

UNDERSTANDING THE POWER OF LITERACY
AND ONTARIO'S LITERACY EDUCATION:
A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE EQAO AND ITS DEFINITION OF LITERACY
PRACTICES

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Abstract

Initially introduced through the Royal Commission on Learning and later created through legislation, the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) is a publically funded, crown agency that determines the quality and effectiveness of the Ontario's education system¹. Administered by the EQAO to students at the Grade Ten level, the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) provides education stakeholders with accurate information regarding the degree to which the students are able to properly demonstrate their understanding of how to utilize certain literacy skills and participate in society once graduated (EQAO, 2007, p.9). Framed by a Foucauldian framework that critiques a technical rationalist understanding of education, this MRP will contribute to the growing research regarding the OSSLT and discuss the potential implications that the literacy assessment may have on students, as well as an individual's understanding of literacy and their own academic and non-academic capabilities.

Using a qualitative research method to perform a critical analysis on the Royal Commission on Learning's report, *For the Love of Learning* (Royal Commission on Learning, 1995), the 1996 *Education Quality and Accountability Office Act* (EQAO Act, 1996; EQAO, 2013), the *Ontario Curriculum: Grades 9 and 10 – English* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007), the EQAO's *Framework: Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test* document (EQAO 2007) and the "OSSLT Sample Assessment Booklet: New Layout" (EQAO, 2015a; EQAO 2015b), findings reveal that the EQAO disregards the complexity of literacy practices. The EQAO constructs its own definition of literacy practices to simultaneously reproduce the definitions of literacy and illiteracy. The illiterate individual is constructed by the EQAO as one

¹ The *Education Quality and Accountability Office Act* defines the Education Quality and Accountability Office as a crown agency (EQAO Act, 1996, s.7) and is funded under the government, subject to the approval of the Lieutenant Governor in Council and "any conditions imposed by the Minister of Finance" (EQAO Act, 1996, s.9 [3]).

to be feared and isolated from the social and economic activities that occur outside of the school. The EQAO establishes literacy practices as a mechanism that can be measured and evaluated, but not challenged, critiqued, nor used to criticize society, or the economy within a society.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Introduction: An Overview of the Purposes of the Major Research Paper

The 1995 Royal Commission on Learning report, *For the Love of Learning* (Royal Commission on Learning, 1995a), discussed the purposes of public education and how Ontario schools may ensure that students are prepared to participate in society, as well as contribute to the economy of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The report recommended the implementation of a “Province-wide [...] ‘literacy guarantee’ test in Grade 10 schools to inform parents of expected outcomes and standards for students in every course” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1995). The Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) created the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) as a large-scale, high-stakes, province-wide standardized test that every student must successfully pass in order to graduate high school. The OSSLT demonstrates to the public the degree to which students are receiving the proper literacy education necessary for participation in Western society. However, in order to distribute a high-stakes, large-scale standardized test, literacy practices are defined in a manner that ensures that the test scores reflect the province’s literacy education in an objectively consistent manner.

Literacy is often regarded as a complex practice (Archer, 2006; Barton *et al.*, 2000; Bickerstaff, 2012; Giampapa, 2010; Green, 1999; Hall *et al.*, 2010; Lipman, 2004) that is continually reformed by surrounding social and political influences, while simultaneously influencing social and political activities; literacy practices play a significant role in the ways in which an individual reflects upon the reality that surrounds them, the manner they communicate their thoughts with themselves and others, as well as how individuals collectively form and dismantle “existing social formation[s]” (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p.viii). Literacy practices may be regarded as both a powerful and fragile mechanism that can be utilized by certain individuals,

or groups, as a means of empowering themselves, or as a means of controlling others. While individuals work to gain the ability to utilize certain literacy practices in order to communicate with others and coexist in a larger society, the complexity of literacy practices draws attention to the notion that certain literacy practices may be excluded from the literacy learning experience within Ontario schools in order to ensure that students achieve success on the OSSLT and are considered literate individuals who may graduate from secondary education.

Martin (2012) explains that the 1995 Ontario provincial election was won by the Progressive Conservative party, who claimed that it would work to ensure that “public services [...] create a ‘business-friendly’ political and economic climate in Ontario that would, in turn, create jobs” (p.263). Forming a relationship between public services, such as public education, and employment, the purposes of public education within Ontario is influenced by external political motives. Researchers have drawn attention to the multiplicity of literacy practices to counteract the increasing “dominant perspective on ‘literacy’ as a unitary, universal phenomenon,” (Lillis *et al.*, 2001, p.37). The nature of standardized testing reinforces assessment practices that evaluate each student’s knowledge and skills in the same objective, measureable manner (Martinez-Brawley, 2000; Pinto, 2012; Shaffer & Gee, 2005). Analysing the EQAO’s definition of literacy practices will demonstrate how Ontario’s literacy education, specifically the literacy assessment that is the OSSLT, shapes the ways in which the students of today and citizens of tomorrow interact with one another.

The EQAO holds the authority to determine which students are literate, creating a binary between the literate and illiterate; some students may have the capacity to engage in some literacy practices, however, the notion that a student who does not achieve success on the OSSLT may influence people to fear the illiterate individual and perceive literacy practices in a

manner that dismisses its complexity in substitution for the EQAO's definition. Using a Foucauldian framework that concerns power relations (Foucault, 1978) and the ways in which relations may be formed through discourses (Miller & Rose, 1993) that critiques a technical rationalist perspective of education, the purpose of the Major Research Paper (MRP) is to illustrate how the EQAO defines literacy practices and consider the potential implications that the definition has on a student's understanding of their abilities, and opportunities within secondary school and beyond. A critical analysis of the policy documents, government reports, and assessment practices relating to the EQAO's OSSLT may reveal the ways in which literacy practices are manipulated and reduced to a practice where the purpose of the practice is to prepare oneself to serve the economy and support the government. The analysis of various documents pertaining to the OSSLT will provide a clear understanding of how policies and assessment practices are utilized as a form of governance.

Personal Statement of Interest

The *Toronto Star* released an article that focussed on the importance of literacy practices in school (Rushowy, 2016). The article reinforces the value in having strong literacy skills as Mohamed Huque, associate director of the National Reading Campaign, explains that "if you can't read well, you are not doing well in math or science" (Rushowy, 2016, n.p.). Curricular activities incorporating literacy practices extend beyond the walls of the English classroom. The experience of reading and writing enable individuals to communicate their thoughts, understand the beliefs held by others, and gain an appreciation for the infinite forms of expression that one may use through the medium of writing. As a member of the Ontario College of Teachers, holding qualifications to teach in the subjects of English and History at the secondary level, I am an educator who holds a passion for language and the ways in which reading, writing, and

speaking simultaneously construct, and are constructed by, the perceived reality that is understood by each individual. I will also forever perceive myself as a student who may continually strive to appreciate and understand the power of language as a tool that humans use to distract themselves from their own limitations on reality, while also creating entire realities to be perceived by every living individual both in a shared manner, as well as a personal manner. As an educator, as well as a student, I hold a deep appreciation for the complex nature of literacy practices because such practices are developed as the human's extension of thought.

Literacy practices influence and shape the perceived reality every individual constructs throughout their lifetime. Through the information that individuals gather when reading, the ways in which they express their own thoughts and communicate with others through writing, literacy practices allow people to establish their own understanding of how relationships are developed and dismantled; from the relationship shared between two people, to the relationship an individual shares with their favourite song, or the relationship an individual perceives between their community and another community, literacy practices form how an individual perceives, and communicates their understanding of the world around them.

I believe that literacy practices cannot be separated from the construction of one's identity. Literacy practices cannot stand isolated from a specific way of "thinking, believing, valuing, acting, interacting [...] other semiotic systems, other people, various objects, tools, settings, and technologies" (Green, 1999, p.413). Defining identity as a knowledge of the self that is shaped by social practices (Giampapa, 2010; Packer & Goicoechea, 2000;), literacy practices are deeply embedded into every aspect of a community and allow the fundamental essence of each individual's identity to develop be understood (Packer & Goicoechea, 2000); from the advertisements that are found on internet websites, to the recipe instructions for cooking

a healthy meal, literacy practices are utilized as a tool which influences how each person acts throughout their daily lives. Literacy practices provide an individual with the opportunity to construct and re-negotiate their understanding of their own identity (Grote, 2006). An individual's understanding of themselves and their own capabilities is framed by the skills that they use to communicate their own thoughts to themselves and express their emotions; through literacy practices, an individual may decode a text, express themselves through the medium of language, and produce an understanding of themselves in relation to their surrounding environment.

Discussing explanation of language as a “social tool” (Hall *et al.*, 2010, p.234), Hall *et al.* (2010) construct literacy practices act as a catalyst that allows an individual to express their thoughts towards others and collectively reach an understanding of a certain belief or form of knowledge. However, Friere and Macedo (1987) note that literacy is utilized to “empower or disempower” (p. viii) individuals and groups. Thus, literacy practices may provide individuals, groups, organizations, and so forth, with the ability to gain authority and influence the ways in which other people communicate with one another and live their day-to-day lives. As an educator and student, I believe it is my responsibility to continually critically examine the literacy practices that I participate in, as well as the literacy practices that I present to literacy learners, because the ways in which my surrounding community engages in literacy practices will continue to form and frame the world around us, as well as the lives of each individual across the globe.

While literacy practices are complex and may be defined in an endless variety of manners, educational institutions often construct and support certain literacy practices that then become dominant literacy practices (Barton *et al.*, 2000). As an assessment practice is used to

“determine whether a student has the literacy (reading and writing) skills required to meet the standard for understanding reading selections and communicating in a variety of writing forms” (EQAO, 2007, p.6), the EQAO determines what literacy skills students will obtain before graduating from secondary education. Due to the nature of high-stakes, large-scale standardized testing, the complexity of literacy practices cause some aspects of literacy to be ignored in order to ensure that the test evaluates each student in an objective manner. For instance, research has shown that absence of feedback (EQAO, 2007) on the OSSLT diminishes the students’ opportunities to properly display their literacy skills (Klinger & Luce-Kapler, 2007). Considering the notion that some aspects of literacy practices may be disregarded for the sake of producing a standardized test, I worry that students may internalize a warped understanding of literacy which forms their identity and understanding of the reality that surrounds them in a manner that reflects a narrow definition of literacy.

Researchers have noted that the OSSLT may be at the expense of other schooling activities and does not provide the literacy learner with the opportunity to participate in critical literacy activities (Klinger & Luce-Kapler, 2007; Pinto *et al.*, 2007). A central objective of this MRP is to discuss the ways in which literacy practices may be utilized both as a tool of liberation and oppression. While critical literacy skills allow individuals to examine, question, critique and actively engage with a text, or conversation (Brannon *et al.*, 2010), functional literacy skills influence individuals to passively participate in literacy practices and may be favoured on standardized literacy tests (Finn, 2009; Lankshear, 1998; Pinto *et al.*, 2007) The province’s literacy education system will be defined and discussed to illustrate the degree to which students are provided with the experiences that will create independent citizens who live within the society and economy of the twenty-first century.

Through a critical analysis that utilizes a Foucauldian framework that concerns power relations (Foucault, 1978) and the ways in which relations may be formed through discourses (Miller & Rose, 1993) framework, I will consider the ways in which the Ontario Ministry of Education and EQAO perceive the purposes of literacy education and literacy practices. The purposes of this MRP is to help others understand how literacy practices in Ontario public schools are defined and the possible implications that such a definition may have on students in school and once graduated. My findings will allow teachers, students, principals and other education stakeholders, such as the Ontario public, to understand the ways in which external forms of authority, the government and EQAO, utilize the school as a technique of power that govern how students, teachers, parents, and so forth, perceive the power of literacy and the ways in which literacy practices enable or restrict an individual from reaching their full capabilities as a student, as well as a human being.

Using Foucault's discussion of power relations (Foucault, 1978) and how relations may be shaped through discourse (Miller & Rose, 1993), the Foucauldian framework will critique a technical rationalist perspective of education that places emphasis on aspects of literacy practices that are regarded as both useful and objectively measureable. This MRP will critically analyze how the EQAO defines literacy practices for the sake of an objectively measurable assessment. My discussion will demonstrate whether or not literacy practices are regulated by the EQAO in a manner that sacrifices the unique needs of each literacy learner in exchange for a literacy education that produces employable citizens who may contribute to the economy. My research will provide researchers, teachers, students, parents, education stakeholders, and so forth, with a stronger understanding of how literacy education may be defined and governed within a society. My research will introduce the potential implications that literacy practices have on an individual

as they move through a society's education system and work to understand their own capabilities in school and once graduated. The discussion regarding the EQAO's literacy assessment will discuss the possible implications of a constructed binary that exists between the literate and illiterate individual and consider how the EQAO utilizes the OSSLT as a governing mechanism that influences the citizens of Ontario to accept a restricted definition literacy practices and act in a certain manner.

Background: The Creation of the EQAO and OSSLT

Throughout the late 1980s, leading into the early 1990's, the public's concern regarding the economic stability of the province continued to grow (Murphy, 1999). Education stakeholders were wary of the notion that the quality of the province's public education system was negatively impacting the students' ability to acquire efficient literacy and numeracy skills that would enable them to become active citizens who contributed to the economy (Rose, 2012). Responding to the increasing demand for stronger accountability measures, under the New Democratic Party, newly appointed minister of education, Tony Silipo, worked to enact a "curriculum reform" that would apply "a common curriculum for all, with worthwhile, relevant, and challenging outcomes, and with explicit criteria (or standards) for assessing and reporting achievement to parents and public" (Gidney, 1999, p.219). While the OSSTF opposed the creation of a common curriculum and standardization of public education, the continuing decline in public confidence, combined with a growing demand for province-wide testing lead to the creation of an Ontario Royal Commission on Learning that would review and propose the implementation of accountability measures, as well as changes to programs of study (Gidney, 1999; Pinto, 2012).

Working to achieve various goals, the commission established the necessity of ensuring that students receive “high-level literacies, beginning with basic reading and writing skills, leading to increasing knowledge, intellectual understanding, problem-solving skills, and critical thinking in a wide range of subjects” (Gidney, p.226; Royal Commission on Learning, 1995e, n.p.). Increasing accountability measures reflected the provincial government’s concern to ensure that the public were informed of the education students receive and that those involved in the education system, such as teachers and students, were held accountable.

The Royal Commission on Learning publically released its report, *For the Love Of Learning* in January of 1995 (Royal Commission on Learning, 1995a). The report established an awareness that many citizens regard public education as a “vocational salvation” (Royal Commission on Learning, 1995a, n.p.). The commission reinforced the notion that the government was continually addressing the concerns of the public to remain accountable, as well as construct an education system that would adhere to the needs of the society and economy; parents were influenced to believe that the ongoing changes made to the education system would allow their child to achieve success while in school and once graduated. The report reflected the province’s efforts towards creating and maintaining an education system that was suited to the needs of the greater society of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century.

The Royal Commission on Learning’s report, *For the Love of Learning* (Royal Commission on Learning, 1995a), concluded with a series of recommendations that drew attention to the ways in which the government may regulate the education that public schools provide to the youth by implementing consistent assessment measures that continually inform the public of the current state of the province’s education system. The Royal Commission on Learning’s recommendation for the government to create, administer, and assess a standard,

uniform evaluation of the Ontario student's learning was placed under the "responsibility of a small agency, independent of the Ministry of Education and Training" (Royal Commission on Learning, 1995h, n.p.). While the agency was not established until 1996, the Conservative Party's success in the provincial election in 1995 allowed the recommendations made within the report to become a reality.

Through legislation, the 1996 *Education Quality and Accountability Office Act* (EQAO Act, 1996) established the EQAO as a corporation that was responsible for evaluating the effectiveness of the province's education. To create the EQAO and provide authority to the agency, the provincial government drew from the report's recommendations to restructure the authority school boards and teachers had over the learning experience students received (Kerr, 2006). After winning the provincial election in 1995, Conservative premiere Mike Harris began to cut provincial taxes dramatically, restricting the level of government funding towards public education, while also working to centralize the creation and implementation of the curriculum in order to better govern learning outcomes (Gidney, 1999; Rezai-Rashti, 2009). Appointing John Snobelen as minister of education, Snobelen stated that he would "invent a crisis" (Gidney, 1999, p.236; Kearns, 2016, p.124; Martin, 2012, p.264; Pinto, 2012, p.54) in an attempt to influence the public to demand a transformation to the province's public education system.

The public continued to receive information regarding the notion that graduates were unprepared to enter into the workforce and contribute to the economy through employment (Martin, 2012; Rose, 2012). Reinforcing a binary between the educated and non-educated, the public were manipulated to demand for a modified education system which would produce knowledgeable and skillful citizens who were able to contribute to the economy. In 1995 Snobelen "proceeded [...] with the legislation to establish the EQAO as a semi-independent

Crown agency” (Gidney, 1999, p.237). Establishing education as a business where teachers are expected to provide a service, Snobelen addressed the needs of the “customers” (Pinto, 2012, p. 56) by giving authority to an agency that would begin to provide a service by standardizing education, presenting learning outcomes in an objectively measurable manner and holding students, teachers, principals, school boards, and so forth, accountable towards the public.

