last column and if there is a pattern of fewer red cells and more green cells as you read the chart from left to right.

Figure 10.2d: Opportunity-to-Learn Comparisons with the Province, Percentages Attaining Excellent Standard, Over Time

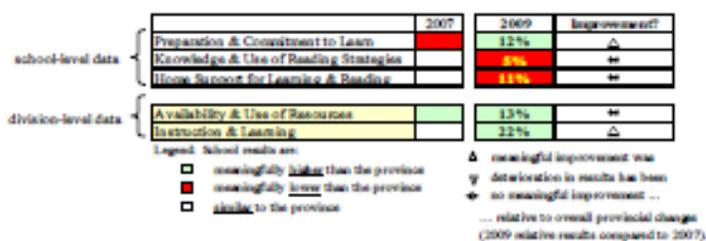
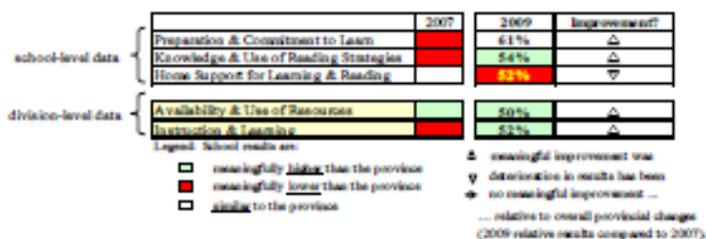


Figure 10.2e: Opportunity-to-Learn Comparisons with the Province, Percentages Attaining At Least Sufficient Standard, Over Time



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**Grade 10 Student Performance Outcome Results - Section 2: Reading Comprehension (Multiple-Choice) Results**

As part of the Assessment, students completed a 60-item multiple-choice test. This section provides analysis of multiple-choice results organized as follows:

- results categorized by comprehension domain (Tables 10.3a and 10.3b, Figures 10.3a and 10.3b);
- results categorized by main reading strategy used (Tables 10.4a and 10.4b, Figures 10.4a-1, 10.4a-2, 10.4b-1, and 10.4b-2);
- results categorized by type of text used (Tables 10.5a and 10.5b);
- summary chart showing comparisons (meaningful distinctions) with division and provincial results (Figures 10.(3-5)a and 10.(3-5)b); and,
- results for each multiple-choice item (Table 10.6).

Tables 10.3a, 10.4a, and 10.5a show average percentage correct, and Tables 10.3b, 10.4b, and 10.5b show the percentage of students achieving all correct, achieving the proficient standard, and achieving the adequate standard. The graphs and charts within each of the figures show comparisons between 2007 and 2009 results.

The tables and figures permit the reader to consider results in light of standards and normative comparisons, and may assist in further investigation and target areas for potential improvement. We encourage reviewers to consult the website to look at the questions, the curriculum guide to review the outcomes, and to consider other evidence and pedagogical research during further investigation and the improvement planning process.

**Analysis of Reading Comprehension Categorized by Domain**

The multiple-choice items were designed to assess reading strategies in three domains of reading comprehension:

- **Explicit** (literal) comprehension involves responses to ideas and/or information that are stated directly in the text.
- **Implicit** (interpretative/inferential) comprehension requires the reader to apply background knowledge to interpret/infer ideas and/or information in the reading.
- **Critical** comprehension involves responses to ideas and/or information that require inferences/interpretation and critical analysis (examples include looking at author's purpose and point of view, distinguishing facts from opinions, and recognizing persuasive techniques).

**Table 10.3a: Multiple-Choice Test Results, Average Percentage of Questions Correct, by Comprehension Domain**

Strand	Standards		School	Division	Province
	Proficient	Adequate			
Reading Comprehension Skills (60 questions)	68%	49%	70%	60%	70%
Explicit Comprehension (11 questions)	71%	51%	66%	70%	72%
Implicit Comprehension (20 questions)	66%	47%	73%	70%	71%
Critical Comprehension (29 questions)	67%	46%	69%	60%	69%

Note: Number of Participating Students ... School: 32, Division: 146, Province: 2679

Note: Percentages in the 'Standards' column indicate the percentage correct a student must attain to reach the specified level. For example, a Grade 4 student had to score at least 49% correct on all 60 questions to have an overall 'Adequate' Reading Comprehension Skill level, and had to score 68% correct to be a 'Proficient' reader. Different standards for the subcategories indicate perceived differences in levels of difficulty of the items used to assess reading comprehension within those subcategories. The last three columns of the table show the results achieved by the school, division, and province.

## Grade 10 Student Performance Outcome Results (Section 2 continued)

Figure 10.3a shows the results and provincial comparator for the average percentage of questions correct for each of the sets of explicit, implicit and critical comprehension questions. Average results for 2007 are restated from those originally reported in 2007 to accommodate perceived differences in difficulty level (i.e., adjusted to reflect differences in standards set by the panel).

Figure 10.3a: Reading Comprehension Skills Results - Average Correct by Domain, School and Provincial Results (over time)

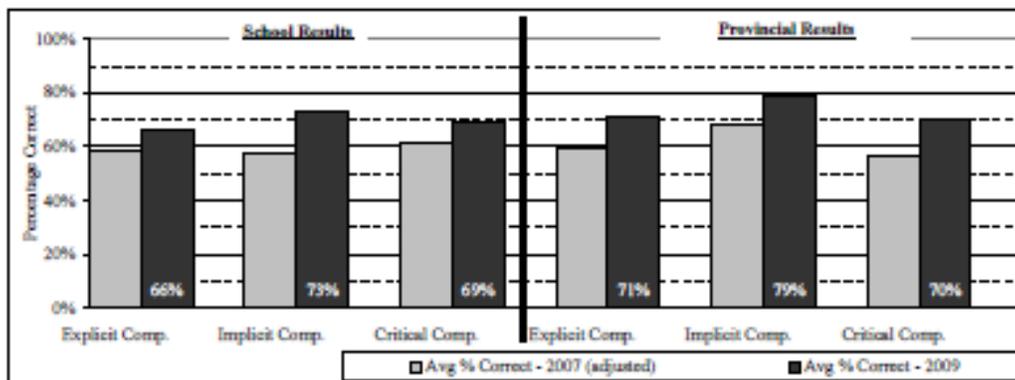


Table 10.3b shows the results and provincial comparator for the percentages of students who succeeded in answering all questions correctly, who achieved the proficient or higher standard, and who achieved the adequate or higher standard (standards are shown in Table 10.3a) for each of the sets of explicit, implicit and critical comprehension questions. Figure 10.3b graphs these results and provides a comparison to 2007 adjusted results.

Table 10.3b: Multiple-Choice Test Results, Percentage of Students, by Achievement, by Comprehension Domain

Strand		Percentage of Students With ...		
		All Correct	Proficient or Higher Achievement	Adequate or Higher Achievement
Reading Comprehension Skills (80 questions)	School	-	54%	97%
	Province	%	65%	91%
Explicit Comprehension (11 questions)	School	-	40%	89%
	Province	6%	65%	89%
Implicit Comprehension (20 questions)	School	-	76%	100%
	Province	1%	71%	92%
Critical Comprehension (29 questions)	School	-	63%	100%
	Province	%	64%	91%

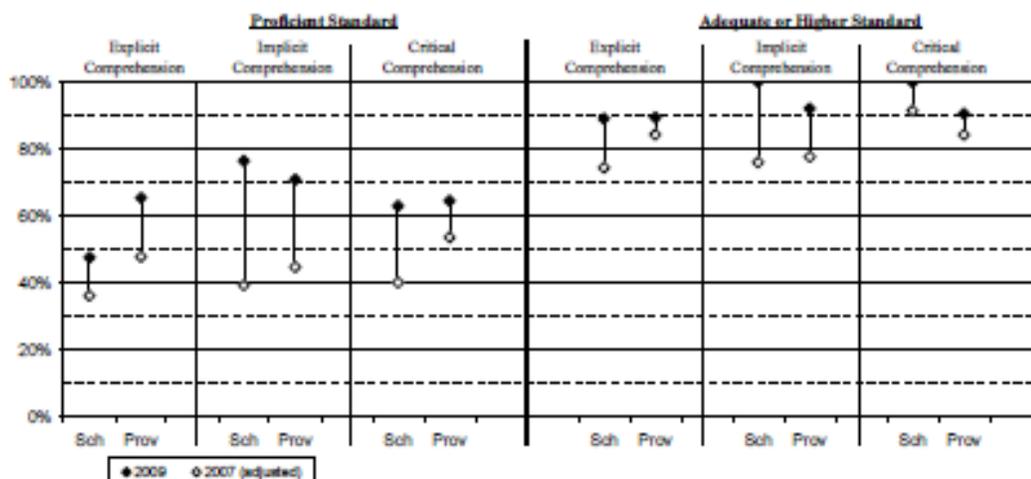
Note: Number of Participating Students ... School: 32, Province: 2679

**Note:** Percentages achieving indicated performance levels are calculated approximating the data as continuous data. The effect this has on the results is shown in the following hypothetical example. If a domain has 25 questions and the cut-score for reaching a standard was established at 65%, this means students would need to get 16.25 out of 25 questions correct to attain the standard. Some students would have 16 out of 25 questions correct and some would have 17 out of 25 questions correct, but in this example, it would not be possible to have a fractional number of questions correct. The percentage achieving the standard would be calculated by taking all those who had 17 or more of the 25 questions correct and adding to this 3/4 of those who had 16 of the 25 questions correct.

**Note:** If a cell in the table is recorded as just a % symbol (and no accompanying number), this means that the results were above 0% but below 0.5%. A dash or 0% in this table indicates no one in the profile achieved the result.