Initially called the “Office of Learning Assessment and Accountability” (Royal Commission on Learning, 1995h, n.p.), the recommendation led to the creation of the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) through the 1996 *Education Quality and Accountability Office Act* (EQAO Act, 1996; EQAO, 2013). The *EQAO Act* recognised the EQAO as an “independent Operational Service Agency (formerly Schedule IV) established to deliver assessment programs that yield objective and reliable information on student achievement” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1995). The agency acted as a mechanism that allowed the public to understand what knowledge and skills were being taught to students and whether or not teachers, principals, and so forth, were fulfilling their duties and responsibilities. EQAO also held itself accountable to the “people of Ontario by maintaining its arm’s-length relationship with the provincial government; by setting strategic policy directions for achieving its mandate; by setting priorities for achieving excellence in the delivery of Ontario’s large-scale assessment program.” (EQAO, “Governance Framework,” n.d.). The EQAO was developed in accordance with the Ontario Curriculum to reflect and uphold the goals and purposes of education discussed within the Ontario curriculum policy documents (EQAO, 2007). The agency itself continues to provide publically available documents, such as the EQAO’s *Framework: Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test* document (EQAO 2007), to explaining how its objectives and policies are set, who sets such directives and who is expected to fulfill them.

The Liberal Party, New Democratic Party and Conservative Party in Ontario would each work towards ensuring that Ontario public schools maintained a strong relationship with the province's economy in a manner that would prepare students for future employment once graduated (Gidney, 1999; Kearns, 2016; Pinto, 2012); regardless of political background, the province collectively pursued the implementation of stronger accountability measures that would establish a public education system which provides student with employable skills. Drawing from the *No Child Left Behind Act*²(NCLB), the emphasis placed on “business rhetoric of efficiency, accountability and performance standards” (Lipman, 2004, p.171) provided Ontario educational policy makers with an understanding of how education could be transformed into a mechanism that efficiently produced citizens who are equipped to serve the future economy (Kearns, 2016). Redefining education as a means to serve the economy, the EQAO's presence in the Ontario education system symbolized a “marketization” of education that “[aligned] with market values and practices” (Spencer, 2012, p.38). Through the relation established between the Ontario Ministry of Education and the EQAO, the purpose of education was redefined as a means to ensure students learned in an efficient manner that would allow them to later contribute to the economy. The provincial government and minister of education worked to ensure that students obtain “acceptable literacy skills” in order to “compete for jobs” (Kearns, 2016, p.126). Thus, the EQAO utilized its authority over education and assessment practices within Ontario schools by implementing standardized tests that would ensure the student was equipped with the

² The *No Child Left Behind Act* was passed in 2001 in the United States and requires states, by law, to evaluate students' reading and math skills in several grades. The *Act* represents the American education system's increase in accountability measures (Lipman, 2004) and is useful as a comparison to the EQAO for the purposes of this MRP because the NCLB establishes the notion that current changes to education systems at the provincial or federal level are commonly discussed and implemented as a means of measuring the usefulness of an education system, regulating the learning experience for the purposes of supporting the economy, as well as maintaining a level of governance over citizens. The *EQAO Act* (EQAO Act, 1996) may resemble the objectives of the NCLB and may allow for a stronger understanding of how Ontario's education system changes under the authority of the EQAO.

knowledge and skills that would allow the student to participate in society once graduated (EQAO, 2007).

Initially implementing Grade 6 reading assessments into the curriculum in 1998, the EQAO would move forward to also implement Grade 3 and 9 assessment practices, before finally introducing the Ontario Secondary School Literacy (OSSLT) test in 2002 (EQAO, 2013). The OSSLT is a large-scale, high-stakes standardized literacy assessment that evaluate students' literacy skills across the province. The OSSLT is completed once, each year by Ontario students within the public secondary schools who are in Grade 10. Students who do not achieve success on the OSSLT are provided with two opportunities to achieve success on the test each following year. Student who do not achieve success on the OSSLT after three attempts are required to enroll in, and successfully pass the Ontario Literacy Course (OLC) (Main, 2008). The OSSLT is also regarded as a high-stakes standardized test because the successful completion of the OSSLT is a requirement for students to obtain an Ontario secondary education diploma (Kearns, 2011).

Problem: The OSSLT and Redefining Literacy Practices

Administered by the EQAO to students at the Grade 10 level, the OSSLT “measures whether or not students are meeting the minimum standard for literacy” (EQAO “Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test,” n.d.). However, many scholars have argued that the OSSLT diminishes the strength of Ontario’s literacy education, as well as the public’s understanding of literacy practices (Chenge *et al.*, 2007; Fairbairn & Fox, 2009; Kearns, 2011; Kearns, 2016; Klinger & Luce-Kapler, 2007; Klinger *et al.*, 2006; Pinto *et al.*, 2007; Ricci, 2004; Skerrett, 2010). Drawing from Pinto *et al.*’s (2007) discussion regarding the public media’s coverage of the OSSLT and definition of literacy practices presented to the public audience, the standardizing of the learning experience for the sake of producing an objectively measureable learning

outcome diminishes the inspirational complexity of the literacy learning experience. Pinto *et al.*, (2007) explain that education reforms are often “characterized by ‘back to basics’ philosophy and accountability measures, often in the form of standardised tests” (p.85). Ontario’s education reform is established as a return to the fundamental, functional principles of literacy practices where the students are restricted from advancing beyond the elementary activities.

The provincial government’s decision to provide the EQAO with the authority to determine what literacy practices students must display on a standardized test in order to graduate suggests that literacy practices are may be utilized as a tool that “functions to either empower or disempower people” (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p.15). As a high-stakes assessment that informs the public of the effectiveness of the province’s education, the OSSLT allows the EQAO to govern the ways in which students experience literacy education. Through the growing demand for stronger accountability measures (Gidney, 1999; Martin, 2012; Pinto, 2012), education stakeholders rely on the authority of the EQAO to assess the quality of the province’s education system, create a method of evaluating the quality of the education and create assessment procedures that displays such information to the stakeholders.

The test score students are required to obtain in order to achieve success on the OSSLT is not only arbitrarily placed, but may construct a binary between the literate and illiterate in a manner that “[indicates] a modest-sized minority” (Connell, 1994, p.130). Remaining accountable towards the public, the level of achievement students receive on the test is utilized to demonstrate whether or not schools are effectively educating students. The students who are unable to properly display their literacy skills on the OSSLT allow the EQAO to construct a minority of inferior, illiterate individuals who should be controlled (Kearns, 2016). The quality of the education students receive may become ignored as the public is intimidated by the

existence of the ‘illiterate’ learner as someone who is not suited for society, nor able to contribute to the economy. Fearing that the future citizen may maneuver through Ontario’s education system without obtaining fundamental literacy skills, the literacy education may overemphasize certain literacy practices that may be objectively measured to ensure that the needs of the public are addressed and met.

Researchers have argued that the students who are unable to achieve success on the OSSLT may not be problematic learners, rather, such students draw attention to the notion that the assessment may pressure the student to conform to a specific definition of literacy practices (Klinger & Luce-Kapler, 2007; Klinger *et al.*, 2006; Luce-Kapler & Klinger, 2005, Takeuchi, 2008; Volante, 2006; Wal & Ryan, 2014). The OSSLT is the first high-stakes standardized test in Canada that students are required to pass in order to graduate (Klinger & Luce-Kapler, 2007). While the literacy skills on the OSSLT are objectively assessed, the EQAO’s literacy assessment practices disregards a contemporary understanding of literacy. Luce-Kapler and Klinger (2005) believe that the current literacy education reflects nineteenth century education where the mass populations were educated in a manner that prohibited such groups from making strong advancements academically, socially or economically (p.159). Although the public demands that students are prepared to advance into the society, the individual may be restricted from properly analysing texts, communicating thoughts, engaging in discussions and quite possible, critically examining the reality that surrounds them.

The Ontario government’s efforts to remain accountable towards the public by incorporating assessment strategies that demonstrate the literacy education students receive adheres to acceptable standards is criticized as relying on a narrow, functional definition of literacy (Pinto *et al.*, 2007, p.87). Functional literacy practices focus “on students learning to

read and compose the kinds of texts that enable them to succeed at school and to participate in society” (Kalantzis *et al.*, 2016, location 3557). Functional literacy skills provide the learner with the tools needed to express opinions and communicate with others in society. Green (1999) explains that education reforms are “organized by the discourse of ‘functional literacy’ [...] because of the dominant-discursive association of ‘literacy’ with ‘standards’ and, hence, with matters of assessment, measurement and testing” (p.394). Similar to the educational “crisis” (Gidney, 1999; Kearns, 2016; Klein, 2008; Martin, 2012; Pinto, 2012) that the Ontario Ministry of Education utilized to increase measures of accountability and implement measureable assessment practices and standardized curriculum policies, literacy education reforms may construct literacy in a manner that diminishes the critical and creative skills embedded into the practice and place functional literacy skills as superior.

Although educators may work to ensure that students are provided with the opportunity to engage in a variety of literacy practices, “socially powerful institutions, such as education, tend to support dominant literacy practices” (Barton *et al.*, 2000). The authority the EQAO has over assessment practices in the Ontario education system allows the agency to determine what literacy practices a student are required to obtain before graduating. Lankshear’s (1998) discussion regarding education policies reinforces ways in which fear enables figures of authority to manipulate learning experiences and confine students from engaging deeply into the complexity of the literacy practice. Lankshear (1998) explains that the discussions surrounding a “literacy crisis” allows policy makers to favour standard, objective education practices which may undermine the opportunities of “those students adjudged ‘most at risk,’ [...] to acquire the ‘new basics’” (p.362). Drawing from Lankshear’s discussion, Pinto *et al.*,’s (2007) explain that ‘new basics’ develops “under the rationale that basic or functional literacy is insufficient for

effective participation in modern societies” (p.86). Noting that the media’s definition of literacy practices is governed by the lingering basic, functional conception of literacy, the authors’ discussion establishes the possibility that the literacy education insufficiently prepares students to enter society once graduated.

Education provides the learner with the opportunity to expand their knowledge within a community of future citizens who continually challenge one another and support each other in the learning process. However, as some students regard the OSSLT as the only valuable consequence of engaging in the education (Fairbairn & Fox, 2009), the EQAO’s implementation of standardized tests that promote “uniformity and sameness” may “not sufficiently acknowledge the significant differences among the students of Ontario’s schools” (Spencer, 2012, p.140). The literacy education students receive may not respect the complexity of literacy practices and provide the learner with the opportunity to approach and utilize literacy practices in a manner that adheres to their own needs. A restricted definition of literacy practices may cause any individual to obtain a restricted understanding of their own capabilities. A critical analysis of the province’s literacy education and assessment strategies will demonstrate whether or not the needs of each student are addressed and the potential implications that the EQAO’s definition of literacy practices has on the lives of each literacy learner.

Definition of Terms

High-Stakes Testing: A form of assessment that plays a significant role in the future of the test-taker. High-stakes testing often determines whether or not a student will be eligible to graduate. High-stakes testing is used by school boards as an accountability measure that regulates what educational practices are taught within schools.

– Large-Scale Testing: A form of assessment that is used across different schoolboards, cities and provinces. Large-scale testing displays how large populations perform and allow for a consideration as to what actions may be taken to allow the population of a city or province to improve.

– Standardized Testing: A form of assessment that evaluates each student's knowledge in a consistent manner. Standardized testing is often administered in the form of a large-scale, high-stakes manner to determine how each school board educates its students in a consistent manner and whether or not the student will be eligible to graduate. For the purposes of this MRP, the OSSLT is considered a large-scale, high-stakes standardized test.

Concluding Remarks: Overall Issues and The Objective of the MRP

Regardless of political background, The Liberal Party, New Democratic Party and Conservative Party provincial governments in the late 1980s and mid 1990s responded to the demands to increase accountability measures through the legislation creation of the EQAO. The EQAO is provided with the authority to determine what literacy skills students are expected acquire before graduating. However, noting that literacy practices are complex, the EQAO's ability to create a form of assessment that measures the quality of the province's education system suggests that the schools no longer hold the independence to dictate the most efficient way to educate each unique student. The nature of standardized testing may redefine literacy practices in a manner that disregards its complexity for the sake of producing an objectively measurable form of literacy assessment.

Reconstructing the learning experience into a product that can be measured and displayed to education stakeholders, the EQAO's transformation of the definition of literacy practices within Ontario public schools education setting will be discussed and critically analysed. As

students conform their literacy skills to achieve success on the OSSLT, students' perceptions of literacy practices and their own capabilities may become influenced under the authority of the EQAO. Therefore, the MRP will discuss how the EQAO defines literacy practices and will consider the potential implications of the definition for students. The discussion will introduce the ways in which the EQAO is regarded as a form of authority that determines the student's ability to participate in society. For the purposes of this MRP, the term 'society' and more specifically, Western society, is defined through a Foucauldian understanding of the term as a collective, organized democratic community that produce goods and services to support an economy and enable a form of authority to maintain power over its citizens (Cook, 2013; Foucault & Kritzman, 1988). The definition of society will later establish how literacy skills dictate how an individual functions within society. Western society is a community that survives through the continual consumption and production of various resources that create wealth and allow the citizens to sustain life in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Chapter Two: Research Questions

The OSSLT is the first high-stakes standardized test in Canada that students are required to pass to graduate from high school (Klinger & Luce-Kapler, 2007). Employing the OSSLT as a means of measuring the effectiveness of the province's education system, teachers, students, school boards, and so forth, are held accountable towards the education stakeholders. Students, as well as teachers, are pressured to ensure that the literacy learner has acquired the specific literacy skills that are assessed on the OSSLT. The EQAO's ability to evaluate the quality of the province's education system and determine whether or not a student is a literate individual who is capable of graduating suggests that the EQAO's literacy assessment practice may have a significant impact on the ways in which individuals understand literacy practices.

The notion that literacy practices simultaneously shape, and are shaped by the ways in which an individual perceives the reality that surrounds them (Green, 2000) suggest the EQAO's authority to define literacy practices for the purposes of its literacy assessment indicates that the EQAO's definition of literacy practice and the potential implications of the definition for students will be considered and discussed. This MRP will focus on the following two questions:

1. *How does the EQAO and its literacy assessment practice, the OSSLT, define literacy practices?*

Established as a means of diverting attention away from the provincial government's responsibility to maintain an efficient public education system (Gidney, 1999), an analysis of the Royal Commission on Learning's report, *For the Love of Learning*, will illustrate how the purposes of education are defined and act as a foundation to the efforts of the EQAO. The discussion will introduce the ways in which Ontario's education was perceived as a faulty system that did not adhere to the requirements of the changing economic society of the late twentieth, and early twenty-first century. Noting that the recommendations made with the commission's report would lead to the eventual creation of the EQAO through legislation, the analysis of the report will demonstrate how the EQAO itself understood the purposes of education.

Critically analyzing the objectives of the EQAO as outlined in the 1996 *Education Quality and Accountability Office Act* (EQAO Act, 1996) will determine what actions the EQAO was expected to take in order to ensure that the purposes of education were met by schools, teachers and students. Discussing the responsibilities of the EQAO will demonstrate the level of authority that the EQAO has over the province's education system and the EQAO's ability to govern and regulate the literacy practices that the students are expected to experience. Furthermore, the analysis of the *Act* will draw attention to the notion that although the EQAO

has the authority to govern and measure the quality of the province's public education system, the analysis of the *Ontario Curriculum: Grades 9 and 10 – English* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) will establish the intended definition of literacy practices within Ontario schools.

The definition of literacy practices that is embedded into the Ontario curriculum policy document will then be juxtaposed with the definition of literacy practices found within the EQAO's *Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test: Framework Document* (EQAO, 2007) and the "OSSLT Sample Assessment Booklet: New Layout" (EQAO, 2015a; EQAO, 2015b) documents. The *Framework* (EQAO, 2007) document discusses the nature of large-scale assessments that it utilizes to evaluate the students' literacy skills and knowledge. A critical analysis of the document will demonstrate how the EQAO respects the definition of literacy practices found within the Ontario curriculum, as well as the degree to which the EQAO manipulates the definition in an attempt to ensure that the students' literacy skills are evaluated in a manner that adheres to the nature of high-stakes standardized testing.

Both the *Framework* (EQAO, 2007) document and OSSLT sample test document will demonstrate how literacy practices are defined by the EQAO and the degree to which the definition adheres to both the purposes of education, as outlined in the Royal Commission on Learning's report (Royal Commission on Learning, 1995a), and the definition of literacy practices, as outlined in the curriculum policy document *Ontario Curriculum: Grades 9 and 10 – English* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). Finally, the analysis of the EQAO's definition of literacy practices will initiate the discussion regarding the potential implications that the definition has on students and their lives beyond secondary education.

2. *What are the potential implications of this definition for students?*

Literacy practices provide an individual with the opportunity to construct and re-negotiate their understanding of their own identity and appreciate themselves in relation to their surrounding society or environment (Grote, 2006). The notion that literacy and identity are intertwined (Baker, 2003; Enriquez, 2011; Johnston & Winograd, 1985; Kearns, 2011; Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003; Wal & Ryan, 2014), illustrates the EQAO's authority to determine which students have acquired the literacy skills that are embedded in the EQAO's definition of literacy practices may play a significant role in how students understand themselves and their ability to participate in society.

The pressure that students face to achieve success on the OSSLT in order to graduate may influence students to dismiss their unique identity and conform their literacy skills to the literacy practices on the OSSLT. The definition of literacy practices may affect the students' understanding of their own capabilities and methods of communication in a manner that may influence their post-secondary education (PSE) lives, as well as their ability to pursue a PSE experience.

Chapter Three: Rationale

The respective chapter of this MRP will introduce various reasons as to why the EQAO's definition of literacy practices will be analysed and discussed. The following subsections of the chapter will establish the impact that the OSSLT has had on students and their perception of literacy practices, education and their own capabilities as a student and human being. The discussion will justify why an analysis of the *Education Quality and Accountability Office Act* (EQAO Act, 1996), EQAO's *Framework: Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test* document (EQAO, 2007) and OSSLT sample test (EQAO, 2015a; EQAO 2015b) will be critically analysed

in order to discover how the EQAO intends to increase accountability measures that ensure Ontario secondary schools are effectively educating student.

The chapter will introduce the potential implications of creating new structures within pre-existing structures of human activity (Kerr, 2006); the EQAO represents an external form of governance that was created through legislation and provided with authority to determine what knowledge and skills schools are expected provide to students before graduating. The EQAO exists alongside the government, schools and education stakeholders. Thus, the EQAO's relation shared with both educators and politicians may influence the ways in which the agency regards the purposes of public education and the definition of literacy practices. The chapter will establish why the EQAO's definition of literacy practices will be critically analysed and discussed in relation to the potential implications that the definition has on students in secondary school and beyond graduation.

Student Responses to The OSSLT

Interviews with students who have participated in OSSLT establishes the significant effect that the literacy assessment has on a student's self-esteem and understanding of their own abilities; researchers have noted that many learners who do not achieve success on the test begin to believe that they are inadequate of success (Cheng *et al.*, 2007; Kearns, 2011; Klinger & Luce-Kapler, 2007; Main, 2008). Through the observation of student behaviour, as well as discussions with both students and teachers, data collected by numerous researchers demonstrates that when literacy education is constructed as a strict, regulated discipline which dismisses any opportunity to govern one's own learning through self-interest causes students to feel alienated, marginalized, and disengaged from the learning experience altogether (Fairbairn & Fox, 2009; Hall, 2016; Moon *et al.*, 2011; Wal & Ryan, 2014; Volante, 2011). Interviews with

students support the notion that the OSSLT regulates and controls the ways in which students approach literacy activities, diminishing their opportunity to participate in certain literacy practices, such as critical literacy practices (Wal & Ryan, 2014).

Many students have expressed their concern regarding the OSSLT preparation activities which cause other curriculum subjects and educational experiences to be disregarded at the expense of ensuring that they achieve success on the standardized test (Klinger & Luce-Kapler, 2007; Luce-Kapler & Klinger, 2005). The interviews with students regarding their experiences with the OSSLT suggests an analysis of the OSSLT itself may establish the notion that the literacy practices on the test are presented in a manner which does not adhere to the unique needs of each learner. Performing a critical analysis of the *Framework* (EQAO, 2007) document and “OSSLT Sample Assessment Booklet: New Layout” (EQAO, 2015a; EQAO 2015b) and comparing the definition of literacy practices to the definition found within the *Ontario Curriculum: Grades 9 and 10 – English* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) may support or oppose the previously conducted interviews that suggest the OSSLT restricts the students’ learning experiences.

The interviews and classroom observations (Kearns, 2011; Kearns, 2016; Klinger & Luce-Kapler, 2007; Luce-Kapler & Klinger, 2005; Wal & Ryan, 2012) explore the ways in which Ontario’s literacy education and implementation of the OSSLT impacts individuals who no longer do not have the authority to determine how the curriculum policies will govern classroom lessons. Previous research demonstrates that the OSSLT influences the lives of students on a personal level as many students begin to perceive literacy practices as a chore (Wal & Ryan, 2012), and consider themselves as incompetent individuals (Fairbairn & Fox, 2009; Wal & Ryan, 2014; Volante, 2011). However, while student’s explain, through interviews and

observations conducted by researchers, that the OSSLT diminishes their learning experience (Kearns, 2011; Kearns, 2016; Klinger & Luce-Kapler, 2007; Luce-Kapler & Klinger, 2005; Wal & Ryan, 2012), the EQAO continues to claim that its assessment practices allows educators to accommodate the needs of individual students (EQAO).

The EQAO agency was initially created as the provincial government's response to the public outcry regarding Ontario's education system and growing concern that the students were not equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary to enter into society once graduated and contribute to the economy (Gidney, 1999; Kearns, 2016; Klein, 2008; Martin, 2012; Pinto, 2012). The EQAO utilizes the OSSLT to determine whether or not students have acquired the literacy skills necessary to graduate (EQAO, "Governance Framework," n.d.). The respective MRP will analyse documents directly relating to the EQAO, OSSLT and Ontario literacy education in order to gain a stronger understanding of the impact that the OSSLT has on student's learning. Moving beyond the voice of the student, discussing the EQAO's definition of literacy practices through an analysis of policy documents and legislation documents will demonstrate the degree to which the EQAO adheres to the purposes of education, respects the complex definition of literacy, and addresses the needs of each unique student.

Education Reforms and Marketization of Education

The legislative acts, policy documents and assessment practices are a product of education reforms. Through the implementation of accountability measures, a government body may maintain authority over an education system, while simultaneously exempting itself from the responsibility of ensuring that the education system functions in an efficient manner (Graham & Neu, 2004; Kerr, 2006). A government draws from its authority to regulate the activities of others and restricts the autonomy that teachers, students, parents, and so forth hold in regards to

education and their lifestyle overall (Sachs, 2010). Discussing a United States' education reform, the NCLB federal legislation, Furumoto (2005) establishes the external control over educational experiences as an act of “school militarization [...] where high stakes testing and punitive sanctions, serve to maintain the power and domination of the ruling capitalist class” (p.200). The education reforms initiated through government legislations enable external figures of authority to regulate how individuals communicate and interact with one another when considering the purposes of public education.

Education reform policies implemented in England, Canada, the United States, and New Zealand place a similar emphasis on standardizing educational goals and practices to ensure accountability measures are efficiently upheld (Fairbairn & Fox, 2009; Taylor, 2000; Sachs, 2010). The education reforms that take place beyond the classroom walls will impact the ways in which educators consider what constitutes appropriate instructional and assessment strategies (Skerrett, 2010). Performing a critical analysis of the Royal Commission on Learning's report, *For the Love of Learning* (Royal Commission on Learning, 1995a), as well as the *Education Quality and Accountability Office Act* (EQAO Act, 1996) and the EQAO's *Framework* (EQAO, 2007) document may suggest that the OSSLT provides the EQAO and government with the ability to regulate how people perceive the purposes of literacy practices. The EQAO's definition of literacy practices may reveal that the OSSLT influences individuals to believe that the purposes of education and literacy practices are fulfilled so long as employable skills are acquired by the learner.

Placing emphasis on the centralization and local management of schools, Sachs (2010) establishes the notion that implemented education policies outside of Canada reflect a “managerialist professionalism” (Sachs, 2010, p. 151), where the effectiveness of public

education is measured through economic strategies implemented into the system. As a result of the upheld belief that that tax dollars cannot support an efficient education system (Leonard, 1992), government partnerships with private businesses play an increasing role in education reforms (Taylor, 2000). Researchers claim that governments and businesses continually support the notion that educational policies continually work to ensure that students obtain the knowledge and skills which will allow them to gain access to employment and contribute to the economy once graduated (Sachs 2010; Taylor, 2000). The government partnerships with businesses provide both groups with the opportunity to fulfill their own goals, such as maintaining control over the working class (Furumoto, 2005). Researchers argue that such partnerships emphasize economic objectives, drawing from a business rhetoric to align the public education system to the global economy and ensure that education policies support economic goals (Furomoto, 2005; Lesko, 2001; Taylor, 2000). Through the school-business partnership, the government maintains authority over its citizens and education, while continuing to operate indirectly, at a distance (Furumoto, 2005; Graham & Neu, 2004; Kerr, 2006; Taylor, 2000).

Noting that the EQAO is an “independent Operational Service Agency (formerly Schedule IV)” (EQAO, “Governance Framework,” n.d.), drawing from the Oxford English Dictionary’s definition of ‘agency’ as “a business [...] negotiating transactions on behalf of a person or group” (OED Online, “agency, n.”, 2016), the EQAO and its partnership with the government and schools may reflect a “recurring theme in policy documents” (Taylor 2000, p. 155). The analysis of legislation documents and policy documents may establish the notion that the EQAO’s partnership with the government and schools reflect a trend towards marketization (Cairns, 2012).

Discussing education reforms in Canada, Cairns (2012) explanation of “marketization” as the redefining of public services, such as education, to adhere to market values (p.38) draws attention to the notion that school-business partnerships place emphasis on providing students with the knowledge and skills that will allow them to participate in Western society and contribute to the economy. Kearns (2016) also explains that the government exploits the “public anxiety” regarding employment, economic stability, and so forth, to influence the acceptance of a “variety of policies meant to prepare the nation’s future citizens to act responsibly and meet the demands of a competitive global economy” (Kearns, 2016, p. 121). Performing a critical analysis of the policy documents, legislation documents, EQAO documents, and curriculum documents regarding Ontario’s literacy education will examine the degree to which literacy education is constructed as a mechanism that serves to produce citizens who will seek employment and contribute to the economy. The EQAO’s definition of literacy education may prioritize literacy practices that will ensure the province’s public education system is aligned with market values and reflects the needs of the economy.

Literacy practices that construct the purpose of reading or writing as one that will allow the individual to contribute to society is regarded as the functional approach to literacy (Kalantzis *et al.*, 2016, location 3557). Finn (2009) explains that functional literacy practices enable the individual to become “productive and dependable, but not troublesome” (xvi). However, Finn (2009) also explains that when the functional approach to literacy is established as superior to other literacy approaches, the learning process is restricted. Noting that the public’s demand to increase accountability measures in fear of students to graduating from secondary education without the skills that will allow them gain employment once graduated (Gidney, 1999; Kearns, 2016; Klein, 2008; Martin, 2012; Pinto, 2012), Green’s (1999)

discussion of Australian education reforms illustrates how a “‘crisis’ in literacy” (p.10-11) is often organized through a functional discourse that associates literacy with objectively, measureable standards. While the functional approach to literacy may provide a learner with the skills necessary to contribute to an economy through employment once graduated, researchers argue that standardized literacy testing often cause other approaches to literacy to be disregarded (Barton *et al.*, 2000; Goodwyn & Findlay, 2003; Hall, 2012b; Lankshear 1998; Pinto *et al.*, 2007; Skerrett, 2010; Verhoeven, 1994).

Furlong (1992) explains that education is “narrowly functional,” preparing the learner “for the world of work and their other future roles in society” (p.168). The Ontario Secondary School *Literacy* Test may influence individuals to perceive the act of reading and writing as a structured activity that serves a social purpose. Thus, the analysis of the OSSLT sample test, and other documents discussed above, may suggest that the OSSLT places emphasis on a functional approach to literacy as both the OSSLT and functional approach to literacy are concerned with literacy practices that are objectively measureable and demonstrate that the student has acquired the literacy skills necessary for gaining employment once graduated. Performing a critical analysis of the various documents relating to the EQAO and OSSLT may demonstrate that the EQAO prioritizes literacy practices that are not only assessed in an objective manner, but also defines literacy practices in a functional manner that places emphasis on preparing the student for employment; although education may prepare students for their lives beyond secondary education, the analysis will also consider if the student’s opportunity to learn through personal interest and curiosity is sacrificed as a result.

The EQAO, Literacy Education and PSE

Noting that the functional approach to literacy allows the individual to obtain literacy skills in which will prepare them to gain employment and contribute to society, the analysis of the EQAO's definition of literacy practices may suggest that the literacy education students receive diminishes their ability to critically and creatively engage with texts. Researchers note that prioritizing functional literacy practices over other literacy practices influence students to become passive learners who cannot creatively examine their surroundings and engage in critical discussions (Anderson, 1980; Barton *et al.*, 2000; Endres, 2001; Finn, 2009; Furumoto, 2005; Verhoeven, 1994). Research has shown that the inability to critically read, write and communicate may leave students unmotivated to challenge themselves academically and may disregard the opportunity to enroll in courses which would prepare the learner for post-secondary education experiences (Long *et al.*, 2012).

Martin (2012) reinforces the notion that students who face difficulty in achieving success on the OSSLT are influenced to pursue post-secondary careers in the workforce, rather than consider continuing their learning process and attending a PSE institution. Research has shown that the students' opportunity to engage in a variety of educational experiences is diminished as a result of the emphasis placed on preparing for the OSSLT, influencing many students to ignore the benefits of the literacy assessment and "[look] beyond their school years to consider the impact of the OSSLT on their future" (Luce-Kapler & Klinger, 2005, p.167). Secondary education should allow the learner to experience a variety of disciplinary skills which they may utilize once graduated. While literacy practices are vital to the students' post-secondary life, other practices are also similarly significant and cannot be disregarded. Furthermore, a 2013 document published by the *Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario* reveals that roughly

60% of students who pass the OSSLT attended university, while under 20% of students who failed the OSSLT on their first attempt did not attend university; under 20% of students who passed the OSSLT did not pursue PSE, whereas over 50% of students who failed the OSSLT did not pursue PSE (Dion & Maldonado 2013, p.14).

Understanding how the EQAO and the OSSLT define literacy practices may provide educators, administrators, parents, students, and so forth, with an understanding that the EQAO's definition of literacy is not necessarily one that suits the needs of each unique, individual learner. A more thorough investigation of how the EQAO defines literacy practices and the potential implications that the given definition has on students will allow for a discussion regarding the impact that the OSSLT has on the students' lives in and outside of the secondary schools.

Concluding Remarks: The Objective of the Research

Previous research has provided an accurate depiction of how the OSSLT impacts students and their emotional wellbeing (Cheng *et al.*, 2007; Kearns, 2011; Kearns, 2016 Klinger & Luce-Kapler, 2007; Main, 2008). The an analysis of the *Framework* (EQAO, 2007) document, as well as the sample test of the OSSLT will establish how the EQAO defines literacy practices and allow for a discussion that considers the why previous research has shown that the students' perception of their own capabilities is influenced by the OSSLT. Furthermore, performing a critical analysis of the Royal Commission on Learning's report (Royal Commission on Learning, 1995a) and the *Education Quality and Accountability Office Act* (EQAO Act, 1996) will provide an understanding as to why the EQAO defines literacy practices in a certain manner; reviewing the Commission's discussion regarding the purposes of education and the EQAO Act's outline of the EQAO's responsibilities, the analysis will reveal the EQAO's approach to define literacy practices and create a high-stakes standardized literacy assessment. The Foucauldian theoretical

framework, further discussed in the next chapter, will outline how the EQAO's definition of literacy practices is similar to, or different from, the definition provided found within the curriculum policy documents and provide a stronger understanding of the potential impact that the definition has on students.

Chapter Four: Framework

The theoretical framework will organize the research conducted by a critical analysis. Introducing the philosophy of technical rationalism provides an understanding as to how human activities may be reconsidered in order to achieve certain objectives. Technical rationalism will establish how individuals, or groups, may collectively understand the purposes of education and literacy practices through a definition that places emphasis on the useful and measureable aspects of the affair. Drawing from the discussion of technical rationalism, the Foucauldian framework will examine how the definition of literacy practices, as well as the purposes of education, reflect the authority that the EQAO and provincial government have over its citizens. Using a Foucauldian framework that critiques a technical rationalist perspective of education will establish how the EQAO regulates literacy practices and why the agency's definition of literacy practices has potential implications on students, their learning, and their perception of their own capabilities.

Technical Rationality

Literacy is a complex practice that cannot be isolated from the influences of the current, and past environment in which it exists (Archer, 2006; Barton *et al.*, 2000; Bickerstaff, 2012; Giampapa, 2010; Green, 1999; Hall *et al.*, 2010; Lipman, 2004). Researchers have drawn attention to the multiplicity of literacy practices to counteract the increasing "dominant perspective on 'literacy' as a unitary, universal phenomenon," (Lillis *et al.*, 2001, p.37).

However, recent education reforms across the globe have reinforced assessment practices that evaluate each student's knowledge and skills in a standard, objectively measureable manner (Martinez-Brawley, 2000; Pinto, 2012; Shaffer & Gee, 2005). Anderson (1980) explains that the curriculum in many education systems is constructed through a "technical rationality" framework that redefines the purposes of literacy education to support methods of "probability, control, breakdown of complex activities into simple steps, and restriction of non-uniform results for the sake of a technically reproducible product" (p.46). Technical rationality is an ideology used to determine the effectiveness of various human activities. Through the consideration of the ways in which activities redefine an abstract concept into a concrete, tangible form that may be calculated and continually duplicated in an objectively consistent manner, the quality of education may be measured and standardized. A technical rational perspective of education allows education stakeholders to accurately understand the current state of the education system.

Furlong (1992) notes that a technical rational approach to any activity seeks to achieve the highest level of efficiency through an "emphasis on task analysis, skill training" by "applying rationalist 'scientific' principles to human affairs such as education" (p.168). Technical rationalism establishes the significance of a human affair through the degree to which the practices within the affair may be measured through the collecting of statistical data. The technical rationalist approach to any human activity or interaction works to manipulate the practice in a manner that reproduces an objectively measurable product. Emphasis is placed on educational practices that may be consistently reproduced, ensuring that each teacher provides their students with the same prescribed knowledge and skills (Kane, 2003). Technical rationality "define the aims of education in terms of what is useful" and "should aim to prepare [children] for the world of work and their other future roles in society" (Furlong 1992, p.168). Education

then becomes structured through a continual measuring of definitive knowledge that students are expected to obtain in order to fulfill a role they are expected to embrace once graduated.