## Grade 10 Student Performance Outcome Results (section 2 continued)

Figure 10.3b: Percentages of Students With Proficient and Adequate Reading Comprehension (by Domain), School and Provincial Results, Over Time



## Analysis of Reading Comprehension Categorized by Reading Strategy

Although reading is a complex act involving many processes simultaneously, it is possible to make inferences about some of the reading strategies students had to use as they responded to each multiple-choice item. The strategy analysis may be useful for discussion about strengths and needs of students and to guide planning around future strategic reading instruction. It is important to note that large-scale assessments are limited in assessing all important reading strategies, and that other forms of assessment and other sources of evidence are required for meaningful improvement planning and intervention.

The multiple-choice items were also categorized by the main reading strategy they assessed. Curricular learning outcomes were grouped into the following reading strategies:

- Using Cueing Systems to construct meaning (pragmatic, textual, syntactic, semantic, and graphophonic), and other cues and conventions including visual clues;
- Connecting to Prior Knowledge and experiences that relate text to self, text to other texts, and texts to the world;
- Making Inferences/ Predictions based on textual information;
- Noting Key Ideas & Finding Support;
- Summarizing/ Recalling Information/ Drawing Conclusions (including organizing and synthesizing the information); and,
- Recognizing (and evaluating) Author's Message & Craft including distinguishing facts from opinions.

## Grade 10 Student Performance Outcome Results (Section 2 continued)

Table 10.4a: Multiple-Choice Test Results, Average Percentage of Questions Correct, by Reading Strategy

Strand	Standards		School	Division	Province
	Proficient	Adequate			
Reading Comprehension Skills (80 questions)	68%	49%	70%	69%	70%
Using Cueing Systems (12 questions)	69%	48%	71%	71%	71%
Connecting to Prior Knowledge (10 questions)	73%	56%	79%	74%	75%
Making Inferences/Predictions (8 questions)	66%	49%	70%	69%	70%
Noting Key Ideas & Finding Support (12 questions)	67%	48%	73%	72%	75%
Summarizing/Recalling/ Drawing Conclusions (10 questions)	66%	46%	63%	65%	66%
Recognizing Author's Message & Craft (10 questions)	65%	46%	63%	63%	63%

Note: Number of Participating Students ... School: 32, Division: 145, Province: 2879

Note: Percentages in the 'Standards' column indicate the percentage correct a student must attain to reach the specified level. For example, a Grade 4 student had to score at least 49% correct on all 80 questions to have an overall 'Adequate' Reading Comprehension Skill level, and had to score 68% correct to be a 'Proficient' reader. Different standards for the subcategories indicate perceived differences in levels of difficulty of the items used to assess reading comprehension within those subcategories. The last three columns of the table show the results achieved by the school, division, and province.

Figure 10.4a-1: Reading Comprehension Skills Results - Average Correct by Reading Strategy, School Results (over time)

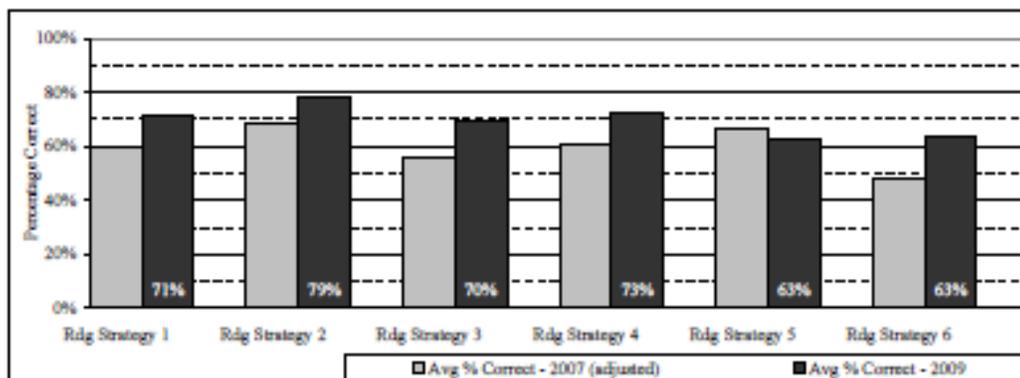
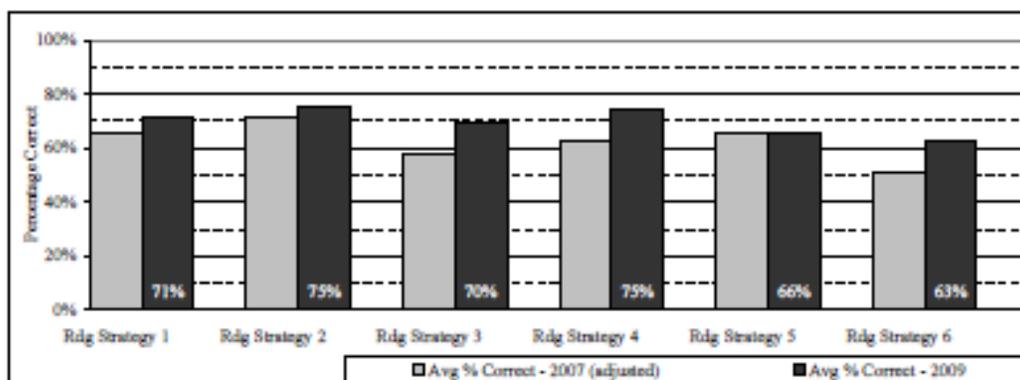


Figure 10.4a-2: Reading Comprehension Skills Results - Average Correct by Reading Strategy, Provincial Results (over time)



## Grade 10 Student Performance Outcome Results (section 2 continued)

Table 10.4b: Multiple-Choice Test Results, Percentage of Students, by Achievement, by Reading Strategy

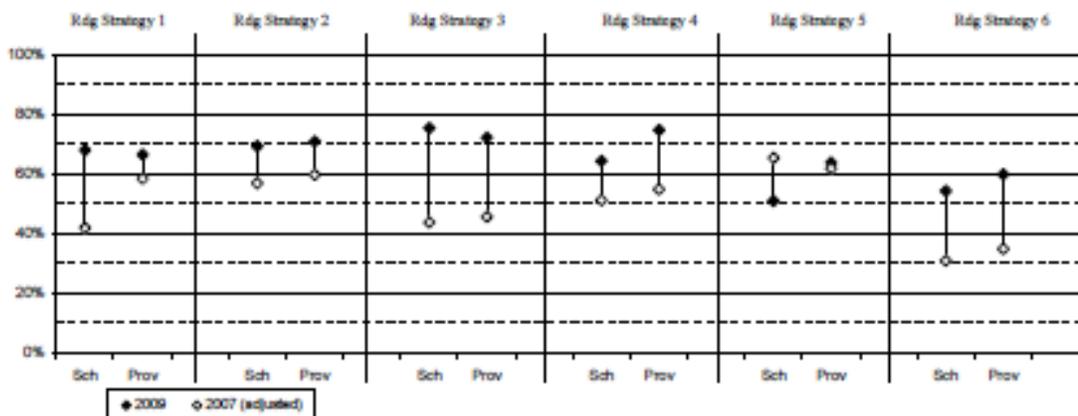
Strand		Percentage of Students With ...		
		All Correct	Proficient or Higher Achievement	Adequate or Higher Achievement
Reading Comprehension Skills (60 questions)	School	-	54%	97%
	Province	5%	65%	91%
Using Cueing Systems (12 questions)	School	3%	60%	91%
	Province	8%	67%	90%
Connecting to Prior Knowledge (10 questions)	School	19%	69%	91%
	Province	17%	71%	88%
Making Inferences/ Predictions (5 questions)	School	3%	76%	95%
	Province	5%	72%	91%
Noting Key Ideas & Finding Support (12 questions)	School	3%	64%	90%
	Province	11%	75%	93%
Summarizing/ Recalling/ Drawing Conclusions (10 questions)	School	3%	51%	92%
	Province	3%	64%	90%
Recognizing Author's Message & Craft (10 questions)	School	-	54%	90%
	Province	3%	60%	85%

Note: Number of Participating Students ... School: 32, Province: 2679

**Note:** Percentages achieving indicated performance levels are calculated approximating the data as continuous data. The effect this has on the results is shown in the following hypothetical example. If a reading strategy has 11 questions and the cut-score for reaching a standard was established at 65%, this means students would need to get 7.15 out of 11 questions correct to attain the standard. Some students would have 7 out of 11 questions correct and some would have 8 out of 11 questions correct, but in this example, it would not be possible to have a fractional number of questions correct. The percentage achieving the standard would be calculated by taking all those who had 8 or more of the 11 questions correct and adding to this 65% of those who had 7 of the 11 questions correct.

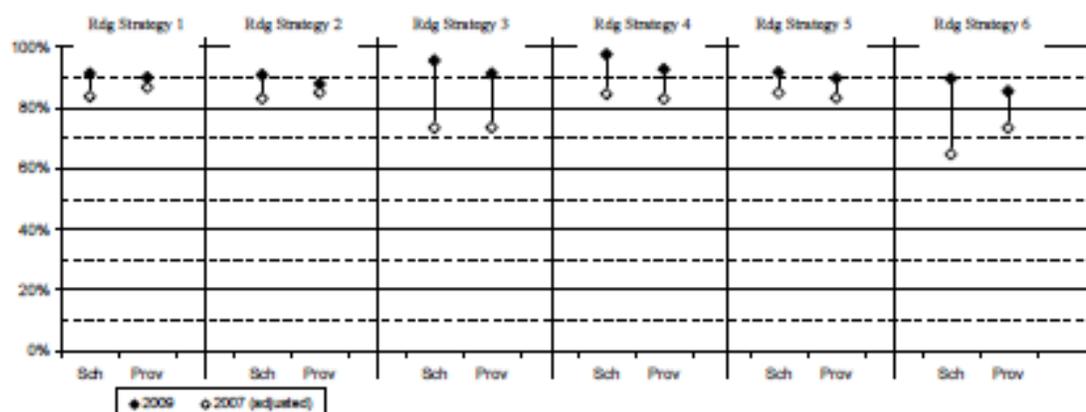
**Note:** If a cell in the table is recorded as just a % symbol (and no accompanying number), this means that the results were above 0% but below 0.5%. A dash or 0% in this table indicates no one in the profile achieved the result.