Technical rationality redefines activities, such as the act of learning, in a manner that places emphasis on standard, measurable learning experiences that will help the student gain employment once graduate and contribute to the economy.

Technical Rationality & Literacy Practices

The technical rationalist perspective of education will establish the ways in which literacy practices may be redefined to determine the usefulness of the literacy practices that students receive in Ontario schools. Discussing the definition of the functional approach to literacy practices will illustrate how technical rationality may frame education policies and manipulate the ways in which individuals perceive the purposes of literacy practices and literacy education. Similar to a technical rationalist approach to education, the functional approach to literacy focuses on “the ways in which different types of texts are structured to serve different purposes” (Kalantzis *et al.*, 2016, location 3646). The functional approach to literacy practices place emphasis on the purpose of the text and how the text is created and utilized to achieve a certain goal. Referring to the functional approach to literacy will allow for a stronger understanding as to how a technical rationalist perspective of literacy practices defines the purposes of literacy practices within an educational setting. Individuals apply functional literacy skills to better understand how a text functions, what purpose the text serves, how the text serves the intended purpose, and what intended social goals are sought after by the text. Therefore, adopting a functional approach to literacy to the technical rationalist understanding of the purposes of education and literacy practices will determine how literacy practices may be defined in a manner that determines the usefulness (Furlong, 1992) of literacy practices.

Technical rationality places emphasis on “acquiring skills in reading” (Verhoeven, 1994) and associating specific practices with “with ‘standards’ and, hence, with matters of assessment, measurement and testing” (Green, 1999). It may be argued that the technical rationalist approach to literacy education draws from functional literacy concepts as priority is given to literacy activities that are useful and will “enable [students] to participate in society” (Kalantzis *et al.*, 2016, location 3557). Technical rationality supports and maintains the notion that the purpose of education is to produce a set of skills that enable the student to enter society as a trained citizen who is prepared “for the world of work and their future roles in society” (Furlong 1992, p.168). The learner is influenced to accept the standards set out by employers, and other members invested in producing a product that will serve the economy.

Functional pedagogy establishes literacy as a tool that is created to serve the social purposes which are defined by the practice itself. Thus, a technical rationalist understanding of literacy practices may establish the purposes of literacy practices through the degree to which literacy practices provide students with the knowledge and skills that will enable them to contribute to the economy. The functional approach to literacy may be adopted by a technical rationalist perspective of education that establishes the notion that the purposes of literacy are fulfilled when a reproducible product displays whether or not students have acquired literacy skills that will allow them prepare students with the literacy skills necessary to participate in society and contribute to the economy.

Foucauldian Framework: Techniques of Power

While technical rationality illustrates how the perceived understanding of the purposes of education may be manipulated to ensure that the student’s learning progress is objectively measured by the degree to which the students are equipped with the knowledge and skills

necessary to contribute to society, such an understanding of education may not exist simply to provide students with skills that will enable them to obtain employment. Employing a Foucauldian understanding of power, the theoretical framework that will be utilized for this MRP will be a Foucauldian framework that analyses a technical rationalist understanding of education.

The Foucauldian theoretical lens reveals the notion that education acts as a human affair and may be utilized as an “[instrument] of the state” to employ “methods of power capable of optimizing forces, aptitudes, and life in general” (Foucault, 1978, p.141). The governing body utilizes methods of power to maintain their influence over practices in an attempt to continue governing others. However, as societies progress technologically, intellectually, and so forth, the ways that a human affair is used as an instrument changes to adjust to increasing population and ensure the strategies set in place align with economic objectives. Foucault (1978) explains that the basis of bio-politics were created as “*techniques* of power,” where “schools [...] operated in the sphere of economic process” (p.141). While the school is intended to provide individuals with the opportunity to grow as unique intellectual learners and gain experiences within the realm of academia, the Foucauldian lens constructs education as a mechanism that supports the economy and is used for profit by a governing authority. The purpose of education is redefined as the experience of existing within an economy and working to serve that economy. The school serves the economy by providing students with the skill training necessary to participate in “the world of work” (Furlong, 1992, p.168). The school is a disciplinary institution that becomes a technique of power used to ensure that individuals are regulated and influenced to continue serving the governing body.

To preserve and maintain power, the governing body may implement practices within the techniques of power that will “qualify, measure, appraise, and hierarchize” (Foucault, 1978,

p.144). The school is established as a mechanism that is utilized by the governing body to influence those within the institution to adhere to various rules and regulations that are set out by the governing body and will support the objectives of the governing body. Practices that are measurable and useful to the state are established as superior to other practices that cannot be contained or regulated within the institution. The state establishes the human affairs that are more difficult to govern as inferior to the other practices which may be objectively measured. Through the techniques of power, the school is utilized by the state to establish and maintain a hierarchical ordering of knowledge, skills, and practices.

The school is employed by the state to create a “normalizing gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify, and to punish” (Foucault 1984, p.197). Thus, the school acts as a technique of power that allows the state to integrate a level of surveillance over its citizens without directly revealing themselves as an authoritative body within the school (Graham & Neu, 2004). The surveillance methods put in place are simply regarded as a ‘normal’ outcome; the hierarchical ordering of knowledge, skills and practices is established as a natural product within society that is accepted and embraced as an essential, logical aspect of everyday life. Those who do not adhere to various rules and regulations incorporated into the school, do not support the objectives of the governing body and are punished as a result.

Foucauldian Framework: Discourse as Technology of Power

As the technique of power operates as a norm within a society, the “normalizing society is the [...] outcome of a technology of power centred on life” (Foucault, 1978, p.144). The technique, or method, of governing others is represented through the technology implemented into the disciplinary institution. Drawing from Foucault, Miller and Rose (1993) define “‘discourse’ as a technology of thought, requiring attention to the particular technical devices of

writing [...] that render a realm into discourse as knowable, calculable and administrable object” (p.79). Discourse allows power to exist within the language that individuals use to communicate with one another. Discourse maintains a power relation between the governing body and respective social body by defining what constitutes knowledge and truth (Blades, 2012, p.30). Discourse is established as a technology of power that allows the governing body to implement a variety of procedures and calculable tools within “policy documents [...] reports, and the specific or prescribed ways in which these tools are used” (Spencer, 2012, p.133). Thus, specific practices, such as literacy practices, exist within the techniques of power, such as the school, and are defined and regulated through the discourse implemented in policy documents, curriculum and assessment practices, and so forth.

Foucault, Discourse & Technical Rationality

Drawing from the Foucauldian understanding of discourse as a technology of power utilized within education systems, discourses will operate as a norm that is integrated into everyday literacy practices within the school (Barton *et al.*, 2000). The Foucauldian lens illustrates the ways in which public education may be utilized as an instrument of power to govern others, employing the school as a method of ensuring that individuals were controlled and monitored. The Foucauldian understanding of discourse and techniques of power and control establishes a Foucauldian critique of a technical rationalist understanding of education as one that reveals the government document, assessment practices, and other forms of governing technology as a means of preparing the individual, or social body, to contribute to the economy and support the government. Taylor’s (2000) discussion regarding education reforms in Canada, the United States, and other countries, draws attention to the notion that the “overriding concern with economic objectives, business values and vocabulary permeate educational discourse,”

allowing education to be “brought more directly and effectively under the control of central government agencies” (p.154). The discourse surrounding education reforms may become embedded into the collective understanding of literacy education and literacy practices. As education is redefined within a reform to serve a certain purpose, the literacy education students receive are a product of a “reform discourse” (Lankshear, 1998, p.353). Therefore, a critical analysis of the policy documents, government reports, and assessment practices relating to the EQAO’s OSSLT may reveal the ways in which literacy practices are manipulated and reduced to a practice where the purpose of the practice is to prepare oneself to serve the economy and support the government.

Using a Foucauldian framework to examine a technical rationalist perceptive of education will identify the conceptualizations of literacy embedded in the literacy policy documents and assessment practices. The respective framework will establish the ways in which education and literacy practices may be defined by the knowledge and skills that are measurable, calculable and profitable. The framework will define and form the critical analysis which will be employed to analyse various policy documents relating to the EQAO and OSSLT.

Concluding Remarks: The Foucauldian Framework Examining Technical Rational Education

Technical rationality illustrates how education is redefined and transformed from an abstract concept into a practice that may be measured and standardized. The technical rationalist perspective establishes the significance of a human affair through the degree to which the practices within the affair may reproduce an objectively measureable statistic that is regarded as useful to achieve a certain purpose. The Foucauldian lens demonstrates that education may be constructed as a mechanism that supports the economy and is used for profit by a governing authority. Technical rationality establishes the purposes of literacy practices through the degree

to which literacy practices provide students with the knowledge and skills that will enable them to contribute to the economy. The Foucauldian framework allows education to be understood as an instrument that is manipulated by a governing body to ensure that the objective of education seeks to support the economy. Utilizing a Foucauldian framework, the critical analysis of the documents relating to the EQAO and OSSLT will examine how the definition of literacy practices allows the EQAO to govern the students' learning, as well as consider the degree to which the students' learning and capabilities are supported or restricted by the EQAO.

Chapter Five: Literature Review: Conceptual Framework

The following literature review will draw from previous research to define literacy practices beyond the influence of the EQAO, provincial government and educational settings. The definition of literacy practice found through academic articles will provide a fundamental understanding of how literacy practices may be understood and utilized by individual both within the classroom and throughout their lives outside of the school. The analysis of the definition of literacy practices found within the *Ontario Curriculum: Grades 9 and 10 – English* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) document, as well as the EQAO's *Framework: Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test* document (EQAO 2007) and "OSSLT Sample Assessment Booklet: New Layout" (EQAO, 2015a; EQAO 2015b) will demonstrate how literacy practices are defined, and possibly redefined, to meet the purposes of public education and the objectives of the EQAO.

The respective chapter will then review previous research that discusses the relation shared between identity and literacy to introduce the notion that literacy practices play a significant role in the ways in which an individual understands themselves, their capabilities and the reality that surrounds them. The definition of identity and its relation to literacy practices will provide a stronger understanding of the potential implications that the EQAO's definition of

literacy practices has on students. The influence that the EQAO and the OSSLT has on students, as well as the functions of the school, will be examined through the review of academic articles relating to discussion regarding the impact that high-stakes standardized testing has on the student, the classroom environment and considerations of PSE opportunities. The literature review will also draw from articles that directly discuss the OSSLT to establish the notion that my research is situated within the ongoing discussion regarding the impact that the EQAO has on the current state of Ontario's education system.

Defining Literacy

Research defines literacy, the act reading and writing, as a complex practice that cannot be isolated from the influences of the environments in which it exists (Archer, 2006; Barton *et al.*, 2000; Bickerstaff, 2012; Giampapa, 2010; Green, 1999; Hall *et al.*, 2010; Lipman, 2004). Understanding literacy as a social practice (Archer, 2006; Barton *et al.*, 2000; Bickerstaff, 2012; Giampapa, 2010; Lillis *et al.*, 2001, Lipman, 2004) establishes the literate individual as someone who not only has the ability to understand the meaning of the text through a practice of reading and writing, but also acknowledges the social, political, historical, cultural and economic elements of the practice (Archer, 2006; Barton *et al.*, 2000; Lipman, 2004).

Just as literacy cannot remain isolated from social, historical, cultural, and economic influences (Gee, 2000), the individual exists as a product of the same influences (Enriquez, 2011). Whether or not a learner is considered as 'literate,' literacy practices significantly impact how an individual engages in social activities, as well as how they understand the social, cultural, historical and economic influences that frame the society they exist within (Endres, 2001; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Giampapa, 2010; Greeno, 1998; Grote, 2006; Norton, 2013). Literacy practices simultaneously construct, and are constructed by, the perceived reality that exists within and

beyond the living individual. Defining literacy practices as a complex practice that influences, and is influenced by, the surrounding environment establishes a fundamental understanding of how literacy practices shape the lives of all students beyond the walls of the classroom.

Literacy Education & Identity

Bickerstaff (2012) defines literacy as a form of self-expression which extends beyond the simple tasks of reading and writing within the classroom. Drawing attention to the influence that literacy practices have on students, Packer and Goicoechea (2000) explain that schooling entails a “production of persons” (p.228), where “one’s identity is closely linked to participation and learning in a community” (p.229). The materials that are read, written, discussed, and so forth, within the classroom play a significant role in the formation of a student’s understanding of themselves and their relation to the world around them; nothing remains isolated from the environment in which it exists. Literacy practices, reading and writing, are very significant skills individuals carefully craft and refine in a manner that suits their own purposes as such practices are used to negotiate, develop, understand and evolve ones’ identity (Barton *et al.*, 2000; Enriquez, 2011; Evans, 1996; Grote, 2006; Hall *et al.*, 2010; Hall, 2012a; Lillis *et al.*, 2001; Packer & Goicoechea, 2000; Street, 1994).

A student’s understanding of their own “identity is a significant dimension to their experience of meaning making, influencing [...] what student-writers (don’t) write and (don’t) wish to write within academia” (Lillis *et al.*, 2001, p.50). The literacy practices a student engages themselves within is preceded by their own past experience and understanding of the world; the student’s knowledge of themselves and others is a product of their environment. When students are provided with the opportunity to participate in literacy practices, their identity simultaneously constructs, and is constructed by, those literacy practices and their reflection of the experience.

The ways in which a student approaches a literacy practice is a reflection of their understanding of their own identity (Alvermann, 2001). When students are provided with the opportunity to control the literacy practice in a classroom setting and participate in reading or writing activities that suit their own interests, students draw from their own identity and participate in the construction of a learning community (Evans, 1996). Students are expected to be provided with the opportunity to guide their own literacy learning experience by engaging with reading and writing activities that allow them to pursue their own interests, draw from their own unique strengths and improve the skills that they require to improve; from reading comics, to writing songs, the classroom may be constructed as a space that allows the student to understand their identity is one that exists within the classroom community, rather than an identity which is expected to be left at home in order to conform to the literacy activities at the school.

When literacy practices are constructed in a rigid, regulated manner where the student is given no authority to govern their own literacy skills, identities are restricted from gaining independence as the student is forced to “take up the literacy practices valued within their classroom or risk being marginalized” (Hall *et al.*, 2010, p.234). The student may begin to alter their own identity and understanding of the social, historical, cultural, political and economic factors that shape the reality around them for the sake of ensuring that they are literate; the student is influenced to sacrifice their own identity and adopt an identity that is defined by the school.

Research suggests that individuals with who continually face challenges when reading and writing may begin to perceive themselves as an unwanted, unwelcomed, social outcast (Baker, 2003; Enriquez, 2011; Johnston & Winograd, 1985; Kearns, 2011; Linnenbrink &

Pintrich, 2003; Wal & Ryan, 2014). When students are “locked into a mindset that they are a particular type of reader who can or cannot do particular types of things with texts, their identities can limit them” (Hall, 2016, p.76). The texts an individual reads, the thoughts that an individual communicates and records through the act of writing are not only a product of historical, social, economic, political and cultural influences, they are mechanisms that control and guide the person. Whether or not an individual is considered literate, the very existence of the terms, literate and illiterate, suggest that students are expected to adhere to specific behaviors to be accepted as a functional human being who can socialize and participate in society.

High-Stakes Standardized Testing Disengaging Students

As an “independent Operational Service Agency (formerly Schedule IV)” (EQAO, “Governance Framework,” n.d.), the EQAO may be defined as a business, or organization (OED Online, “agency, n.”, 2016), that provides educational assessment services on behalf of the provincial government. Working to ensure that the province’s public education serves the overall economy, researchers explain that the emphasis placed on preparing students for high-stakes standardized tests may influence students to become disengaged from the learning process and increase the dropout rate (Amrein & Berliner, 2003; Certo *et al.*, 2008; Firmin *et al.*, 2004). Wal and Ryan (2012) discuss the incorporation of standardized literacy tests into the Ontario curriculum as an assessment practice that warps the students understanding of the purposes of education and lead students to perceive “reading and writing as a chore rather than an effective means of conveying their thoughts” (p.4). The continual efforts put towards preparing students for the OSSLT construct the learning experience as one that ignores the strengths and weaknesses of each individual student.

High-Stakes Standardized Testing and the Classroom Environment

Understanding literacy as a social practice (Archer, 2006; Barton *et al.*, 2000; Bickerstaff, 2012; Giampapa, 2010; Lillis *et al.*, 2001, Lipman, 2004), the literacy education embedded into the Ontario curriculums provides students with a level of independency and control over their own learning (Grote, 2006; Hall *et al.*, 2010; Margolis & McCabe, 2006; Massey & Lewis, 2007; Street, 1994; Warpole & McKenna, 2006). However, the procedures taken to complete the OSSLT force students to remain isolated during the assessment and no written feedback is provided to the students once the test is evaluated (Kearns, 2011; Klinger & Luce-Kapler, 2007; Main, 2008). The community that supports the students' learning and the feedback that inspires the students to continue their progress as literacy learners is disregarded to ensure that students are objectively assessed (Takeuchi, 2008). Main (2008) explains that the absence of constructive feedback following the completion of the OSSLT discourages students from further engaging themselves in literacy education. As the community of learning diminishes under the influence of the EQAO, students and teachers are restricted from participating in a collaborative learning environment where a responsive pedagogy would allow the students to benefit from a learning community (Klinger & Luce-Kapler, 2007; Main, 2008; Ricci, 2004; Skerrett, 2010).

High-Stakes Standardized Testing and Uniformity

Lipman (2004) explains that the pressure students face to achieve success on high-stakes standardized tests lead to a "delegitimization of one's language, identity and sense of self" (p.120). The knowledge and skills that are assessed on the standardized tests create a hierarchy of knowledge where only certain skills that may be objectively evaluated are valued. As certain aspects of the learning process are established as superior, other valuable learning activities are disregarded and ignored in an attempt to ensure that students are provided with continual

opportunities to prepare for the test (Berliner, 2009; Brannon *et al.*, 2010; Simon, 2010). Several articles address the concern that the OSSLT may compel students to believe that literacy practices are confined to school assessment procedures, influencing students to perceive education as simply a numerical grade and withdraw from the learning experience altogether (Cheng *et al.*, 2007; Kearns, 2011; Main, 2008; Pinto *et al.*, 2007). Some students are pressured to abandon their own unique learning methods in order to achieve success on the test. The standardizing of education promotes the notion that every student is expected to learn the same information, display the same skills and become the same learner.

The OSSLT and Conformity

The accountability measures put in place by the EQAO places pressure on schools to ensure that students achieve success on OSSLT (Kearns, 2011; Kearns, 2016; Wal & Ryan, 2014). As a result of such external influences, certain aspects of the Ontario curriculum that align with the OSSLT are constructed as superior to other educational practices, manipulating the student to believe that they will abandon their own knowledge in exchange for the knowledge held by those in authority (Kearns, 2016). Klinger and Luce-Kapler (2007) interviewed students to illustrate the ways in which OSSLT impacts the student's learning experience and discovered that test preparation often came "at the expense of their regular schooling" (p.29). The authors establish the OSSLT as an authoritative test that diminishes the role of the teacher and manipulates the education students receive to ensure that they achieve success on the OSSLT.

While the curriculum policy documents themselves are not directly discussed to reveal whether or not the curriculum is narrowed as a result of the OSSLT, researchers have claimed that standardized testing in Canada has resulted in the exclusion of learning experiences to ensure students are properly prepared for the test (Klinger and Luce-Kapler, 2007; Ricci, 2004;

Skerrett, 2010; Volante, 2006). As the learning experience in Ontario schools are shaped by standardized test preparation, some students may become alienated from engaging in literacy practices that do not directly align with their unique literacy skills and strengths (Volante, 2006). The OSSLT diminishes the student's opportunity to engage in academic activities that are not assessed on the tests suggests that students may feel pressured to abandon their individual learning behaviours (Pinto *et al.*, 2007; Pinto & Portelli, 2009).

Every individual channels their own unique experiences when participating in literacy practices, leading some researchers to claim that the standardized tests are not necessarily accurate reflections of the students' true abilities (Koretz, 2008; Lankshear, 1998; Martinez-Brawley, 2000; Massey & Lewis, 2011). While literacy may be defined as a complex practice that extends beyond simply objectively measureable reading and writing activities, researchers have noted that the OSSLT does not properly assess a diverse variety of literacy skills, undermining the students' true potentials to demonstrate their literacy skills (Cheng *et al.*, 2007; Fairbairn & Fox, 2009; Kearns, 2016; Klinger & Luce-Kapler, 2007; Luce-Kapler & Klinger, 2005, Skerrett, 2010; Volante, 2006; Wal & Ryan, 2014). Researchers' interviews with Ontario students illustrates the disconnection between literacy practices and the EQAO's assessment practices as many students do not understand the how the OSSLT preparation activities, nor the test itself, provide students with the opportunity to learn and participate in literacy practices and strengthen their literacy knowledge and skills (Klinger & Luce-Kapler, 2007; Luce-Kapler & Klinger, 2005). Scholarly interviews also reveal that students do not believe the OSSLT is an accurate evaluation of the students' literacy skills as many believe that the standardized test disregards the social community established within literacy practices which respects and utilizes

the diverse knowledge each learner and educator contribute to the literacy experience (Cheng *et al.*, 2007; Kearns, 2011).

The OSSLT as Surveillance

High-stakes standardized testing establishes and maintains a relationship between the public and the education sectors as students, teachers, and so forth, are held accountable for the education practices within the schools. Such assessment practices also provide the government with the ability to preserve a level of authority over its citizens without being directly involved (Graham & Neu, 2004; Sachs, 2010; Taylor, 2000). Graham and Neu (2004) explain that the government replaces its reliance on military force with the techniques of self-discipline that are employed through practices such as the standardizing of education curriculums. Literacy is not only a social practice, but a social instrument that guides the ways in which people interact with one another. Thus, the OSSLT is regarded by some researchers as the provincial government's attempt to implement a surveillance mechanism which will monitor and regulate the intellectual activities students encounter while enrolled in Ontario's secondary schools (Kearns, 2016; Martin, 2012; Pinto *et al.*, 2007; Wal & Ryan, 2014).

The authoritative pressure researchers claim students endure to achieve success on the OSSLT cause students to overlook the notion that their educational experiences will allow them to establish their own unique identity and act as an intellectually independent person. The OSSLT may act an instrument of power to govern others, employing the school as a method of ensuring that individuals are controlled and monitored.

High-Stakes Standardized Testing and Post-Secondary Education

The pressure students continually face to achieve success in school influences students to conform their own learning goals to the accepted standards for high school education.

Researchers believe that as the students are pressured to pass a test, the absence of any personal feedback leaves the learner feeling unfulfilled and may influence them to dropout altogether (Amrein & Berliner, 2003; Horn, 2005). As students become disengaged from the learning experience, students are unmotivated to challenge themselves academically and may disregard the opportunity to enroll in courses which would prepare the learner for post-secondary education experiences (Long *et al.*, 2012). Furthermore, regardless of the students' interest in the learning process, placing students in lower level courses as a result of their test scores and academic achievements affects post-secondary opportunities (Archbald *et al.*, 2009). When students are encouraged to challenge themselves academically, students may have become more likely to continue onto post-secondary education.

Adhering to the professional and ethical responsibilities, teachers are required to prepare students for the mandated standardized tests, regardless of their interpretation of the assessment practice as beneficial or harmful to the student learning. However, such testing should be “weighed, in part, against the potential indirect effects that such decisions may have on college access” (Horn, 2005, p.338). Assessment practices provide the student with the opportunity to understand how they may improve themselves as learners and extend their knowledge and skills beyond a single class or grade level. However, research shows that student learning expectations in secondary and post-secondary education are uncorrelated with one another, causing students to remain unprepared to continue their learning progress once graduated from high school (Kurlaender & Larsen 2013; Luce-Kapler & Klinger 2005). Standardized tests place limits on the learning process and are regarded by researchers as “antithetical to real learning, lifelong or otherwise” (Fanetti *et al.*, 2010, p.81). High-stakes testing establishes the notion that the

intellectual mind is something which may be objectively measured. Secondary education is one of many steps an individual will take to achieve their goals.

The OSSLT and Post-Secondary Education

Although there is little research regarding the ways in which the OSSLT influences the students' ability to attend post-secondary education, Takeuchi (2008) explains that the students who face difficulty achieving success on the test are repeatedly restricted from engaging in a variety of literacy practices. The narrow conception of literacy students receive will most likely cause students to be unprepared for post-secondary education and instead be forced to enter production employment (Takeuchi, 2008). Martin (2012) reinforces the notion that students who face difficulty in achieving success on the OSSLT are influenced to pursue post-secondary careers in the workforce, rather than consider continuing their learning process and attending a post-secondary education institution.

Research has shown that the students' opportunity to engage in a variety of educational experiences is diminished as a result of the emphasis placed on preparing for the OSSLT, influencing many students to ignore the benefits of the literacy assessment and "[look] beyond their school years to consider the impact of the OSSLT on their future" (Luce-Kapler & Klinger 2005, p.167). Secondary education may allow the learner to experience a variety of disciplinary skills which they may utilize once graduated. While literacy practices are vital to the students' post-secondary life, other practices are also similarly significant and cannot be disregarded. Furthermore, research has also demonstrated that students who do not achieve success on the OSSLT are three times more likely to choose to not attend university upon graduating from high school (Dion & Maldonado, 2013, p.14). The analysis of the EQAO's definition of literacy practices and discussion relating to the potential implications that the definition has on students

may suggest that the OSSLT significantly impacts the student's understanding of their PSE opportunities.

Concluding Remarks: Defining Literacy and Identity

The literature review establishes the definition of literacy practices as a social practice that shapes, and is shaped by, various social, political, historical, cultural and economic influences. Through reading, writing, and classroom discussions, the literacy practices presented within the classroom play a significant role in a student's understanding of themselves and their relation to reality that surround them. The literature review provides a fundamental definition of literacy practices that will be used as a basis to compare the definition provided by the EQAO, as well as the Ontario Ministry of Education's curriculum policy documents. Furthermore, the definition of literacy practices also illustrates the necessity of providing students with the opportunity to pursue their own interests, draw from their own strengths and receive feedback from within the classroom community in order to allow the student develop their identity and grow as a human being.

Literacy is a social practice, as well as a social instrument that guides how people interact with one another. Every individual draws from their own unique strengths when engaging in literacy practices. Thus, the definition of literacy practices is placed within an ongoing discussion that establishes literacy practices as a fragile entity that may be used to empower, or disempower people. As the learning experience in Ontario schools are shaped by standardized test preparation, the analysis of the EQAO's definition of literacy practices may reveal that the agency causes some students to feel alienated and become disengaged from interacting within the classroom and outside the school.

Chapter Six: Research Methodology

Framed by a Foucauldian theoretical framework that critiques a technical rational perspective of education, this MRP will use a qualitative research method and perform a critical analysis on several documents relating to the EQAO to identify the ways in which literacy practices are defined in the Ontario secondary education system. The documents chosen for the purposes of the research project are all publically available documents that collectively reflect the government and EQAO's perception of literacy education in Ontario schools and the purposes of literacy practices. The documents reflect the ongoing discussions that lead to the creation of the EQAO and how the purposes of education were re-examined, allowing the EQAO to define literacy practices in a certain manner in order to achieve specific objectives.

Social changes occur through discourses that define relationships between social practices (Hamilton & Pit, 2011). Defining literacy as a social practice (Archer, 2006; Barton *et al.*, 2000; Bickerstaff, 2012; Giampapa, 2010; Lillis *et al.*, 2001, Lipman, 2004), discourses may redefine a society's collective understanding of the purposes of literacy practices. A critical analysis may examine policy documents to determine the ways in which relationships are developed "between texts, discursive practices, and events as well as wider social structures" (Moffatt *et al.* 2016, p.324). A critical analysis is used to examine how language shapes the ways in which relationships are constructed and how such relationships are influenced by forms of social and political power (Raptis, 2012). A critical analysis will reveal how the changes that occur allow for "abstract rationalities" to become "concrete forms" (Spencer, 2012, p.133) that occur through the discourses that define social inclusion and exclusion (Hamilton & Pit, 2011).

The Foucauldian framework is used to construct literacy practices as a form of authority that controls and governs the literacy education in Ontario public secondary schools. The

discourse of literacy education and economic, as well as social, concerns shape how the purposes of education and literacy practices are defined, as well as how the literate and illiterate individual are defined in respect to the accepted definition of literacy practices. Applying a Foucauldian framework to this MRP will demonstrate how public education may be measured to adhere to an acceptable quality and simultaneously utilized as an instrument of power to govern others. The critical analysis will then demonstrate how such objectives are specifically achieved in Ontario's education system through the analysis of the purposes of education and definition of literacy practices are established and discussed within the Royal Commission on Learning's report, *For the Love of Learning* (Royal Commission on Learning, 1995a), *Education Quality and Accountability Office Act* (EQAO Act, 1996), the *Ontario Curriculum: Grades 9 and 10 – English* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) and the EQAO's *Framework: Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test* document (EQAO, 2007). Lastly, a critical analysis of the "OSSLT Sample Assessment Booklet: New Layout" (EQAO, 2015a; EQAO 2015b) will reveal the how the definition of literacy practices impacts the literacy practices students experience in Ontario schools and consider the ways in which such experiences shape their lives.

The critical analysis will begin with an analysis of the Royal Commission on Learning's report, *For the Love of Learning* (Royal Commission on Learning, 1995a). Reviewing the Royal Commission on Learning's discussion of the purposes of education, the discourse used to relate the province's public education system to the stability of the economy will demonstrate how the purposes of education are defined. Introduced through the commission's recommendations a critical analysis the 1996 *Education Quality and Accountability Office Act* (EQAO Act, 1996; EQAO, 2013) will then demonstrate what authority the EQAO has over the learning process that is expected to occur throughout elementary and secondary education in Ontario. Examining the

discourse of the purposes of education in the Royal Commission on Learning's report and how the purposes of education are expected to be met through the legislative creation of the EQAO, the first two documents to be analysed will reveal the discourse implemented into documents that shape the collective understanding of the purposes of education, as well as how such purposes of education are measured and assessed by the EQAO.

A critical analysis of the *Ontario Curriculum: Grades 9 and 10 – English* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) will establish how literacy practices are defined by the Ontario Ministry of Education. The discourse within the policy document will reflect how teachers are expected to present literacy practices to students and what literacy skills students are expected to obtain before graduating. Following a critical analysis of the curriculum policy document, comparing the document's definition of literacy practices with the discourse regarding the purposes of literacy education discussed within the EQAO's *Framework: Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test* document (EQAO, 2007) will determine the degree to which the EQAO changes the understanding of literacy practices to adhere to the purposes of education. A critical analysis of the EQAO's *Framework: Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test* document (EQAO, 2007) will examine how the EQAO defines the purposes of literacy practices and literacy assessment in order to consider how such a definition may enable, or restrict students from obtaining an empowering literacy experience. Lastly, the critical analysis of the "OSSLT Sample Assessment Booklet: New Layout" (EQAO, 2015a; EQAO 2015b) will demonstrate the degree to which the EQAO's definition of literacy practices is reflective of the literacy practices students are intended to experience, as outlined in the Ontario curriculum policy document. Each of the five documents to be analysed is discussed in further detail in order to clearly explain why

a critical analysis of the documents will reveal how literacy practices are defined under the authority of the EQAO.

Royal Commission on Learning Report

The 1995 report, entitled “For the Love of Learning” (Royal Commission on Learning, 1995a) established the necessity of adhering to professional responsibilities by maintaining the accountability of Ontario public education towards the public. The report contains six chapters that discuss the past and current state of the province’s education system, followed by several chapters that focus on the Royal Commission’s recommendations towards the provincial government and Ministry of Education. A critical analysis of the report will demonstrate how the province of Ontario perceives the state of public education. The analysis will establish the initial steps taken by the government to regulate the ways in which Ontario schools provide education to those who attend elementary or secondary schools in the province. The analysis of the report will then illustrate how literacy practices are defined in relation to the purposes of education and consider the implications that such a definition has on the students’ learning.

The discourse regarding the purposes of education will be critically analysed to determine how the Royal Commission on Learning defines the purposes of education, as well as the province’s public education system in relation to external factors, specifically economic concerns. The Foucauldian theoretical framework that critiques a technical rational perspective of education will seek to demonstrate how public education is regarded as a vital mechanism of the overall economy. Although the report may continue to uphold the notion that education allows the learner to draw from their own skills and interests in the pursuit of gaining knowledge and learning for the sake of learning, a critical analysis of the Royal Commission on Learning’s discussion regarding the relation between education and the economy will establish how the

student's learning experience is influenced by the roles they are expected to fulfill once graduated; analysing the discourse that correlates education with the economy, the report may reveal the ways in which the provincial government works to redefine the purposes of education in a manner that alters the ways in which education stakeholders, the public, consider the quality of the province's public education system.

A critical analysis of the report will consider how the purposes of education are defined in a manner that focuses on measurable forms of assessment that display a standard outcome. Specific chapters discussing the purposes of education and the relationship between public education and the economy will be critically analysed to demonstrate how the discourse regarding education and the economy construct the space of the school as a “*techniques of power*,” where “schools [...] [operate] in the sphere of economic process” (Foucault, 1978, p.141). The discourse of employment, economic stability and the language used to describe the current, and future, state of public education and the economy will draw attention to the ways in which the government draws from the an overall perception of the province's education system and state of the economy to increase accountability measures and govern those within schools, including students.

Education Quality and Accountability Office Act

Initially titled the “Office of Learning Assessment and Accountability” (Royal Commission on Learning 1995h, n.p.), the EQAO was created as a response to the recommendations from the Royal Commission on Learning. Established through the legislative passing of the 1996 *Education Quality and Accountability Office Act* (EQAO Act, 1996; EQAO, 2013), the EQAO's objectives and responsibilities are outlined through the *Act*. Through a close examination of the discourse of the EQAO's responsibilities, a critical analysis of the *Act*

(EQAO Act, 1996) will reveal the ways in which the provincial government provides the EQAO with the authority to “define the aims of education in terms of what is useful” (Furlong, 1992, p.168). The analysis of the *Act* (EQAO Act, 1996) will consider the purposes of ensuring that the EQAO maintains its ability to govern how the education system is expected to evaluate the effectiveness of the province’s education, the assessment practices the Office is intended to create and incorporate into the curriculum, as well as the reporting the Office is expected undertake to ensure the public is made aware of the effectiveness of the elementary and secondary education.