Figure 10.4b-1: Percentages of Students With Proficient Comprehension (by Reading Strategy), School and Provincial Results, Over Time



## Grade 10 Student Performance Outcome Results (Section 2 continued)

Figure 10.4b-2: Percentages of Students With Adequate or Higher Comprehension (by Reading Strategy), School and Provincial Results, Over Time



## Analysis of Reading Comprehension Categorized by Text Type

Grade 10 students completed 10 multiple-choice items for each of six texts. Three of the texts used, *Defining Freedom*, *Plot 23, Row A, Grave 5*, and *On the 60th*, are literary texts; the other three, *Cyber Crime*, *Reporting Vehicle Accidents*, and *The Case for a National Service Program*, are informational texts. Literary texts tend to tell stories or represent ideas through various forms including prose and poetry. Literary texts tend to use a more descriptive style and have more figurative language than is present in informational texts. Informational texts may describe procedures to complete, may provide information about a topic, or may be persuasive in encouraging a reader to adopt a particular point of view. These texts might have a narrative or factual/chronological style.

Table 10.5a: Multiple-Choice Test Results, Average Percentage of Questions Correct, by Text Type

Strand	Standards		School	Division	Province
	Proficient	Adequate			
Reading Comprehension Skills (60 questions)	68%	49%	70%	69%	70%
Literary text - <i>Defining Freedom</i> (10 questions)	52%	32%	67%	66%	69%
Literary text - <i>Plot 23, Row A, Grave 5</i> (10 questions)	54%	45%	66%	69%	69%
Literary text - <i>On the 60th</i> (10 questions)	66%	48%	76%	76%	75%
Informational text - <i>Cyber Crime</i> (10 questions)	72%	54%	72%	69%	70%
Informational text - <i>Reporting Vehicle Accidents</i> (10 questions)	75%	55%	67%	69%	72%
Informational text - <i>The Case for a National Service Program</i> (10 questions)	76%	56%	67%	65%	66%

Note: Number of Participating Students ... School: 32, Division: 146, Province: 2679

Note: Percentages in the 'Standards' column indicate the percentage correct a student must attain to reach the specified level. For example, a Grade 4 student had to score at least 49% correct on all 60 questions to have an overall 'Adequate' Reading Comprehension Skill level, and had to score 68% correct to be a 'Proficient' reader. Different standards for the subcategories indicate perceived differences in levels of difficulty of the items used to assess reading comprehension within those subcategories. The last three columns of the table show the results achieved by the school, division, and province.

## Grade 10 Student Performance Outcome Results (section 2 continued)

Table 10.5b: Multiple-Choice Test Results, Percentage of Students, by Achievement, by Text Type

Strand		Percentage of Students With ...		
		All Correct	Proficient or Higher Achievement	Adequate or Higher Achievement
Reading Comprehension Skills (80 questions)	School	-	54%	97%
	Province	%	65%	91%
Literary text - Defining Freedom (10 questions)	School	6%	73%	96%
	Province	6%	86%	96%
Literary text - Plot 23, Row A, Grave 5 (10 questions)	School	-	70%	94%
	Province	3%	74%	94%
Literary text - On the 60th (10 questions)	School	9%	83%	94%
	Province	13%	79%	92%
Informational text - Cyber Crime (10 questions)	School	13%	65%	88%
	Province	6%	64%	86%
Informational text - Reporting Vehicle Accidents (10 questions)	Division	-	42%	91%
	Province	9%	60%	86%
Informational text - The Case for a National Service Program (10 questions)	Division	9%	53%	70%
	Province	9%	47%	73%

Note: Number of Participating Students ... School: 32, Province: 2679

Note: Percentages achieving indicated performance levels are calculated approximating the data as continuous data. The effect this has on the results is shown in the following hypothetical example. If a test has 10 questions and the cut-score for reaching a standard was established at 72%, this means students would need to get 7.2 out of 10 questions correct to attain the standard. Some students would have 7 out of 10 questions correct and some would have 8 out of 10 questions correct, but in this example, it would not be possible to have a fractional number of questions correct. The percentage achieving the standard would be calculated by taking all those who had 8 or more of the 10 questions correct and adding to this 80% of those who had 7 of the 10 questions correct.

Note: If a cell in the table is recorded as just a % symbol (and no accompanying number), this means that the results were above 0% but below 0.5%. A dash or 0% in this table indicates no one in the profile achieved the result.

Tables 10.3b, 10.4b, and 10.5b show the percentages of students achieving the proficient standard and the adequate standard for the various categories tested by the multiple-choice items. Figures 10.(3-5)a and 10.(3-5)b show how outcome results have changed over time relative to the province. Light-green shading indicates instances when results have been meaningfully higher than the province, red shading indicates instances when results have been meaningfully lower than the province, and  $\Delta$ ,  $\nabla$ , and  $\leftrightarrow$  indicate whether meaningful improvement or deterioration has occurred. See pages 3-4 for discussion and examples about these comparisons. [As noted in the 'Considerations and Cautions' section at the beginning of this report, results from small school populations can vary greatly from one year to the next, and the pattern of meaningful distinction illustrated in the chart should be interpreted in the context of other data sources.]

Figure 10.(3-5): Percentage of Students Achieving Proficient Reading Comprehension, School and Provincial Comparisons Over Time

	2007	2009	Improvement?
Reading Comprehension Skills		54%	$\Delta$
Explicit Comprehension		46%	$\Delta$
Implicit Comprehension		76%	$\Delta$
Critical Comprehension		63%	$\Delta$
Using Coating Systems		68%	$\Delta$
Connecting to Prior Knowledge		69%	$\leftrightarrow$
Making Inferences/Predictions		76%	$\leftrightarrow$
Finding Key Ideas & Support		64%	$\Delta$
Summarizing/Recalling/Concluding		61%	$\leftrightarrow$
Author's Message & Craft		64%	$\Delta$
Literary Test #1		73%	$\Delta$
Literary Test #2		70%	$\leftrightarrow$
Literary Test #3		83%	$\leftrightarrow$
Informational Test #1		65%	$\Delta$
Informational Test #2		43%	$\Delta$
Informational Test #3		53%	$\Delta$

Legend: School results are:

- meaningfully higher than the province
- meaningfully lower than the province
- similar to the province

- $\Delta$  meaningful improvement was
- $\nabla$  deterioration in results has been
- $\leftrightarrow$  no meaningful improvement ...
- ... relative to overall provincial changes (2009 relative results compared to 2007).

## Grade 10 Student Performance Outcome Results (Section 2 continued)

Figure 10.(2-5)b: Percentage of Students Achieving Adequate or Higher Reading Comprehension, School and Provincial Comparisons Over Time

	2007	2009	Improvement?
<b>Reading Comprehension Skills</b>		97%	↔
Explicit Comprehension	■	89%	△
Implicit Comprehension		100%	△
Critical Comprehension	■	100%	↔
Using Cueing Systems		70%	↔
Connecting to Prior Knowledge		91%	↔
Making Inferences/Predictions		91%	↔
Finding Key Ideas & Support		96%	↔
Summarizing/Recalling/Concluding		98%	↔
Author's Message & Craft	■	92%	↔
Literary Test #1	■	90%	△
Literary Test #2	■	96%	△
Literary Test #3		94%	↔
Informational Test #1		94%	↔
Informational Test #2	■	88%	↔
Informational Test #3		91%	△

Legend: School results are:

- meaningfully higher than the province
- meaningfully lower than the province
- similar to the province

- △ meaningful improvement was
- ▽ deterioration in results has been
- ↔ no meaningful improvement ...
- ... relative to overall provincial changes
- (2009 relative results compared to 2007).

## Grade 10 Student Performance Outcome Results (Section 2 continued)

Each question of the 50-item multiple-choice assessment is categorized by comprehension domain, by reading strategy, and pertaining to a particular text. Analysis of the percentages of students within the school choosing the correct alternative may provide areas of the relative strength and weakness for a particular reading strategy or domain. Analyzing the percentages of students choosing the incorrect responses and perhaps why those responses were erroneously chosen may provide the reader insight into reading comprehension difficulties that students encounter.