Drawing from the Foucauldian framework that critiques a technical rational perspective of education, the critical analysis of the EQAO’s responsibilities and the terms used to define the Office’s objectives will demonstrate how the EQAO is a form of authority that holds the power to govern and regulate education as an “[instrument] of the state” with “methods of power capable of optimizing forces, aptitudes, and life in general” (Foucault, 1978, p.141). The analysis of the responsibilities that the EQAO is expected to uphold will establish how a form of authority, created through legislation, holds the ability to govern institutions in a manner that enables one group to control and influence another group. Through the assessment practices and ability to define and evaluate the current state of the province’s education system, from school to school and student to student, the critical analysis will demonstrate how the EQAO Act provides the EQAO with the authority to determine what actions schools, teachers, students, and so forth, are required to take to demonstrate their ability to adhere to the predefined purposes of education.

Ontario Curriculum: Grades 9 and 10 – English

For the purposes of this MRP, a critical analysis of the *Ontario Curriculum: Grades 9 and 10 – English* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) document will provide an understanding as to how Ontario secondary schools define literacy practices. The curriculum documents allow students and teachers to engage with one another and reach an understanding of how to best determine what actions may be taken to allow the student to participate in a constructed educational setting. Performing a critical analysis of the curriculum policy document will demonstrate how the Ontario Ministry of Education defines literacy practices and literacy education. Reviewing the description of where literacy practices may take place, how students are expected to interact with a written text or their own writing, what impact literacy practices have on an individual and the surrounding environment, and so forth, the critical analysis of the document will establish how literacy practices are defined by the Ontario Ministry of Education.

Analysing the definition of literacy practices and how students are expected to gain literacy skills and use such skills while enrolled in school, as well as once graduated, will demonstrate the degree to which literacy practices in the curriculum policy documents have been standardized in an attempt to reduce and control the complex definition of literacy practices “for the sake of a technically reproducible product” (Anderson, 1980, p.46). Through an examination of the language used to define literacy practices and the purposes of literacy practices as a complex or simple, empowering or disempowering, practice, a critical analysis will seek to determine whether or not the *Ontario Curriculum: Grades 9 and 10 – English* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) document establishes a multifaceted literacy learning environment, or works to produce a standardized literacy learning environment. The critical analysis may reveal the

level of influence that the EQAO has over the Ontario curriculum and the how the pressure to prepare students for a standardized assessment shapes the definition of literacy practices.

The Foucauldian theoretical framework will allow for a discussion regarding the autonomy that teachers and students are expected to maintain without the influence of the EQAO. The critical analysis of the Ontario curriculum policy document will illustrate the whether or not the OSSLT, as a literacy assessment practice, contradicts with the assessment and evaluation strategies outlined in the curriculum document. The discussion that follows the analysis will consider the ways in which the OSSLT shapes the English curriculum, as well as the ways in which the literacy practices from the curriculum are incorporated into the standardized test. Comparing the definition of literacy practices in the curriculum policy document to the definition found within the EQAO documents, the critical analysis will illustrate how the EQAO respects the Ministry of Education's definition of literacy practices and the degree to which the definition is manipulated in order to be incorporated into a standardized test.

Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test: Framework Document

The EQAO provides a publically accessible document that discusses the efforts made by the agency to evaluate student learning across the province, the reasons as to why the OSSLT is implemented into the Ontario secondary curriculum and how such evaluations are assessed. Performing a critical analysis of the EQAO's *Framework: Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test* (EQAO, 2007) document will establish how the EQAO defines literacy practices in respect to the curriculum students are expected to receive. Analysing the definition of literacy practices within the document will demonstrate the degree to which the EQAO works to ensure that the literacy practices in OSSLT are aligned with the literacy education presented under the guidance of the Ontario curriculum policy documents; comparing the definitions found within the

Framework (EQAO, 2007) document and *Ontario Curriculum: Grades 9 and 10 – English* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) document will demonstrate how the EQAO's definition of literacy practices is similar to, and differs from, the definition of literacy presented within the curriculum policy document.

The critical analysis of the *Framework* (EQAO, 2007) document will consider how literacy practices are discussed in relation to the nature of the standardized test. The comparison of the definitions of literacy practices within the *Framework* (EQAO, 2007) and *Ontario Curriculum: Grades 9 and 10 – English* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) documents suggests that the discourse establishing the relationship between literacy practices and standardized assessment practices may reveal the transformation that literacy practices undergo as a result of the EQAO's authority to govern how literacy skills are assessed. Isolating the examples of literacy practices presented within the document may establish the notion that while the EQAO adheres to the complex definition of literacy practices, the discourse of large-scale, high-stakes standardized testing may demonstrate that contradicting definitions and discussions of literacy practices exist within the *Framework* (EQAO, 2007) document. The analysis and discussion that follows will work to provide a stronger understanding of the ways in which literacy practices are reconstructed for the sake of standardized testing.

A critical analysis of the document may suggest that the EQAO establishes literacy practices as an objectively measurable practice that is properly evaluated only through the confines of a high-stakes standardized test. The analysis of the discourse of literacy practices in relation to large-scale, high-stakes standardized assessment practices may suggest that the multifaceted definition of literacy practices is disregarded in an attempt to place emphasis on literacy practices that the EQAO regards as both “useful” (Furlong 1992, p.168) and objectively

measureable. Examining the agency's discussion regarding the purposes of the OSSLT and analyzing the ways in which the OSSLT supports and undermines the given definition of literacy practices will demonstrate how the EQAO governs the students' literacy learning experiences. A critical analysis of the EQAO's discussion regarding the purposes and benefits of the OSSLT will determine the degree to which the definition of literacy practices, as defined within *Ontario Curriculum: Grades 9 and 10 – English* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) document, is redefined under the authority of the EQAO.

A Foucauldian critique of the technical rationalist perspective of literacy practices suggests that the EQAO's definition of literacy education and literacy practices may suggest that the school represents a technique of power, whereby the literacy practices presented within the OSSLT is utilized as an instrument to employ "methods of power capable of optimizing forces, aptitudes, and life in general" (Foucault, 1978, 140-141). The critical analysis of the purposes of the OSSLT and how literacy practices are defined in relation to the testing, as well as the intended objectives of OSSLT outcomes large-scale testing, may demonstrate that the EQAO is provided with the authority to govern how literacy practices are incorporated into the province's public education system. Furthermore, the analysis may also suggest that the EQAO has the ability to define and determine which students are literate and which students are illiterate. The research regarding the impact that literacy practices have on an individual's identity (Barton *et al.*, 2000; Enriquez, 2011; Evans, 1996; Grote, 2006; Hall *et al.*, 2010; Hall, 2012a; Lillis *et al.*, 2001; Packer & Goicoechea, 2000; Street, 1994) will allow for consideration of the ways in which the EQAO impacts students and their perception of their own capabilities.

OSSLT Sample Assessment Booklet: New Layout

To establish an accurate understanding of the literacy skills that students are expected to acquire to achieve success on the OSSLT and graduate, an analysis of the “OSSLT Sample Assessment Booklet: New Layout” (EQAO, 2015a; EQAO 2015b) will reveal what literacy practices are specifically incorporated into the OSSLT. According to the EQAO’s website, “the sample test is a complete test in the same order and with the same instructions as an actual test” (EQAO, 2015c, n.p.). The analysis of the sample test will establish how the EQAO evaluates the effectiveness of the province’s education system.

The critical analysis will draw from literacy pedagogies, such as the didactic pedagogy, functional pedagogy and critical pedagogy, to determine if any approaches to literacy practices are favoured on the OSSLT. Drawing from the technical rationalist perspective of education, the critical analysis of the OSSLT sample test will seek to determine if the functional approach to literacy is given priority for the purposes of assessing the students’ literacy skills. Reviewing the instructions and questions presented on the OSSLT, the critical analysis will consider whether or not emphasis is placed on ensuring that students understand how “different types of texts are structured to serve different purposes” (Kalantzis *et al.*, 2016, location 3646). Examining the open-ended and close-ended questions, such as multiple choice assessment practices, the critical analysis may reveal that the OSSLT influences students to conform to a “pre-existing social order” (Pinto *et al.*, 2007, p.87). The analysis will draw attention towards the impact that literacy assessment has on student’s learning, as well as the ways in which high-stake standardized testing may cause literacy practices to be narrowly defined as a measurable practice.

The analysis of the literacy activities presented on the OSSLT will allow for a discussion as to whether or not students are provided with the opportunity to display a variety of literacy

skills. The Foucauldian framework will guide the critical analysis towards considering the possibility that literacy practices are redefined by the EQAO and implemented onto the OSSLT as an instrument of the state “[instrument] of the state” (Foucault, 1978, p.141) that governs how students interact within the school’s learning environment. Reviewing the literacy assessment questions on the OSSLT will demonstrate the degree to which students are able to engage with a variety of literacy practices and display their own unique literacy skills on the test. The analysis of the OSSLT sample test may reveal that the EQAO utilizes the OSSLT as a means of measuring and hierarchizing literacy practices. Findings may suggest that the EQAO uses the OSSLT as an instrument to regulate how students perceive literacy practices and their own capabilities.

Concluding Remarks: The Foucauldian Framework & Critical Analysis

The Foucauldian framework will guide the critical analysis of the several documents relating to the EQAO and OSSLT in order to gain a better understanding as to how literacy practices are defined by the EQAO and the possible implications that the definition has on students in school and beyond. Utilizing the theoretical framework to critique a technical rational perspective of education, the analysis will reveal the degree to which the definition of literacy practices is modified in order to evaluate the students’ literacy skills in an objectively measureable manner. Reviewing the purposes of education and the responsibilities that the EQAO is expected to uphold, the language used throughout the documents’ discussion of such concerns will provide a fundamental understanding of how the EQAO is expected to function and why the EQAO defines literacy practices in a certain manner. Isolating discourses of literacy and economic concerns, as well as literacy and community building, will provide a stronger understand of the EQAO’s objectives and how such objectives are pursued with the creation of

the OSSLT. The critical analysis of the documents will reveal the EQAO's definition of literacy practices and why the agency defines literacy practices in such a manner.

Chapter Seven: Findings

The critical analysis of the documents establishes the ways in which various education stakeholders perceive the purposes of education and literacy practices. The analysis isolated the discourse of education and economic objectives to illustrate the degree to which the student's learning experienced is framed by external motives that work to ensure students are equipped with the skills that will allow them to contribute to the economy once graduated. The analysis also isolated the discourse of literacy and community to demonstrate how the EQAO influences the learning environment in Ontario schools. Examining adjectives used to discuss the purposes and definition of education and literacy practices embedded into the documents, the critical analysis establishes what authority the EQAO holds over the province's literacy education and how the organization works to fulfill its objectives.

Royal Commission & the Economic Purposes of Education

The second chapter of the Royal Commission on Learning's 1995 report discusses the reasons as to why individuals participate in a schooling experience and explains that no single definition of the purposes of education exists. The authors of the report note that many teachers, parents, social agents and students believe that the school should "meet the social, physical, and emotional needs of students" (Royal Commission on Learning, 1995d, n.p.). Education allows individuals to develop intellectually, gain an interest in learning for the sake of learning, and understand the history of one's society and the values everyone upholds (Royal Commission on Learning, 1995e, n.p.). However, the Royal Commission on Learning also notes that schools are expected to prepare students for the "transition from adolescence to adulthood, and from school

to employment” (Royal Commission on Learning, 1995e, n.p.). Schools are expected to ensure that the student is equipped with the ability to enter the workforce and participate in the production of services that contribute to the economy. The report explains that secondary schools and programs are often constructed as a space that “should be tailored to academic and vocational outcomes” (Royal Commission on Learning, 1995c, n.p.). While the document notes that schools exist for individual fulfillment, to gain an understanding of one’s culture, or for a variety of other reasons, the authors are aware that education provides individuals with the opportunity to acquire the skills that will allow them to pursue an academic career or vocational learning experience.

The report establishes the school as an institution that does not stand isolated from society, rather, the school is one of many mechanisms that correspond with other economic sites of production to function as a whole structure. The school is shaped by the economic activities that occur beyond the classroom walls, while simultaneously influencing the same economic activities. Thus, “Ontario’s changing economy” (Royal Commission on Learning, 1995c, n.p.), including a growing unemployment rates, is discussed in relation to the province’s public education system. The uncertain future that lay ahead creates an “anxiety about an uncertain economy [that] often translates into calls for schools to ‘do more,’ on the premise that a strong educational system is vital to the future” (Royal Commission on Learning, 1995c, n.p.). The Royal Commission on Learning addresses the concern that many people hold in regard to the future of the society and the ways in which many fear a diminishing job market. Responding to the public’s fears and demands for a stronger education system, the report explains that while the future for “Ontario’s children” is unclear, action will be taken to ensure that those children are able to be “‘competitive’ in a ruthless globalized economy” (Royal Commission on Learning,

1995a, n.p.). Thus, the purposes of school and education are not simply defined as an opportunity for an individual to grow as a unique learner and achieve an intellectual euphoria of understanding and awareness. Rather, the purposes of school and education are essential and fundamental tools which societies may utilize to ensure its own survival as a competitive machine within the global arena (Royal Commission on Learning, 1995d, n.p.). Students are expected to adhere to the rules and regulations embedded into the schools and curriculum documents that will enable them to gain employment and strengthen the economy.

The report explains that “for most students and parents, preparation for employment ranks high, and thus needs to be stated as an explicit purpose” (Royal Commission on Learning, 1995e, n.p.). The economy functions through the policy makers, government officials, employees, workforces, and virtually anyone who contributes to the economy of Western society through the services that they provide to others. However, each and every individual who contributes to the economy supports themselves and others through the skills and knowledge that they have *learned*. Therefore, the report declares that “education drives the economy – that our economic well-being is dependent on a well-educated workforce able to compete in the ‘new global economy’ (Royal Commission on Learning, 1995c, n.p.). The purpose of education is to allow future citizens to learn the ways in which they may create or participate in the production of services that will contribute to the economic activities in Western society. The stronger the education, the stronger the economy; the stronger the economy, the more competitive the society is amongst the globalized economy. Education is constructed in the report as a strategic tool utilized to maintain the stability of the economy.

To ensure the purposes of education are met, the report acknowledges the notion that while many educators disagree with the increase of assessment and accountability strategies,

many education stakeholders, including the public, believe that “more assessment of student learning, and more testing, are needed, and that greater attention should be paid to ensuring accountability” (Royal Commission on Learning, 1995d, n.p.). To support the purposes of education, the Royal Commission on Learning recommends the implementation of accountability measures that will reflect the degree to which the public schools of Ontario strive to ensure that students are presented with learning experiences that will allow them to achieve success beyond their school lives. The Royal Commission on Learning proposes an increase of accountability measures to allow education stakeholders to determine the degree to which students are acquiring the skills that will allow them to contribute to the economy once graduated.

The accountability measures and assessment practices are introduced through report’s recommendations that a “literacy test be given to students, which they must pass before receiving their secondary school diploma” (Royal Commission on Learning, 1995h, n.p.). The report establishes the ways in which public education may ensure that students are provided with the skills and knowledge that will allow them to achieve success through the transition from school to employment. Through the recommendation to increase of accountability measures within Ontario schools, the Royal Commission on Learning demonstrates that the purposes of education may be defined in a manner which transforms the abstract understanding of education into a practice that is objectively measurable. Ontario schools are constructed as a space where learning may be measured to ensure that the public schools are not isolated from the surrounding society, but are instead constructed as a place that will participate in a relationship with the respective society.

The report acknowledges that “in order to carry out [the school’s] primary mandate of making children literate and numerate, must also respond to the diverse abilities children have” (Royal Commission on Learning, 1995f, n.p.). To fulfill the purposes of education and ensure that students acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to enter society once graduated, the report notes that the province’s public education system is expected to provide students with the opportunity to achieve success according to their own interests, skills, and strengths, as well as areas where students may improve through the guidance of the educator. Through differentiated instruction, students are respected as individuals who may overcome any challenge, in or outside of the classroom, so long as they are provided with the resources and guidance to draw from their own abilities and achieve their goals in a manner that suits their needs and interests. However, the discourse constructing the relation between education and the economy suggests that the individual needs of each student may be overlooked in order to ensure that the province remains economically stable. The Royal Commission on Learning’s discussion regarding the purposes of education establishes the notion that Ontario schools are a site where all students are expected to receive the skills that will allow them to contribute to the economy once graduated. Recommending the implementation of increased accountability measures, the Royal Commission on Learning introduces the notion that teachers and students are unable to effectively ensure that all students acquire useful skills through their learning experience.

EQAO Act Conceptualizing a Measurement of Education Quality

The *Education Quality and Accountability Office Act* (EQAO Act, 1996) discusses the responsibilities that the EQAO is expected to uphold and what actions the agency is expected take to meet the demands of education stakeholders. The *Act* (EQAO Act, 1996) establishes the EQAO as a “corporation without share capital known in English as the Education Quality and

Accountability Office” (EQAO Act, 1996). Thus, the EQAO is provided with the ability to function independently from the government. The third section of the *Act* (EQAO Act, 1996) explains that the EQAO is expected to “evaluate the quality and effectiveness of elementary and secondary school education” (EQAO Act, 1996, s.3, [1]). The objective of the agency is to measure and consider the value of the education students receive. Although literacy education is not discussed within the *Act*, the province’s education system is constructed as something that may be measured.