Table 10.6: Multiple-Choice Test Results, Detailed Item Analysis

#	Comp. Domain	Reading Strategy	Text	Percentage Choosing Alternatives (School) ...				Percentage Successful ...			Predicted Success Rate for Achieving Standard ...	
				a	b	c	d	School	Division	Province	Proficient	Adequate
A-1 #1	Explicit	Using Cueing Systems	Library	0%	16%	22%	59%	59%	72%	72%	49%	27%
A-1 #2	Implicit	Finding Key Ideas & Support	Library	63%	3%	19%	16%	63%	71%	76%	44%	22%
A-1 #3	Critical	Connecting to Prior Knowledge	Library	22%	9%	63%	3%	63%	63%	62%	54%	32%
A-1 #4	Implicit	Making Inferences/ Predictions	Library	6%	63%	6%	25%	63%	57%	60%	39%	24%
A-1 #5	Critical	Author's Message & Craft	Library	47%	9%	44%	0%	47%	46%	50%	49%	29%
A-1 #6	Implicit	Using Cueing Systems	Library	3%	81%	16%	0%	81%	77%	69%	54%	30%
A-1 #7	Critical	Summ./ Recalling/ Concluding	Library	0%	9%	16%	75%	75%	63%	64%	56%	36%
A-1 #8	Implicit	Making Inferences/ Predictions	Library	3%	88%	6%	3%	88%	86%	64%	60%	41%
A-1 #9	Critical	Finding Key Ideas & Support	Library	41%	53%	0%	6%	53%	47%	52%	56%	36%
A-1 #10	Critical	Connecting to Prior Knowledge	Library	81%	13%	0%	6%	81%	73%	79%	55%	36%
A-2 #1	Implicit	Using Cueing Systems	Library	6%	9%	64%	0%	64%	72%	73%	59%	36%
A-2 #2	Explicit	Using Cueing Systems	Library	0%	64%	3%	13%	64%	66%	66%	66%	44%
A-2 #3	Explicit	Making Inferences/ Predictions	Library	34%	38%	19%	9%	19%	34%	32%	59%	44%
A-2 #4	Critical	Finding Key Ideas & Support	Library	75%	0%	0%	25%	75%	63%	62%	67%	50%
A-2 #5	Critical	Summ./ Recalling/ Concluding	Library	13%	6%	3%	78%	78%	60%	70%	64%	43%
A-2 #6	Critical	Summ./ Recalling/ Concluding	Library	6%	64%	0%	9%	64%	74%	74%	64%	46%
A-2 #7	Implicit	Finding Key Ideas & Support	Library	0%	3%	94%	3%	94%	92%	92%	70%	50%
A-2 #8	Critical	Connecting to Prior Knowledge	Library	88%	9%	0%	3%	88%	85%	64%	74%	57%
A-2 #9	Critical	Author's Message & Craft	Library	6%	9%	63%	22%	22%	34%	31%	57%	36%
A-2 #10	Critical	Author's Message & Craft	Library	53%	0%	25%	22%	53%	54%	56%	60%	40%

Note: Number of Participating Students ... School: 32, Division: 146, Province: 2679

Note: The correct answer corresponds to the percentage that matches the percentage success for the school.

Note: Percentages choosing alternatives a, b, c, and d may not total 100% because some students may not have answered the question, or may have chosen two responses for a question.

Note: The last two columns of the table show average judgements of standard-setting panels when considering the level of difficulty of the multiple-choice item. These represent the predicted or expected success rates for students at the threshold of adequacy and at the threshold of proficiency. If school results for a particular item are lower than these expected success rates, then students in the school (as a whole) had more difficulty than expected to attain adequate or proficient performance on the item.

Note: Item results are for texts indicated in the first column according to the following legend:

A-1: Defining Freedom    A-2: Plot 23, Row A, Grave 5    A-3: On the 60th  
 B-1: Cyber Crime    B-2: Reporting Vehicle Accidents    B-3: The Case for a National Service Program

## Grade 10 Student Performance Outcome Results (Section 2 continued)

Table 10.6: Multiple-Choice Test Results, Detailed Item Analysis (continued)

#	Comp. Domain	Reading Strategy	Test	Percentage Choosing Alternatives (School) ...				Percentage Successful ...			Predicted Success Rate for Achieving Standard ...	
				a	b	c	d	School	Division	Province	Proficient	Adequate
A-3 #1	Explicit	Using Cueing Systems	Literacy	3%	3%	3%	91%	91%	88%	91%	76%	52%
A-3 #2	Implicit	Using Cueing Systems	Literacy	41%	6%	13%	41%	41%	41%	43%	67%	46%
A-3 #3	Implicit	Finding Key Ideas & Support	Literacy	75%	6%	9%	9%	75%	70%	73%	64%	44%
A-3 #4	Critical	Summ./ Recalling/ Concluding	Literacy	0%	13%	72%	13%	72%	75%	69%	67%	50%
A-3 #5	Critical	Finding Key Ideas & Support	Literacy	3%	9%	64%	3%	64%	76%	72%	63%	44%
A-3 #6	Implicit	Making Inferences/ Predictions	Literacy	0%	97%	3%	0%	97%	89%	88%	75%	52%
A-3 #7	Critical	Author's Message & Craft	Literacy	0%	13%	3%	84%	84%	82%	78%	64%	43%
A-3 #8	Critical	Summ./ Recalling/ Concluding	Literacy	16%	59%	13%	13%	59%	71%	77%	40%	59%
A-3 #9	Critical	Author's Message & Craft	Literacy	64%	3%	6%	6%	64%	66%	81%	73%	53%
A-3 #10	Critical	Summ./ Recalling/ Concluding	Literacy	22%	3%	75%	0%	75%	78%	76%	67%	44%
B-1 #1	Implicit	Using Cueing Systems	Inform	13%	6%	0%	78%	78%	72%	72%	72%	52%
B-1 #2	Critical	Summ./ Recalling/ Concluding	Inform	53%	25%	6%	13%	53%	48%	50%	68%	47%
B-1 #3	Explicit	Using Cueing Systems	Inform	3%	81%	16%	0%	81%	80%	63%	74%	56%
B-1 #4	Explicit	Finding Key Ideas & Support	Inform	16%	6%	78%	0%	78%	80%	64%	74%	54%
B-1 #5	Implicit	Making Inferences/ Predictions	Inform	28%	9%	0%	63%	63%	62%	59%	72%	53%
B-1 #6	Critical	Connecting to Prior Knowledge	Inform	31%	0%	3%	66%	66%	59%	62%	69%	54%
B-1 #7	Implicit	Making Inferences/ Predictions	Inform	91%	9%	0%	0%	91%	80%	82%	76%	60%
B-1 #8	Explicit	Finding Key Ideas & Support	Inform	3%	3%	91%	3%	91%	92%	91%	77%	57%
B-1 #9	Critical	Author's Message & Craft	Inform	25%	72%	3%	0%	72%	67%	65%	64%	55%
B-1 #10	Critical	Summ./ Recalling/ Concluding	Inform	19%	50%	28%	3%	50%	51%	50%	68%	50%

Note: Number of Participating Students ... School: 32, Division: 145, Province: 2679

Note: The correct answer corresponds to the percentage that matches the percentage success for the school.

Note: Percentages choosing alternatives a, b, c, and d may not total 100% because some students may not have answered the question, or may have chosen two responses for a question.

Note: The last two columns of the table show average judgements of standard-setting panels when considering the level of difficulty of the multiple-choice item. These represent the predicted or expected success rates for students at the threshold of adequacy and at the threshold of proficiency. If school results for a particular item are lower than these expected success rates, then students in the school (as a whole) had more difficulty than expected to attain adequate or proficient performance on the item.

Note: Item results are for tests indicated in the first column according to the following legend:

A-1: Defining Freedom

A-2: Plot 23, Row A, Grave 5

A-3: On the 60th

B-1: Cyber Crime

B-2: Reporting Vehicle Accidents

B-3: The Case for a National Service Program

## Grade 10 Student Performance Outcome Results (section 2 continued)

Table 10.6: Multiple-Choice Test Results, Detailed Item Analysis (continued)

#	Comp. Domain	Reading Strategy	Text	Percentage Choosing Alternatives (School) ...				Percentage Successful ...			Predicted Success Rate for Achieving Standard ...	
				a	b	c	d	School	Division	Province	Proficient	Adequate
B-2 #1	Explicit	Finding Key Ideas & Support	Inbrm1	63%	20%	3%	6%	63%	57%	57%	64%	42%
B-2 #2	Implicit	Making Inferences/Predictions	Inbrm1	3%	0%	97%	0%	97%	93%	93%	79%	64%
B-2 #3	Implicit	Making Inferences/Predictions	Inbrm1	3%	13%	72%	13%	72%	73%	77%	78%	64%
B-2 #4	Explicit	Using Cueing Systems	Inbrm1	31%	22%	3%	44%	44%	59%	60%	78%	54%
B-2 #5	Explicit	Using Cueing Systems	Inbrm1	56%	44%	0%	0%	44%	55%	61%	74%	52%
B-2 #6	Critical	Author's Message & Craft	Inbrm1	9%	0%	63%	28%	63%	66%	72%	79%	57%
B-2 #7	Critical	Author's Message & Craft	Inbrm1	69%	6%	3%	22%	69%	72%	75%	68%	44%
B-2 #8	Critical	Connecting to Prior Knowledge	Inbrm1	3%	97%	0%	0%	97%	91%	89%	86%	66%
B-2 #9	Critical	Connecting to Prior Knowledge	Inbrm1	9%	3%	0%	88%	88%	86%	84%	79%	54%
B-2 #10	Implicit	Summ./Recalling/Concluding	Inbrm1	38%	34%	19%	9%	38%	41%	47%	69%	52%
B-3 #1	Implicit	Using Cueing Systems	Inbrm1	79%	3%	3%	16%	79%	74%	69%	76%	55%
B-3 #2	Implicit	Using Cueing Systems	Inbrm1	3%	68%	6%	3%	68%	81%	76%	81%	61%
B-3 #3	Explicit	Finding Key Ideas & Support	Inbrm1	25%	3%	69%	3%	69%	77%	78%	74%	56%
B-3 #4	Critical	Connecting to Prior Knowledge	Inbrm1	19%	6%	72%	3%	72%	70%	69%	85%	76%
B-3 #5	Implicit	Finding Key Ideas & Support	Inbrm1	3%	47%	28%	22%	47%	47%	53%	70%	53%
B-3 #6	Explicit	Finding Key Ideas & Support	Inbrm1	6%	0%	81%	13%	81%	77%	77%	84%	68%
B-3 #7	Implicit	Making Inferences/Predictions	Inbrm1	13%	22%	25%	41%	41%	44%	52%	58%	39%
B-3 #8	Critical	Author's Message & Craft	Inbrm1	75%	9%	3%	13%	75%	63%	59%	72%	52%
B-3 #9	Critical	Connecting to Prior Knowledge	Inbrm1	9%	75%	0%	13%	75%	70%	72%	84%	68%
B-3 #10	Critical	Summ./Recalling/Concluding	Inbrm1	47%	31%	9%	13%	47%	51%	54%	74%	54%

Note: Number of Participating Students ... School: 32, Division: 145, Province: 2879

Note: The correct answer corresponds to the percentage that matches the percentage success for the school.

Note: Percentages choosing alternatives a, b, c, and d may not total 100% because some students may not have answered the question, or may have chosen two responses for a question.

Note: The last two columns of the table show average judgements of standard-setting panels when considering the level of difficulty of the multiple-choice item. These represent the predicted or expected success rates for students at the threshold of adequacy and at the threshold of proficiency. If school results for a particular item are lower than these expected success rates, then students in the school (as a whole) had more difficulty than expected to attain adequate or proficient performance on the item.

Note: Item results are for texts indicated in the first column according to the following legend:

A-1: Defining Freedom    A-2: Plot 23, Row A, Grave 5    A-3: On the 60th  
 B-1: Cyber Crime    B-2: Reporting Vehicle Accidents    B-3: The Case for a National Service Program

### Grade 10 Student Performance Outcome Results - Section 3: Reader Response Results

#### Analysis of Reading Comprehension Demonstrated Through Written Response

Students completed a written response for one of the literary texts, *Best Friends!*, and for one of the informational texts, *Building an Ant Farm*. The purpose of the written response items was to assess students' ability to make meaning from text by making connections to personal knowledge or experience. The written response items were scored by teachers using rubrics and student exemplars (examples of student responses at each performance level) for each of four criteria:

- how well the response addressed the question prompt;
- how well the response demonstrated understanding of the text;
- how well the student provided support from the text to justify the response; and,
- how well the student made connections between the text and his/her background knowledge and/or experiences.

Student responses were scored based on the quality of their ideas and not the quality of the writing. Student responses were assigned a performance on a five-level scale from Level 1 (inadequate) to Level 5 (insightful). Scoring rubrics can be found at <http://www.education.gov.sk.ca/AFL>.

Table 10.7 shows both the average level attained by students in the school, division, and province, and the percentage distribution of students attaining a specified performance level or above. The cut-score levels for attaining threshold of adequacy and threshold of proficiency set by the standard-setting panel are repeated from Table 10.0b as follows:

- On the 60th: Proficient cut-score level is 3.80. Adequate cut-score level is 2.70.
- The Case for a National Service Program: Proficient cut-score level is 3.80. Adequate cut-score level is 2.70.
- Combined Reader Response score (average level of the two texts, rounded up): Proficient cut-score level is 4.00. Adequate cut-score level is 3.00.

Figure 10.7a shows the percentages of students achieving proficient and adequate performance in the school for both 2007 and 2009. Figures 10.7b and 10.7c shows whether school results are meaningfully different than the percentages achieving those levels in the province.

Table 10.7: Student Performance on Written Response Items

Reader Response Measure	Percentage at Specified Level or Above						Average Level
	Not Attempted	Level 1 or above	Level 2 or above	Level 3 or above	Level 4 or above	Level 5	
<b>School Results</b>							
Written Response - Combined	0.0%	100%	97%	70%	50%	10%	3.1
Wake of the Stranger	7.1%	100%	96%	71%	32%	21%	3.2
School Uniforms?	3.4%	100%	76%	55%	21%	14%	2.7
<b>Division Results</b>							
Written Response - Combined	0.0%	100%	96%	73%	29%	8%	3.1
Wake of the Stranger	3.8%	100%	95%	74%	24%	13%	3.1
School Uniforms?	4.8%	100%	81%	65%	19%	12%	2.8
<b>Provincial Results</b>							
Written Response - Combined	0.0%	100%	96%	69%	27%	9%	3.0
Wake of the Stranger	1.9%	100%	95%	70%	21%	13%	3.0
School Uniforms?	8.8%	96%	81%	57%	19%	12%	2.7

Note: Number of Participating Students ... School: 30, Division: 136, Province: 2826

Note: Percentages achieving at or above the specified levels shown in the above table are based only on those who attempted the written response. That is, they exclude those shown in the "Not Attempted" column.

Note: The written response - combined score is calculated by averaging each student's performance level on the two written response items, and when applicable, rounding the score. For example, if a student achieves Level 4 on one written response and Level 3 on the other written response, then the scores are averaged resulting in 3.5, which is rounded up to give the student a combined score of Level 4.

Grade 10 Student Performance Outcome Results (section 3 continued)

Figure 10.7a: Percentages of Students With Proficient and Adequate Reading Response Results, School and Provincial Results, Over Time

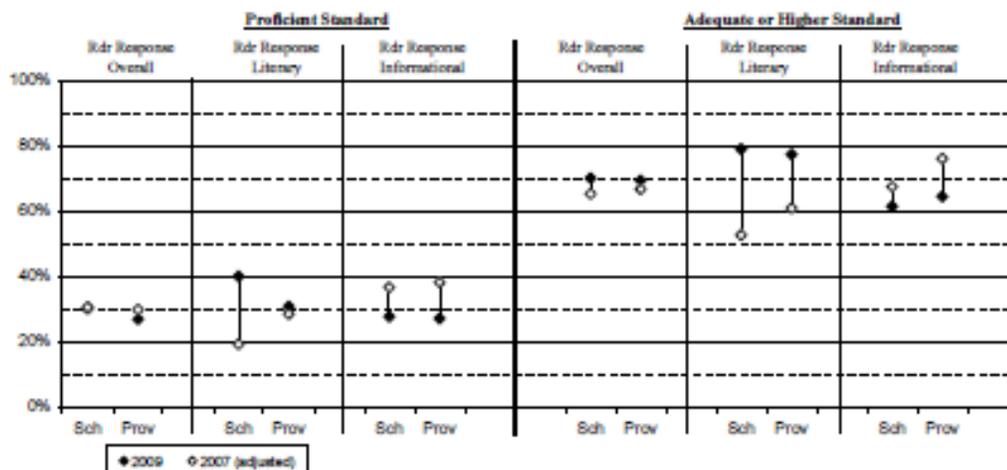


Figure 10.7b: Percentage of Students Achieving Proficient Reader Response Results, School and Provincial Comparisons Over Time

	2007	2009	Improvement?
Reader Response (Overall)		38%	↔
Reader Resp. - Literary text		48%	△
Reader Resp. - Informational text		28%	↔

Legend: School results are:

- meaningfully higher than the province
- meaningfully lower than the province
- similar to the province

△ meaningful improvement was  
▽ deterioration in results has been  
↔ no meaningful improvement ...  
... relative to overall provincial changes (2009 relative results compared to 2007).

Figure 10.7c: Percentage of Students Achieving Adequate or Higher Reader Response Results, School and Provincial Comparisons Over Time

	2007	2009	Improvement?
Reader Response (Overall)		78%	↔
Reader Resp. - Literary text		79%	△
Reader Resp. - Informational text		61%	↔

Legend: School results are:

- meaningfully higher than the province
- meaningfully lower than the province
- similar to the province

△ meaningful improvement was  
▽ deterioration in results has been  
↔ no meaningful improvement ...  
... relative to overall provincial changes (2009 relative results compared to 2007).

**Note:** The above figures show how outcome results have changed over time relative to the province. Shaded cells indicate instances when results have been meaningfully distinct from the province, and △, ▽, and ↔ indicate whether meaningful improvement or deterioration has occurred. See pages 3-4 for discussion and examples about these comparisons.

## Grade 10 Student Performance Outcome Results (Section 3 continued)

Students' written response items were assigned codes to capture how well they addressed the prompt, demonstrated understanding of the text, provided support from the text to justify their response, and made connections to background knowledge and/or experiences. The following codes (very generally described below) were used:

- code W: work is perceptive, thoughtful, and shows synthesis;
- code R: work is developed, logical, and straightforward;
- code S: work is undeveloped, limited, and general;
- code X: work is irrelevant, inadequate, and vague;
- code Z: response indicates student did not engage in the task; and,
- code E: no response given (completely empty).

Table 10.8 shows the percentage of students receiving various codes for the different aspects of their written response.

Table 10.8: Written Response Items - Frequency of Codes Assigned

	School	Division	Province
<b>On the 60th</b>			
<b>Addressing the Prompt</b>			
code W	37%	26%	26%
code R	40%	46%	40%
code S	17%	22%	29%
code X	0%	2%	3%
<b>Understanding the Text</b>			
code W	37%	26%	22%
code R	27%	45%	45%
code S	27%	21%	25%
code X	3%	4%	4%
<b>Providing Support</b>			
code W	27%	23%	20%
code R	30%	35%	36%
code S	27%	29%	32%
code X	10%	9%	10%
<b>Making Connections</b>			
code W	23%	15%	20%
code R	23%	31%	29%
code S	33%	39%	37%
code X	13%	9%	12%

Note: Number of Participating Students - School: 30, Division: 136, Province: 2026

	School	Division	Province
<b>National Service Program</b>			
<b>Addressing the Prompt</b>			
code W	20%	24%	24%
code R	27%	30%	23%
code S	33%	32%	35%
code X	17%	9%	11%
<b>Understanding the Text</b>			
code W	20%	19%	19%
code R	30%	45%	34%
code S	20%	12%	21%
code X	27%	20%	18%
<b>Providing Support</b>			
code W	17%	17%	19%
code R	33%	43%	32%
code S	30%	16%	22%
code X	17%	19%	19%
<b>Making Connections</b>			
code W	17%	19%	19%
code R	30%	29%	27%
code S	43%	32%	20%
code X	7%	15%	18%

## Grade 10 Student Results - Section 4: Gender Comparisons

The graphs below show the opportunity-to-learn and performance outcomes for male and female students. The reader may wish to review the characteristics of the OTL rubrics to ground their understanding of the established standard for each OTL element, and then engage in reflection and discussion about whether there might be differences in how male and female students approach reading and the implications these might have for instruction. Also, comparing gender results for the different reading performance components can confirm or challenge preconceptions about reading proficiency, by gender, and can inform areas for further investigation or improvement. Finally, the graphs provide gender comparisons for both the division and the province, which allows the reader to view the uniqueness or similarity of any findings that appear.