Working to improve the current state of the public education system, the EQAO is expected to implement tests which will “[evaluate] the quality and effectiveness of elementary and secondary school education” (EQAO Act, 1996, s.3 [3]). The tests and other forms of evaluation provide the EQAO with the authority to determine what knowledge and skills will be taught within the classroom. The *Act* (EQAO Act, 1996) allows the agency to govern the ways in which students and teachers interact with one another as the quality of the learning progress is reflected in the degree to which students achieve success on the methods of evaluation that are created and distributed by the EQAO. Working to maintain the relationship between the Ontario schools and the education stakeholder, including the public, the *Act* (EQAO Act, 1996) notes that the agency is expected to “report to the public and to the Minister of Education and Training on the results of tests and generally on the quality and effectiveness of elementary and secondary school education” (EQAO Act 1996, s.3, [6]). Stated within the same section as the EQAO’s outlined objectives regarding the quality of education and assessment practices, the *Act* (EQAO Act, 1996) demonstrates that the province’s education system cannot stand isolated from the surrounding society.

The EQAO is created through legislation in order to “evaluate the public accountability of boards and to collect information on strategies for improving that accountability” (EQAO Act 1996, s.3, [5]). Both the EQAO and Ontario schools are expected to display the quality of the education student receive. The legislative passing of the *EQAO Act* (EQAO Act, 1996) illustrates the provincial government continually works to ensure that education stakeholders are informed of the effectiveness of the public education system. The *Act* (EQAO Act, 1996) reflects the ways in which the provincial government preserves a level of authority over its citizens, while simultaneously acting at a distance, through the legislative creation of an agency that will determine what knowledge and skills students are required to acquire before graduating from the secondary level of education. Furthermore, the *Act* (EQAO Act, 1996) also illustrates the government’s ability to demonstrate to the citizens of Ontario that the province’s public education system is undergoing a reform that will ensure students are following the proper procedures that will allow them to contribute to the society once graduated. The *Act* (EQAO Act, 1996) establishes the EQAO as a governing structure that defines the purposes of education and regulates the ways in which public education provides students with a certain set of knowledge and skills.

Defining Literacy Practices Without The EQAO

The introduction of the *Ontario Curriculum: Grades 9 and 10 – English* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) policy document explains that the “goal of Ontario secondary schools is to support high-quality learning while giving individual students the opportunity to choose programs that suit their skills and interests” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p.3). The curriculum document establishes Ontario secondary schools as an organization of individuals who collectively work alongside one another to provide students with efficient

learning experiences. Students are supported and thus, provided with the assistance they require to achieve their own academic goals. Almost immediately, the document constructs the purposes of education as space where individuals are given the opportunity to understand themselves, strengthen their skills that interest them, and prosper as unique human beings.

The literacy education students receive in Ontario secondary is defined in the curriculum document as a “communal project [...] that is dedicated to developing the knowledge and skills on which literacy is based – that is, knowledge and skills in the areas of listening and speaking, reading, writing, and viewing and representing” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p.3). The space that is the Ontario secondary school is constructed as a supporting environment where educators teach alongside learners and provide students with the support, constructive criticism and feedback, as well as the independence and personal responsibility to learn. The curriculum policy document defines literacy education as a practice that exists within a community and occurs through various forms of communication and thinking; students may engage in a literacy practice through the act of writing, or simply by listening to a conversation between teachers and peers.

“Language development” and “literacy development” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p.3) are defined in the curriculum document as practices that include “debates and essays, the narrative language of stories and novels, the figurative language of poetry, the technical language of instructions and manuals” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p.3), as well as other genres of text, including scientific research reports, graphic novels, and so forth (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p.16). Drawing from a variety of written forms of communication, the Ontario English curriculum constructs literacy practices as any form of expression that utilizes the written language. Whether the written form is a formal persuasive essay, or an

informal free-verse poem, literacy practices are reflected in a diverse range of writing forms. Reading a wide variety of written texts also illustrates that the Ontario secondary curriculum provides students with the opportunity to experience various forms of communication. The curriculum policy document discusses literacy practices through a multi-literacy approach where the unique learner is given the opportunity to engage in unique writing and reading practices.

The curriculum document establishes the notion that literacy practices allow individuals to “develop a deeper understanding of themselves and others and of the world around them” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p.4). Language and literacy development is established as a necessary learning process individuals undertake in order to successfully become effective, high-level listeners, viewers, speakers, writers, readers and communicators (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p.5). Ontario literacy education focuses on providing students with “critical literacy skills [...] to help them become reflective, critical, and independent learners” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p.5). The language and literacy education in Ontario secondary schools provide students with the skills they need to achieve “responsible and productive citizenship” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p.4) and “make meaningful connections between themselves, what they encounter in texts, and the world around them” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p.4). The curriculum document establishes the purposes of literacy education as the opportunity to acquire the skills necessary to critically examine the world around them in a manner that will enable each individual to become a responsible and productive citizen once graduated. The critical literacy practices discussed in the curriculum document demonstrates the Ministry of Education’s efforts towards ensuring that students acquire the skills that will allow them to acknowledge various perspectives and identify a bias within the texts that they encounter.

Students are provided with the option to “choose between course types on the basis of their interests, achievement, and postsecondary goals” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p.9). The English courses incorporated into the Ontario secondary education curriculum allow students to participate in a learning community that suits their interests and educational objectives. Students may enlist in a course where they may participate in literacy practices that focus on the theoretical aspects of language and literacy, or the practical application of language and literacy; the “academic,” “applied” and “open” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p.9) level courses reflect the notion that the Ontario English curriculum works to accommodate all students and ensure that everyone has the opportunity to learn in a manner that suits their own learning behaviours.

The *Ontario Curriculum: Grades 9 and 10 – English* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) policy document defines assessment as the “process of gathering information from a variety of sources (including assignments, demonstrations, projects, performances, and tests) that accurately reflects how well a student is achieving” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p.20). The document establishes literacy assessment practices as an evaluation of a wide range of the student’s literacy knowledge and skills. Literacy practices include multiple forms of expression, including poetry, essays, short stories, autobiographies, and so forth (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p.16). The curriculum document establishes writing as a form of literacy practice that is not experienced in one isolated instance. Rather, the document explains that writing, “from initial musings to final publication, is a complex process that involves a range of complementary thinking and composing skills” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p.17) The literacy practice of writing draws from a variety of methods of expression and are repeatedly sculpted and refined during the various stages of brainstorming, editing and publication.

Similar to the curriculum document's definition of writing, reading is also defined as a "complex process that involves the application of various strategies before, during, and after reading" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p.15). The curriculum document establishes reading as a literacy practice that is not passively encountered, but rather, is an experience that the reader actively engages with in order to properly obtain an understanding of the diverse range of thoughts, messages, concepts, theories, meanings, and so forth, that exist within the text. Both reading and writing literacy practices are established as complex activities that utilize a multiplicity of knowledge and skills over a period of time; the definition of literacy practices in the curriculum document illustrates that students are encouraged to consider the purpose of the literacy practice, while also having the opportunity gain insight and feedback from others, edit, and revise their work and continue to strengthen and pursue their own literacy interests.

To allow the students to properly strengthen their literacy skills, the *Ontario Curriculum: Grades 9 and 10 – English* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) policy document explains that it is necessary for students to learn within a "supportive classroom environment, with opportunities to extend and refine their skills in using the writing process and doing research" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p.17). The literacy education is established as an experience where multiple literacy skills and literacy assessment practices are continually incorporated into the students' learning environment. The curriculum policy documents for the English courses allow students to understand how they may improve their own literacy skills. The expectations outlined in the curriculum documents illustrate the commitment to ensure that all students are provided with the opportunity to understand what actions they may take to grow as a literacy learner. The curriculum document reflects the notion that a classroom is a learning environment where teachers and students are expected to support one another in order to

continue to strengthen each student's literacy skills. From the independent literacy learning activities which allow a student to draw from his or her strengths, to the “descriptive feedback that guides their efforts towards improvement” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p.20), the curriculum policy document's discussion of literacy practices reflect the complexity of literacy practices. The document reinforces the notion that each literacy learner is a unique human being who may achieve success through the support they receive within a healthy classroom environment.

Defining Literacy Practices With The EQAO

The *Framework* (EQAO, 2007) document introduces the EQAO and provides a detailed discussion regarding the nature of provincial, large-scale, high-stake assessments, specifically, the OSSLT. To demonstrate that EQAO's literacy assessment practices are aligned with the province's education curriculum, the document references *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: English* (EQAO, 2007, p.10). Referencing the *Ontario Curriculum: Grades 9 and 10 – English* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) document, the *Framework* (EQAO, 2007) document defines “[l]iteracy development [as] a communal project” (EQAO, 2007, p.10). The document draws from curriculum policy documents to explain that literacy education is regarded as a learning process that occurs within a community. The EQAO references the curriculum policy document to demonstrate that Ontario schools create a learning community where students are provided with the opportunity to work alongside others and acquire literacy skills through the interactions and experiences they share with peers, teachers, and others.

To reinforce the notion that the OSSLT assessment procedures are in accordance with the objectives of public education, the EQAO also references several national and international assessments to demonstrate that large-scale literacy assessments work to “determine the extent to

which students near the end of compulsory education have acquired the knowledge and skills that are essential for full participation in society” (EQAO, 2007, p.9). Referencing both the Ontario curriculum document, as well as national and international assessment programs, the *Framework* (EQAO, 2007) document works to establish the legitimacy of its assessment practices. Literacy education is defined both as a practice that is developed within a communal learning environment, as well as a learning experience that will enable students to acquire the skills necessary to participate in society. The literacy education students receive is established by the EQAO as one that will unfold in a supportive environment and allow students to become literate productive citizens who will participate in society once graduated.

Continually citing educational curriculums and assessment programs, the *Framework* (EQAO, 2007) document notes that the EQAO’s definition aligns with the current research (p.14). Referring to Alvermann and Phelps (2002), the document explains that “language and literacy are viewed as social practices that take place in and are influenced by the social and cultural contexts [...] in which students interact with others” (EQAO 2007, p.14). The scholarly references cited within the document reinforces the validity of the EQAO’s literacy assessment practice. The EQAO draws from such research to define literacy as a practice that shapes, and is shaped by, social and cultural influences; literacy practices do not stand isolated, rather, literacy practices exist within a social environment and shape the ways in which a social environment functions. The document establishes the OSSLT as a vital assessment practice incorporated into the Ontario education system for the purposes of ensuring that the students have acquired the social skills that will enable them to participate in society.

The document explains that the “reading component of the OSSLT is based on the widely accepted view in research that reading comprehension is the goal of reading” (EQAO, 2007,

p.14). Through the support of academic research, the *Framework* (EQAO, 2007) document defines the purpose of reading as the literal understanding of the text; the OSSLT evaluates a student's reading skills through their ability to understand the literal meaning of the material presented on the test. While students are required to complete the OSSLT during a single school day, the EQAO explains that reading is a "complex process that involves the application of various strategies before, during, and after reading" (EQAO, 2007, p.11). Reading is constructed as an intricate practice that is not simply completed in a single act, rather, reading is defined as an activity that requires the individual to contemplate the purpose of the text, examine the elements of the text and reflect on the literal meaning, or message, conveyed within the text.

The *Framework* (EQAO, 2007) document discusses the creative and critical skills a student may utilize to achieve success on the OSSLT, explaining that the student's reading practices are evaluated under "three" (EQAO, 2007, p.15) reading and writing skills that reflect their ability to understand "explicitly [...] [and] implicitly stated information and ideas," as well as their ability to "[make] connections between information and ideas in a reading selection and personal knowledge" (EQAO, 2007, p.15). A student's ability to read is evaluated through their ability to understand the literal meaning of the text, and the literal and implied purposes as to why the text was written. The document illustrates that the OSSLT reduces the complex process of reading into three interrelated skills which may be evaluated on a single test. The practice of reading is defined as a finite practice which may be regulated and evaluated under through the student's ability to display three pre-defined reading skills. Although the document explains that a literate reader utilizes creative and critical reading skills (EQAO, 2007, p.11), explicitly stating that the student's ability to read is evaluated through fixed and precise measures.

Continually drawing from the Ontario curriculum policy documents (EQAO, 2007, p.19-26), writing is defined as “the constructive process of communicating in the written forms in which students are expected to write according to the expectations in The Ontario Curriculum across all subjects up to the end of Grade 9” (EQAO, 2007, p.15). Writing is constructed as a practice that allows individuals to communicate their thoughts in a various forms of expression. The document establishes the notion that literacy practices do not occur in a single instant. The EQAO explains that writing, “from initial musings to final publication, is a complex process” (EQAO, 2007, p.12) which requires the individual to draw from a diverse range of creative and critical communication skills that will allow them to express their own thoughts and ideas in writing. To ensure that students are equipped with the literacy skills that will enable them to revise and develop their understanding of a text, the document explains that literacy education should occur within a “supportive classroom environment” (EQAO, 2007, p.12). Additionally, reading is also constructed as a form of literacy practice that “involves the application of various strategies before, during, and after reading” (EQAO, 2007, p.12). Literacy practices are discussed within the *Framework* (EQAO, 2007) document as a discipline that requires the individual to revise and re-examine their own work, or the works of others, in order to develop a stronger understanding of the text, their capabilities, and the world around them. The supportive classroom environment provides students with the opportunity to receive constructive feedback and utilize such criticism to consider what actions they may take to improve their writing and reading skills.

Similar to the restricting of reading skills to three standards, writing skills are also defined under three measures. The document explains that a student’s writing skills is reflected in their ability to coherently develop a main idea with supporting arguments, using proper

grammar and punctuation (EQAO, 2007, p.15). The EQAO's literacy assessment places some writing practices as superior to others; for example, a student's writing strengths may lie in their descriptive writing skills which allow the student to construct beautiful imagery and deep metaphors in their own work, however, such skills may not necessarily be evaluated in the assessment. The OSSLT places emphasis on the aspects literacy practices, specifically writing practices, which may be defined and evaluated in an objective and measurable manner.

Due to the fact that the nature of large-scale assessment practices “does not allow for a complete revision and refinement process, written work on the OSSLT is scored as first-draft (unpolished) writing” (EQAO, 2007, p.10). The *Framework* (EQAO, 2007) document acknowledges the notion that although writing is a complex process which requires the individual to continually revise their work in order to prepare and create a well-written response, the OSSLT does not provide students with the opportunity to prepare, develop and edit their writing to communicate ideas and information clearly and coherently. While assessment practices evaluate a student's performance based on their ability to meet a certain criteria of skills and knowledge, the focus placed on certain writing skills suggests other writing skills are disregarded within the assessment. The OSSLT substitutes the classroom environment for the standardized test. Although the *Framework* (EQAO, 2007) document defines literacy practices as a complex process that requires supportive feedback, as well as the opportunity to refine and improve one's skills, the definition is simultaneously disregarded to justify the EQAO's literacy assessment practices. The EQAO transforms the definition of literacy practices from a process that occurs within a supportive environment, to a measurable discipline that is assessed when completing the OSSLT.

Measuring Literacy Practices With The EQAO

The OSSLT sample tests contain forty-five “multiple-choice questions” in total (see Appendix A, Appendix B, Appendix C, Appendix F, Appendix H, Appendix I, Appendix J, Appendix L); of the forty-five multiple choice questions, ten questions are concerned with proper grammar and punctuation. Correct grammar and proper use of punctuation convey the meaning within a text in a clear and concise manner. Literacy practices that are “associated with traditional grammar” (Kalantzis *et al.*, 2016, location 3601) draw from a didactic understanding of literacy practices which establish the “formal rules of what is presented as the one, correct way to write” (Kalantzis *et al.*, 2016, location 2050-2051). The OSSLT implements questions that evaluate the student’s ability to use proper punctuation in the formal, universally accepted standard of the written English language. The OSSLT evaluates a student’s ability to understand how to properly write words and display their understanding of where certain punctuation marks are placed. Thus, the OSSLT constructs the purposes of literacy as a practice that focuses on the fundamental forms of written communication. The multiple-choice questions regarding proper grammar and punctuation reinforce the notion that literacy serves to express thoughts and ideas in a uniform manner. Students who are unable to identify which written texts contain proper uses of punctuation and correct grammar are penalized because they do not comply with the pre-established ways of engaging in literacy practices.

Throughout the OSSLT sample test, several multiple-choice questions are concerned with sentence structure. Literacy practices are established as a communicative practice that is structured in a certain manner to achieve a certain purpose. For instance, in “Section B” (see Appendix B), the first two questions focus on the sentence structure, encouraging the student to reflect upon the different ways in which a sentence, or paragraph, are structured, as well as the

purpose of the text itself. The student is asked to focus on the forms of communication that comply with preconceived understandings as to how sentences are organized. The final two questions in the same section (see Appendix B), as well as the second question in “Section C” (see Appendix C), question four in “Section F” (see Appendix F), questions two and four in “Section H” (see Appendix H), question four in “Section I” (see Appendix I), and the second question in “Section J” (see Appendix J) instruct the student to display their understanding of proper grammar and sentence structure. Thus, a significant portion of the entire literacy assessment practice focuses on ensuring that students have acquired the ability to adhere to the formal, fundamental aspects of the Westernized, written English language; Kearns (2016) explains that students require the education a Western society has to offer. The OSSLT reflects the EQAO and provincial government’s efforts towards demonstrating the effectiveness of the public education system and its ability to provide students with the knowledge and skills that will allow them to properly communicate their thoughts with others through the mediums of reading and writing.