Figure 10-Q.1 - Percentages of Students With Excellent and Sufficient Opportunity, Selected OTL Measures, Gender Comparisons

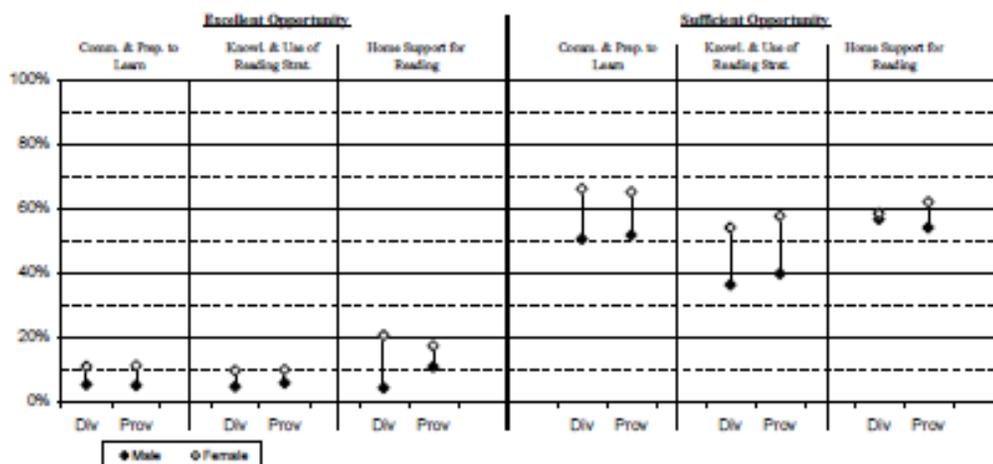
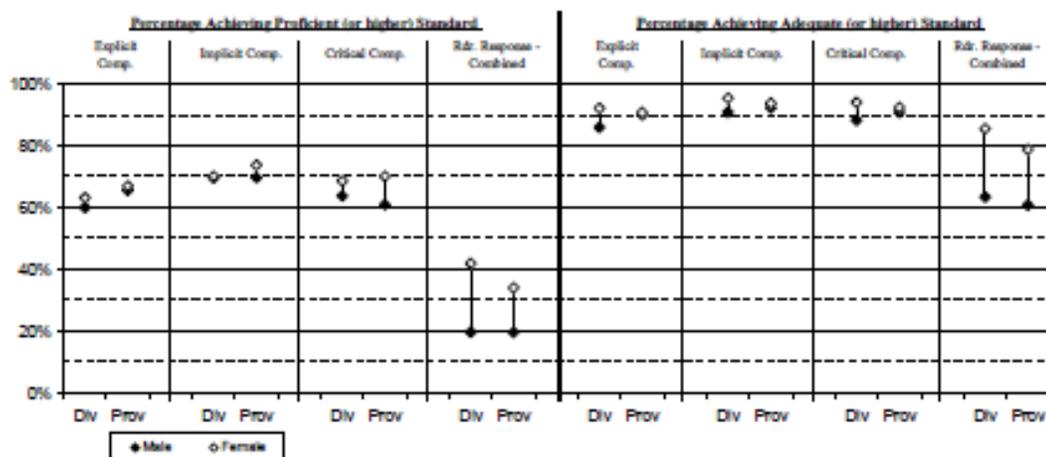


Figure 10-Q.2 - Percentages of Students Achieving Proficient and at Least Adequate, Selected Components, Gender Comparisons



## Grade 10 Student Results - (Section 4 continued)

## Grade 10 Students' Attitudes and Preferences Related to Reading

Gathering student data, by gender, on attitudes and preferences related to reading might inform discussions about teaching strategies to address specific needs or accommodate preferences of boys and girls to enhance their reading strategies and improve their reading proficiency, or to address inequities in their outcomes. Table 10.9 has three parts.

- The first part (7 items) shows the percentages of boys and girls who responded that the given statement applied to them 'almost always' or 'most of the time'.
- The second part (3 items) shows the percentages of boys and girls who selected the given statement related to the usefulness of the reading they learned in the classroom.
- The third part (3 items) lists the three most commonly identified reading sources (from a list of 8 choices) read 'a lot' or 'quite a bit' by students in the division, and shows the percentages of boys and girls in the division and province who do this kind of reading outside of school.

Please note that percentages for all 5 items related to the second part of the table and all 8 items of the third part of the table are reported in the Division Questionnaire report (as question 19 and question 14 respectively).

Table 10.9: Student Attitudes and Preferences Related to Reading, by Gender

Statements	Division		Province	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
<b>'Almost always' or 'Most of the time'....</b>				
I am confident about reading difficult material.	63%	74%	68%	70%
I feel nervous when I have to read aloud in school.	33%	20%	28%	32%
I will choose to read in free time even if I don't have to.	26%	52%	20%	47%
Most of the reading I do in school is boring for me.	62%	31%	51%	34%
Most of the reading I do in school is easy for me.	67%	82%	68%	69%
I would rather read for information than for enjoyment.	36%	12%	36%	13%
I like reading.	42%	71%	34%	63%
<b>The reading learned in the classroom....</b>				
is useful for everyday life.	54%	63%	52%	62%
helps me when I do work in other subjects.	63%	72%	56%	67%
is not useful.	21%	6%	21%	13%
<b>I read 'a lot' or 'quite a bit' the following outside of school ....</b>				
internet-free resources	63%	66%	67%	66%
magazines or newspapers	47%	69%	51%	64%
novels	28%	63%	25%	58%

Note: Number of Participating Students ... Division: 142; Province: 2806

Note: The last three items in the table represent the reading sources most commonly read by students in the division outside of school. These may or may not be the same as the sources read most commonly throughout the province, or by specific genders within or outside the division.

## Grade 10 Students' Reading Strategies

There are several reading strategies practised by effective readers before they read, while they read, and after they read. Increasing students' awareness and use of these strategies enables them to become better readers. Students were given a list of 7 statements describing reading practices that may be used before a reading task is undertaken, another list of 21 statements describing reading practices undertaken during the reading process, and a third list of 10 statements describing practices that might occur after completing a reading task. Students were asked to mark all statements that they used 'even some of the time' when they engaged in reading at school or on their own. Table 10.10 shows the percentages of boys and girls that use the particular strategy at least some of the time. The table is organized to show:

- data for the 2 most commonly used 'before reading' strategies, followed by the 2 least commonly used 'before reading' strategies (within the division);
- data for the 6 most commonly used 'during reading' strategies, followed by the 4 least commonly used 'during reading' strategies (within the division); and,
- data for the 2 most commonly used 'after reading' strategies, followed by the 2 least commonly used 'after reading' strategies (within the division).

The Division Questionnaire Report includes percentage distributions for all 7 'before reading' strategy statements (question 5), all 21 'during reading' strategy statements (question 6), and all 10 'after reading' strategy statements (question 9).

## Grade 10 Student Results - (Section 4 continued)

Table 10.10: Students' Use of Reading Strategies 'Before', 'During' and 'After' Reading, by Gender

Statements	Division		Province	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
<b>The two most commonly used 'before reading' strategies ...</b>				
I look over the front and back covers to get an idea of what the text is about.	58%	82%	58%	80%
I just start reading.	68%	49%	55%	50%
<b>The two least commonly used 'before reading' strategies ...</b>				
I think about my purpose for reading this material.	20%	20%	22%	28%
I think about what message the author is trying to send.	14%	29%	18%	26%
<b>The six most commonly used 'during reading' strategies ...</b>				
I get pictures in my mind of what is happening.	75%	89%	78%	89%
I change my reading speed depending on how difficult the reading is.	49%	63%	43%	62%
I keep trying to guess what's going to happen next.	47%	82%	49%	84%
I try to connect the text to what I already know.	36%	63%	41%	51%
I try to understand the text using clues from the text and what I already know.	38%	51%	48%	57%
I ask myself, "Does this make sense?"	32%	43%	32%	39%
<b>The four least commonly used 'during reading' strategies ...</b>				
I make notes, drawings, or charts to organize and remember what I have read.	0%	5%	4%	8%
I make notes of things that I don't understand.	5%	9%	6%	12%
I look at the date of publication and the source to decide if the information is useful.	9%	17%	12%	15%
I think about whether the information is new to me.	12%	14%	19%	22%
<b>The two most commonly used 'after reading' strategies ...</b>				
I figure out the main idea of the text.	38%	54%	42%	50%
I think about how my experiences relate to the text.	30%	43%	25%	40%
<b>The two least commonly used 'after reading' strategies ...</b>				
I make judgements about how the author wrote the text (craft and technique).	13%	23%	14%	20%
I make judgements about the author's message.	20%	25%	19%	25%

Note: Number of Participating Students ... Division: 142, Province: 2006

**Note:** Items in the table represent the reading strategies most (or least) commonly identified by students in the division as being used at least some of the time. These may or may not be the same as those used most (or least) commonly throughout the province, or by specific genders within or outside the division. The Division Questionnaire Report includes percentage distributions for all reading strategies included in the Student Questionnaire (see questions 5, 6, and 9 within the Student Questionnaire section of the Division Questionnaire Report).

Students were also asked to identify what they did when they come to a word they do not understand, or when they no longer understand what they are reading. Table 10.11 shows the percentages of boys and girls that use the particular strategy at least some of the time. The table is organized to show:

- data for the 2 most commonly used, followed by the 2 least commonly used practices when a word is encountered that is not understood; and,
- data for the 2 most commonly used, followed by the 2 least commonly used practices when the text (content) is no longer understood.

The Division Questionnaire Report includes percentage distributions for all 17 statements related to practices used when experiencing difficulty reading (questions 7 and 8 in the Report).

Table 10.11: Students' Practices When Experiencing Difficulty While Reading, by Gender

Statements	Division		Province	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
<b>The two most commonly used strategies when a word is not understood ...</b>				
I think about the other words in the sentence to figure out the meaning.	54%	75%	60%	77%
I read on to try to figure it out.	38%	66%	36%	56%
<b>The two least commonly used strategies when a word is not understood ...</b>				
I think about what I know in another language to help me understand.	7%	11%	8%	10%
I look at the charts and visuals.	8%	9%	7%	10%
<b>The two most commonly used strategies when a text is not understood ...</b>				
I go back and read some parts again.	55%	80%	61%	81%
I slow down.	39%	66%	54%	75%
<b>The two least commonly used strategies when a text is not understood ...</b>				
I stop reading and ask for help.	11%	12%	10%	18%
I stop reading and give up.	18%	6%	13%	8%

Note: Number of Participating Students ... Division: 142, Province: 2006

**Note:** Items in the table represent the strategies most (or least) commonly identified by students in the division as being used at least some of the time when encountering difficulties. These may or may not be the same as those used most (or least) commonly throughout the province, or by specific genders within or outside the division. The Division Questionnaire Report includes percentage distributions for all reading strategies included in the Student Questionnaire (see questions 7 and 8 within the Student Questionnaire section of the Division Questionnaire Report).

**Grade 10 Student Results - (section 4 continued)**

Students identified specific strategies used when they read informational texts or when they read to solve problems in subject areas such as math, health, or science. Table 10.12 shows the percentages of boys and girls that use the particular strategy at least some of the time.

The Division Questionnaire Report includes percentage distributions for all 17 statements related to these strategy statements (questions 10, 11, and 12 in the Report).

**Table 10.12: Students' Reading Strategies Related to Informational Texts and Solving Problems, by Gender**

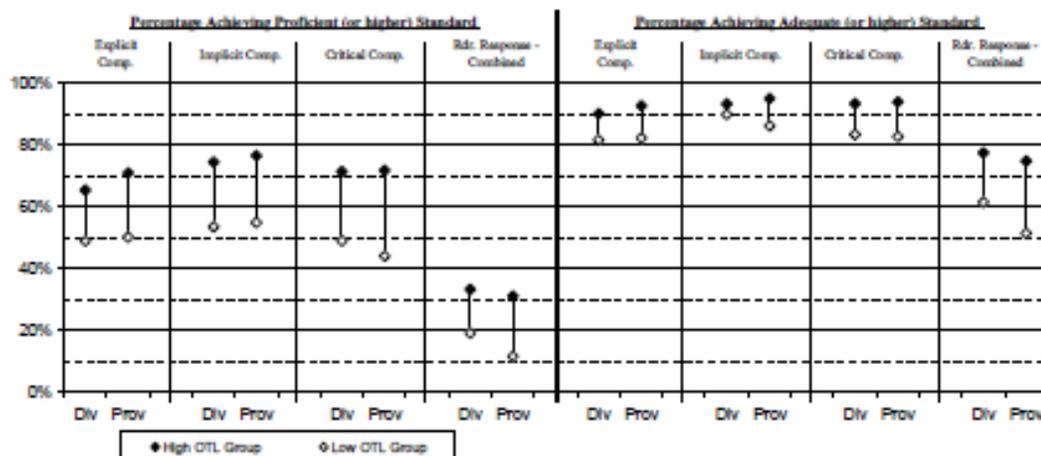
Statements	Division		Province	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
<b>When reading informational texts, it helps me remember the information if ...</b>				
I ask myself questions as I read.	28%	26%	29%	32%
I make notes or highlight parts of the text.	14%	52%	22%	55%
I make sketches or diagrams of the information.	4%	11%	6%	9%
<b>Most commonly identified location for finding the most important information in informational texts ...</b>				
everywhere in the text.	57%	65%	62%	67%
<b>When I read to solve problems in math, health or science, I usually ...</b>				
read over the whole problem to identify what I'm supposed to do.	74%	86%	78%	87%
make connections to what I already know about solving this type of problem.	38%	57%	43%	55%
note key words that suggest what process to use.	38%	40%	33%	46%
read the problem more than once with different purposes in mind.	41%	63%	45%	62%

Note: Number of Participating Students ... Division: 142, Province: 2806

**Grade 10 Student Results - Section 6: Performance Related to Opportunity-to-Learn**

The graphs below compare performance of two groups - those with high opportunity-to-learn (OTL) measures (Level 3 or above) and those with lower OTL measures (Level 2 or below). The dichotomized groupings are formed independently for each OTL measure; that is, just because a student might be at Level 3 or above in his/her preparation for and commitment to learn, he/she may be at Level 2 or below in the family support provided for reading. Within the division and province, the performance of each of the high OTL groups is compared to the performance of each of the low OTL groups related to success in selected reading assessment components. Care should be taken in the interpretation of the results. These should be viewed as correlations and not causality, as it is not always clear the direction of influence when considering these variables. Instead, any findings of interest might be considered along with other available information and experience when targeting areas of further investigation and potential improvement.

**Figure 10-O.1 - Percentages of Students Achieving Proficient (or higher) and Adequate (or higher) Scores, Preparation & Commitment to Learn**



Grade 10 Student Results - Performance Related to Opportunity-to-Learn (continued)

Figure 10-0.2 - Percentages of Students Achieving Proficient (or higher) and Adequate (or higher) Scores, Knowledge & Use of Reading Strategies

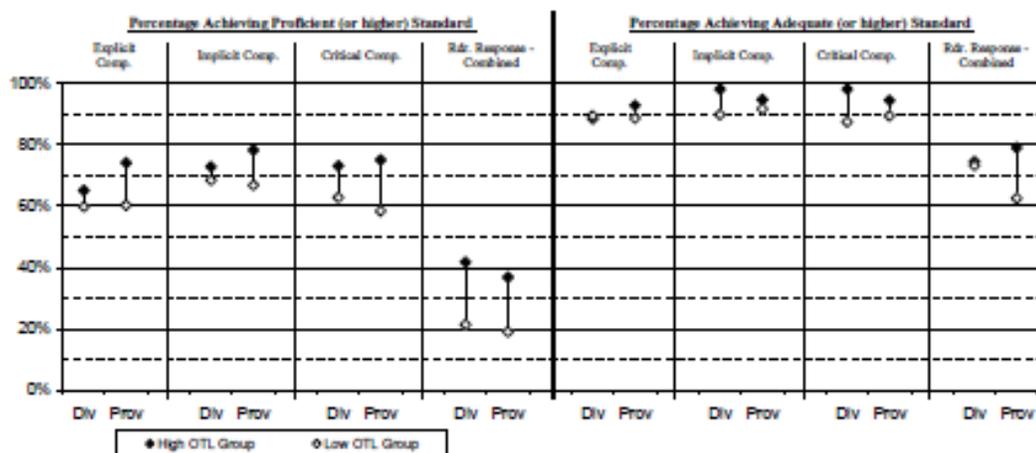
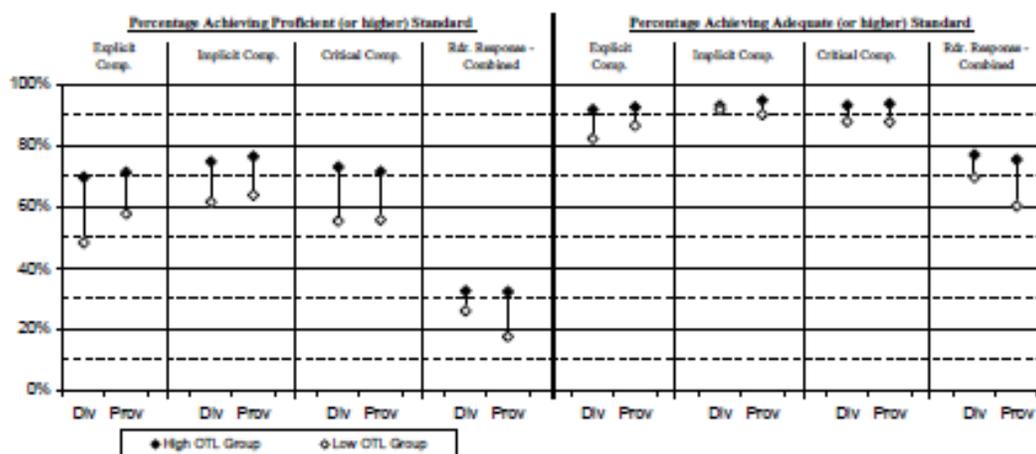


Figure 10-0.3 - Percentages of Students Achieving Proficient (or higher) and Adequate (or higher) Scores, Family Support for Reading



### Teaching Reading Strategies for the Secondary Level - section 6

Teachers at all grade levels and in all subject areas share in the responsibility of helping students to become proficient readers. Students become fluent, strategic readers across the curriculum when they are explicitly taught (both in language arts classes and in all subject areas) and when they learn and use a variety of skills and strategies before, during, and after reading. Becoming proficient in the use of reading strategies is a developmental process that extends over a long period of time and requires explicit teaching and extensive practice.

Table 10.13 shows the percentages of language arts teachers and the percentages of teachers of other subjects who indicated they explicitly taught each of the listed reading strategies to their students during the current year (they may have reinforced or incidentally mentioned the use of other strategies listed in the table, which would be detailed in the *Division Questionnaire Report* as part of the question 7 analysis).

Table 10.13: Reading Strategies Explicitly Taught in Class, Division, and Province

Reading Strategy	Percentage of teachers that stated strategy was explicitly taught	
	Division	Province
<b>Before reading ...</b>		
1. Reflecting on prior knowledge and experience	87%	80%
2. Previewing text	82%	37%
3. Setting a purpose for reading	42%	58%
4. Predicting what the reading will be about	87%	80%
5. Anticipating the author's intention	33%	35%
<b>During reading ...</b>		
6. Using the cueing system to make meaning from text	25%	28%
7. Making connections to personal knowledge and experience	100%	81%
8. Making, confirming and adjusting predictions	50%	44%
9. Making, confirming and adjusting inferences	25%	37%
10. Constructing mental images	50%	55%
11. Distinguishing key ideas and supporting details	75%	71%
12. Drawing conclusions	87%	68%
13. Distinguishing fact and opinion	42%	53%
14. Noting author's purpose, tone, and point of view	42%	82%
15. Attending to how different texts are structured	33%	30%
16. Using a repertoire of strategies to understand and interpret vocabulary and figurative language	58%	43%
17. Interpreting visuals, such as graphs, tables, illustrations, etc.	42%	27%
18. Adjusting reading style and rate to purpose and difficulty of text	25%	20%
19. Pausing, thinking and making notes, charts, etc.	87%	48%
20. Self-questioning, self-monitoring and self-correcting to guide understanding	25%	28%
<b>After reading ...</b>		
21. Synthesizing (e.g., retelling, summarizing, paraphrasing, determining main idea, transforming information, etc.)	83%	78%
22. Recognizing and/or evaluating author's message	50%	65%
23. Recognizing and/or evaluating author's craft and technique	33%	40%
24. Identifying new knowledge or insight as a result of reading	33%	43%
25. Rereading to extend knowledge or locate information	58%	61%
26. Extending and applying new understandings and strategies	25%	35%
27. Responding personally, giving support from text	83%	78%

Note: Number of Participating Language Arts Teachers ... Division: 12, Province: 194

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**Teaching Reading Strategies for the Secondary Level (section 6 continued)**

Language Arts teachers indicated the inclusion (and extent of use) of various activities designed to help their students develop reading proficiency. Table 10.14 shows the percentages of teachers who indicated that the given activity was 'Integral to my practice' and those who indicated the activity was 'an Important supplement to my practice'. The Division Questionnaire Report shows the complete percentage distribution for all categories for these activities (question 22 in the Report).

**Table 10.14: Use of Different Activities to Develop Student Reading Proficiency, Division and Province**

Activity to Develop Reading Proficiency	Percentage of teachers that stated activity was used as follows:			
	Integral to Practice		Important Supplement	
	Division	Province	Division	Province
1. reader-response activities	50%	49%	33%	35%
2. written comprehension questions	58%	48%	25%	35%
3. independent (free-choice) reading	25%	28%	33%	38%
4. reading aloud to students	42%	41%	25%	40%
5. skills-based activities	25%	18%	42%	51%
6. teacher-led discussions	58%	40%	42%	52%
7. explicit vocabulary instruction in context	17%	20%	58%	44%
8. focusing on literary elements, such as foreshadowing, irony, metaphors	25%	35%	50%	41%
9. explicit instruction and practice in reading strategies	8%	20%	25%	44%
10. modeling and think-aloud	17%	28%	42%	40%

Note: Number of Participating Language Arts Teachers ... Division: 12, Province: 194

### Grade 10 Student Participation Information

Table 10.15 shows student participation data for the school, division, and province. Differences between the first two data rows indicate the numbers of students participating in modified language arts (reading) courses where the significant modifications would suggest the student was not 'doing Grade 10 language arts'. This information, along with the 'actual' participation information in the subsequent rows of the table, are important considerations when interpreting the results of the assessment for the school, division, or province. If a school has levels of participation much higher or lower than the division or province, it may be appropriate to engage in discussion around this.

Also, the table shows the types and frequencies of accommodations made for students participating in the assessment. Schools were encouraged to make accommodations for these tests similar to the types of day-to-day accommodations made during classroom assessments.

**Table 10.15: Student Participation Data and Accommodations Made for Student Participation**

Participation	School	Division	Province
Number of Grade 10 students from Participating Schools	34	180	3,259
Number of Students Expected to Contribute to the Profile	34	158	3,188
<b>Frequency of Accommodations for Students Contributing to the Profile:</b>			
Braille	0	0	0
Large-Print	0	0	0
Colour Overlay	0	0	0
Scorbe	0	1	9
Separate Room	0	1	16
Extra Time	1	5	51
Other Accommodation	0	1	27
<b>Actual Number of Students in the Profile:</b>			
Student Questionnaire Participation	32	142	2,806
Multiple-Choice Test Participation	32	145	2,879
Reader-Response Item Participation	30	136	2,826
<b>Number of Secondary-Level Teacher Questionnaires Completed</b>			
	-	12	194

**Note:** Numbers in the top two rows of the Participation Table were derived from pre-administration data provided by participating school divisions. The second row differs from the first row of the table, as students who were in modified language arts courses (where objectives were altered to the extent that they were doing little Grade 10 language arts) were not included in the school, division, or provincial profiles, but were invited to complete parts of the assessment relevant to their modified program. Actual numbers of students that participated in parts of the assessment (shown in the table) differed from the expected participation numbers because of absences, students no longer at the school, refusal to write, or because of inaccuracies in original student number information supplied to the Ministry.

**Note:** Teacher participation data is not released at the school level, so the last row will not contain information for the school.

As emphasized throughout this report, findings from the assessment can offer useful indicators of student performance, but should not be interpreted as definitive measures of a school's or division's performance. There can be a number of validity and reliability considerations that introduce measurement error. In addition, if there is not full participation of the Grade 10 students in the assessment, the indicator picture becomes a little more blurred. Table 10.16 shows the effect that this non-participation might have in terms of the margin of error introduced into the findings due to an assumed 'sampling error'. Please see the footnote below the table.

**Table 10.16: Margins of Sampling Error**

Participation	School	Division	Province
Student Questionnaire Results	+/- 4.2%	+/- 2.6%	+/- 0.6%
Multiple-Choice Test Results	+/- 4.2%	+/- 2.3%	+/- 0.5%
Reader-Response Item Results	+/- 6.1%	+/- 3.1%	+/- 0.6%

**Note:** Margins of error in the above table represent the maximum error calculated for a binomial percentage distribution derived from the actual participation compared to the number expected to contribute to the profile. The calculation assumes that the non-participation was random; that is, high achievers were as likely not to participate as were low achievers. The reader could assume that the results shown in this report represent the school, division, or province (+/- the margin of error) 19 times out of 20.

**Note:** A 0% margin of sampling error indicates there was no sampling error (that all students expected to participate in the assessment did participate), and that these results reflect the entire population of students in the school (or division, etc.). There may be many other types of measurement error or factors that affect performance, and a 0% margin of sampling error does not preclude these.

## APPENDIX J: The Second Biggest Sport

**PASSAGE #1**

*This excerpt from Keeper'n Me describes another important aspect of contemporary culture—relationships.*

## The Second Biggest Sport

White Dog was hosting their annual pow-wow and as usual had invited every reserve in the area to come and dance and celebrate the powers of nature. By the time of the opening Grand Entry—that's where all the dancers line up and dance in together for an opening prayer by elders—there was about two hundred people here from other places.

That's an awful lot of folks for a tiny place like this and people were bunked in with relatives and friends or else camped out in tents and trailers all around the pow-wow grounds, which was really the ball diamond. It's a big thing and White Dog folks take a lotta pride in giving their guests their best hospitality.

This year was no different and things were going really well up until the very last night of dancing. There's another part of pow-wow that's not really an official part but part and parcel of every pow-wow in Indian country anyway. It's called snaggin' and it means that the young people are all around on the lookout for that special someone. You're considered "snagged" if you're seen in the company of a young man or young woman holding hands, smooching or making them big wet googoo eyes at each other. Next to hockey, it's the biggest sport in Indian country. Come to think of it, it's ironic that we have our pow-wow on the baseball diamond, since mosta the young people are all trying to get past first base.

Anyway, dancers save their best moves for the benefit of the person they're interested in. The snaggee, I guess

you'd call them. And singers all sing their best when their target is near.

Well, Wally Red Sky had his eye on this young jingle-dress dancer from the Rat Portage reserve, and I have to admit that old Wally had a pretty good eye. Not being a dancer or a pow-wow singer meant Wally was a little low on the totem pole when it came to attracting any attention to himself, so he was forced to be creative. They were sitting right in front of me on the bleachers that night when Wally made his big move.

"Sure dance good," he said. "Come here often?"

I winced.

"Betcha don't know that I'm the chief radio executive here on White Dog, eh?" Wally said, slowly skulking in for the big snag.

"No," she said and turned her head real coy-like and looked at the men's fancy dance competition going on below.

"Yep. I'm the one brought the world to White Dog. Hooked us up to the twentieth century. An' I'm also the special musical guest ev'ry night too. Gonna be a big country singin' star real soon."

He leaned in a little closer while he told her this so she could get a whiff of his Brylcreem and Old Spice.

"Really," she said.

She batted those big brown eyes again and giggled, and they disappeared in the direction of Wally's while I smiled, shook my head and turned back towards the dancing.

- Richard Wagamese