Throughout the multiple-choice questions on the OSSLT, students are instructed to consider the meaning of specific words, as well as display their understanding of the fundamental aspects of the reading sections on the test. The first question in “Section F” (see Appendix F) presents four single words and asks the student to consider which of the four words best convey the meaning of the word “‘endure’ as used” (see Appendix F) in the text. The OSSLT evaluates a student’s knowledge of specific words and their ability to correlate their understanding of certain words with others. Students are also expected to display their understanding of the structure of the reading sections on the test, explaining who is discussed in the test, what events unfold, when and where such events unfold, and why. For example, the fifth

question of “Section J” (see Appendix J) instructs the student to choose which of the four responses best explains why the fifth paragraph is important to the text. The OSSLT question establishes the notion that students cannot simply understand the meaning of the term, ‘important’, but are expected to have the ability to comprehend what answer would collectively be agreed upon by the majority of education stakeholders as important; the students may consider one of the responses to hold more significance than the other responses, however, in order to achieve success on the OSSLT, students are expected to distinguish between their own feelings and the most appropriate answer. Students are not invited to critically analyse the text or questions, instead, the questions are designed in a manner that forces the student to display literacy skills that are appropriate in the Ontario societies, populated by the same education stakeholders who demanded for an increase in accountability measures.

Drawing from appropriate, “real-world” (Kalantzis *et al.*, 2016, location 3646) texts that are present within society, such as newspaper articles, or conversations regarding the environment, sections “D” (see Appendix D), “E” (see Appendix E) and “G” (see Appendix G) instructs students to write in a manner that serves a certain purpose. In “Section D” (see Appendix D), students are asked to discuss an environmental issue and explain why the issue is important. The written evaluation is concerned with creating a text that serves a certain purpose; the student are expected to structure their response in a manner that supports the purpose of the written text. “Section E” (see Appendix E) presents the practices of writing a news report on a given topic. The section indicates that students are required consider the intent of the text they write and structure their writing in a manner that persuades the audience, the readers of the newspaper. “Section G” (see Appendix G) also instructs students to engage in literacy practices

that must serve a certain purpose. Once again, students are expected to demonstrate their ability to utilize their literacy skills for the purposes of conveying their thoughts to a certain audience.

The sections, “D” (see Appendix D), “E” (see Appendix E) and “G” (see Appendix G) in the OSSLT illustrate the ways in which students are instructed to convey their thoughts and display their writing skills in a specific manner; to achieve success, students are expected to adhere to the writing instructions in order to demonstrate that they have acquired the literacy skills which will allow them to transition from the school to the society. The students are provided with the opportunity to “compose the kinds of texts that enable them to succeed at school and to participate in society” (Kalantzis *et al.*, 2016, location 3557). Instructions explaining that the written text must include three paragraphs to support whether or not students should obtain part-time employment, the question evaluates the student’s ability to properly structure their writing, understand the purpose, and how to address the “adult” (see Appendix G) audience of the text. Furthermore, the intended audience is not simply any “adult” (see Appendix G), rather, through the predefined notion of part-time employment, the audience is constructed as individuals who participate in Western society and understands the purposes of part-time employment for students.

Although students are instructed to demonstrate their literacy skills by adhering to specific instructions, allowing the student to draw from their creative writing skills and create a written discussion regarding environmental issues (see Appendix D), the employment of youth (see Appendix G), and their reflection of an image (see Appendix E), suggests that the OSSLT provides the students with a level of independent thinking. However, some questions, such as the sixth question in “Section A” (see Appendix A), restrict the student from conveying their own personal beliefs through the medium of writing. While students may have the opportunity to

respond to the writing section in a manner that suits their interests, the OSSLT focuses on assessing the students' literacy skills through their knowledge of the structure of the text. For example, the third question in the "Section I" (see Appendix I) asks: "How is the information in paragraphs 1 to 3 organized?" (see Appendix I). The question on the OSSLT sample test emphasizes the notion that the paragraphs are structured in a manner that establishes the purpose of the argument and introduces the reasons as to why the athlete is discussed. The literacy skills the evaluated on the OSSLT primarily reflect the functional approach to literacy as the assessment is concerned with the ways in which the paragraphs are intentionally structured to convey a certain message, or purpose.

Concluding Remarks: The Purposes of Education & Contradictory Definitions of Literacy Practices

The Royal Commission on Learning's report provides the foundation to which the EQAO discusses the purposes of literacy education and how the agency works to define and assess literacy practices. The Royal Commission on Learning establishes the purposes of education as a space where student are expected to acquire the skills that will allow them to enter the workforce and participate in society through their employable contributions to the economy. The report establishes the school as mechanism that corresponds with other aspects of Western society, namely, the economy, to function as a whole structure. The analysis of the report demonstrates the Royal Commission on Learning establishes the notion that a strong education system will strengthen the economy. Through the implementation of accountability measures, the Royal Commission on Learning establishes the notion that schools are required to display the effectiveness of the curriculum to ensure that the economy remains stable.

Following the Royal Commission on Learning's recommendations to increase accountability measures in Ontario public schools, the legislative passing of the *EQAO Act* (EQAO Act, 1996) reflects the provincial government's efforts to ensure that the public is informed of the effectiveness of the province's education system. The analysis of the discourse of education and standards demonstrates that the *EQAO Act* (EQAO Act, 1996) allows the EQAO to decide what aspects of literacy education will be assessed to determine the effectiveness of the curriculum in Ontario schools.

The *Ontario Curriculum: Grades 9 and 10 – English* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) document establishes the school as a supportive community. Teachers and students work alongside one another to provide constructive feedback and allow each student to develop a stronger understanding of a text, their own capabilities, and the world around them. The critical analysis of the curriculum policy document demonstrates that the Ontario Ministry of Education works to provide students with the opportunity to critically examine the world around them. The curriculum document's discussion of critical literacy practices demonstrates that literacy practices in the school are defined in a manner that allows the student to learn to acknowledge different perspectives and identify the existence of a bias within the texts that they encounter. The curriculum document establishes literacy practices as complex activities that utilize a multiplicity of knowledge and skills over a period of time.

Although the *Ontario Curriculum: Grades 9 and 10 – English* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) document incorporates a multi-literacy approach to literacy practices (p.16), the EQAO's discussion regarding the nature of high-stakes standardized testing and the notion that the OSSLT does not allow the student to revise and develop their work undermines the complex definition of literacy practices. The EQAO transforms the definition of literacy

practices from a process that occurs within a supportive environment, to a measurable discipline that is assessed when completing the OSSLT. The analysis of the EQAO's *Framework* (EQAO, 2007) document and the "OSSLT Sample Assessment Booklet: New Layout" (EQAO, 2015a; EQAO 2015b) document illustrates that the EQAO's literacy assessment transforms the definition of literacy practices into a measurable discipline. The EQAO diminishes the complexity of literacy practices and reconstructs literacy practices into something that occurs in one instance and does not require any further development. The students' opportunities to revise and develop their own literacy skills is undermined by the notion that one's literacy skills are reflected in their ability to achieve success on the OSSLT in a single day.

Chapter Eight: Discussion

Following the analysis of the various documents relating to the EQAO and OSSLT, the "Discussion" chapter will draw from scholarly articles to examine how the purposes of education are established by the Royal Commission on Learning, the EQAO, as well as the Ontario Ministry of Education. The chapter will begin with a discussion that focuses on the Royal Commission on Learning's definition of the purposes of education. The discussion will demonstrate how the commission's report acted as the basis of the EQAO's efforts to evaluate the effectiveness of the province's education system and influence the ways in which the EQAO define literacy practices.

The discussion will consider the terms used within the *EQAO Act* (EQAO Act, 1996) regarding the objectives and responsibilities that the EQAO is expected to fulfill in order to establish the authority that the EQAO has over the Ontario schools and the ways in which the EQAO may undermine the complex definition of literacy practices. The critical analysis of *Ontario Curriculum: Grades 9 and 10 – English* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) will

allow for a discussion regarding the definition of literacy practices found within the curriculum document and will be compared to the EQAO's definition of literacy practices discussed in the *Framework* (EQAO, 2007) document, as well as the definition of literacy practices reflected on the OSSLT sample test documents. The transformation that the definition of literacy practices is shown to undergo in order to construct literacy practices as an objectively measureable discipline that may be incorporated into standardized tests and used to determine the students' abilities to display their literacy skills will demonstrate the EQAO's authoritative ability to redefine literacy practices.

Following the discussion regarding the EQAO's definition of literacy practices, the notion of the illiterate individual will be examined to consider the ways in which the illiterate individual is exploited as a means of governing others. Referencing scholarly articles that discuss the impact of high-stakes standardized testing, the OSSLT, and the public's fear of illiteracy, the chapter will argue that the OSSLT juxtaposes the literate and illiterate individual to pressure students to abandon their own unique literacy skills and conform their literacy skills to the EQAO's definition of literacy practices. The illiterate individual will be discussed as a symbol used by the EQAO to regulate the ways in which students communicate their own thoughts and interact with others throughout their entire lives. The discussion will then consider the impact that the EQAO's definition of literacy practices, as well as the notion of the illiterate individual, has on the students' perception of their own capabilities and PSE opportunities.

The Royal Commission on Learning & The Purposes of Education

Ontario's schools are constructed as a space where students are encouraged to "foster a love of learning" (Royal Commission on Learning, 1995e, n.p.) that will produce curious minds who continually strive to discover the realities that surround them. The report explains that

schools influence students to respect other beliefs, as well as to find a respect and admiration of one's own history and culture. However, the Royal Commission on Learning also establishes the purposes of Ontario public schools as a space where educators are expected to "prepare students for the transition from adolescence to adulthood, and from school to employment" (Royal Commission on Learning, 1995e, n.p.). The report establishes the notion that students will gain the knowledge and skills to acquire employment and participate in society once graduated. Recalling that the report was initially created as a response to the growing demand from education stakeholders to increase the quality of public education and ways in which the education system prepared students for future employment (Gidney, 1999), the report addresses the "Anxiety about an uncertain economy [that] often translates into calls for schools to 'do more,'" (Royal Commission on Learning, 1995c, n.p.). Ontario's schools are established as a space that is defined by the ways in which education may serve the economy and ensure that the students participate in society. While the purposes of education may continue to pursue the act of acquiring new forms of knowledge and communication, the Royal Commission on Learning constructs the school as a space that is expected to equip the learner with the tools that the greater society perceives as necessary to maintain a stable economy.

Discussing the capitalist restructuring of Ontario's public education system, Martin (2012) explains that the "[news] of graduates being ill-equipped for the workforce and a critical skills shortage had been part of the prevailing political narrative in the early 1990s" (p.264). The Minister of Education worked to construct the current state of the province's public education system as a fragile, vulnerable structure that will be reconstructed in order to ensure that students would gain the knowledge and skills necessary to be successful in the late twentieth, and early twenty-first centuries (Gidney, 1999; Kearns, 2016; Klein, 2008; Martin, 2012; Pinto, 2012).

Through Snobelen's political narrative of ill-equipped graduates, as well as the public media's discussion regarding the purposes and definition of literacy education (Pinto *et al.*, 2007), the public were influenced to demand that the province's education system implement standardized accountability measures to determine whether or not students are acquiring the skills that will prepare them to contribute to the economy once graduated (Royal Commission on Learning, 1995c, n.p.).

Responding to the demand, the report's discussion regarding the increasing unemployment and poverty within "Ontario's changing economy" (Royal Commission on Learning, 1995c, n.p.) illustrates that as the economy continued to change towards the end of the twentieth century, the purposes of education required a revision in order to adhere to the demands of the public and ensure that both the society and public education system underwent a transformation in a unitary manner. The provincial government's support of the commission's recommendations demonstrates that an increasing "call for 'back to basics' education and standardization" (Pinto, 2012, p.52) is reflected in the report's defining of public education as a mechanism that "drives the economy" (Royal Commission on Learning, 1995c, n.p.). The Royal Commission on Learning discusses the learning experience in a manner reflective of an assembly line that produces goods and services to the economy through a systematic, procedure of the manufacturing of a material in a uniform and consistent manner. The school is utilized by the state as a device that will generate an effective level of energy that will drive and support the economy.

Discussing the Ontario curriculum and the role of critical thinking practices within schools, Pinto and Portelli (2009) explain that recent education reforms "[emphasize] education for economic prosperity, and standardization" (p.5). While the report establishes the purposes of

education as a means of ensuring economic stability under the support of future citizens, the discourse of economic stability in relation to education also promotes the standardization of education. The public schools of Ontario are discussed within the report as a mechanism that will be assessed in order to ensure that the education system effectively contributes to the economy.

Working to improve the quality of Ontario's public education, the sixth chapter of the Royal Commission on Learning's report establishes the role of the educator as a longstanding, complex, informally constructed profession that may not adhere to the societal needs of the twenty-first century. To overcome such issues, the report explains that if "accountability results were more clearly established, much of the debate would be defused" (Royal Commission on Learning, 1995g, n.p.). The province's public education system is constructed as a fragile structure that cannot continue to contribute to economic activities and meet the needs of the surrounding society in an independent manner. The current state of the province's education system is established as one that is in "crisis" (Gidney, 1999; Kearns, 2016; Martin, 2012; Pinto, 2012). The students' learning experiences act as a catalyst to understand the current state of education and discuss the degree to which Ontario's public education complies with the defined purposes of education; the students' learning experiences are employed as a measurement of the effectiveness of education.

To ensure that teachers are effectively educating future citizens, the report suggests that through the "acceptance of reasonable, clearly stated standards, together with ongoing assessment of student learning" (Royal Commission on Learning, 1995g, n.p.), the province's public education system will overcome issues concerning the preparing of students to transition from school to employment. Teachers are increasingly expected to adhere to a "transmission model of teaching" that is "grounded in an epistemology of technical rationality that construes

teachers as technicians delivering a prescribed curriculum” (Kane, 2003, p.371). The Royal Commission on Learning report establishes the notion that Ontario’s public schools are vulnerable to the threat of becoming an inefficient space that passively enables teachers to provide students with various forms of knowledge and skills which are not useful for the student while in school, or once graduated. The report not only defines the purposes of education to establish the valuable aspects of education as those that will support the economy, but also discusses the advantages of incorporating stronger, more effective methods of accountability that will enable education stakeholders to understand the degree to which students are working towards fulfilling the purposes of education.

The discourse of quality and accountability create a learning environment where quality and standards are constructed as superior to individual curiosity, and “as a result, instead of devoting attention to those students with the greatest learning needs, schools are pressured to cater toward ‘value-adding’ students” (Cairns, 2012, p.40). The education reform’s impact on the purposes of education and the ways in which the students’ learning experiences are shaped by the redefined understanding of public education causes the individual student to be lumped into the masses. Addressing the possibility that the guidance and personal support which may benefit a student’s learning experience is sacrificed in order to increase accountability measures and the standardize of education, the report exploits the public’s demand for an education that prepares the student to transition between school and the workforce in order to redefine the school as a workplace where teachers are manufacturers who are required to produce the ‘material,’ or employees that will contribute to the economy.

Gidney (1999) explains that the provincial government, specifically the Ministry of Education and Training, “abdicated its responsibility for public education” (p.230) by creating an

agency, independent of the Ministry, “in order to ensure public confidence” (p.229). Thus, the report enables the provincial government to maintain public confidence, thereby maintaining the government’s ability to continue implementing its own legislation and preserve the authority over the citizens of Ontario, while simultaneously continuing to operate indirectly, at a distance. The school acts as a technique of power that allows the state to integrate a level of surveillance over its citizens without directly revealing themselves as an authoritative body within the school. Through the discourse of education and economic concerns, Royal Commission on Learning redefines the purposes of education to construct the province’s public education system as a fragile entity that requires an external form of authority to govern the Ontario schools and ensure that students are acquiring the skills necessary to contribute to the economy once graduated. Although education provides an individual with the opportunity to pursue his or her own interests, the report constructs the purposes of education to support economic needs of the province.

The EQAO Act & Authority of the EQAO

The *EQAO Act* (EQAO Act, 1996) establishes education as a practice that is value-laden and adopts specific standards to determine the quality of the education in Ontario schools. The *Act* (EQAO Act, 1996) notes that the EQAO is expected to “develop tests and require or undertake the administering and marking of tests of pupils in elementary and secondary schools. [...] To develop systems for evaluating the quality and effectiveness of elementary and secondary school education” (EQAO Act, 1996, s.3 [2-3]). Working to remain accountable towards the public, the EQAO’s objectives are to create and incorporate assessment practices that will reflect the effectiveness of teacher’s ability to fulfill the purposes of education, as well

as the effectiveness of students' ability to acquire and utilize the skills that will allow them gain employment once graduated.

The EQAO's authoritative ability to implement accountability measures demonstrates that the learning experience is reconstructed as a product "that is objective and quantifiable, something we can chart in an Excel file" (Fanetti *et al.*, 2010, p.77). The EQAO is responsible to determine, define and report the value of the learning process. Not only are the purposes of education redefined as a practice which will prepare students to transition from school to employment, the ways in which students will learn and display their knowledge is governed by an external authoritative source, rather than the teacher.

The discourse of value-laden concepts, specifically incorporating objectives that note the EQAO is expected to "develop systems for evaluating the quality and effectiveness of elementary and secondary school education" (EQAO Act, 1996, s.3, [3]) and "collect information on assessing academic achievement" (EQAO Act, 1996, s.3, [4]) provides the EQAO with the authority to determine the value of the knowledge students are taught throughout their elementary and secondary education experiences. The EQAO is expected to implement methods of assessment that will measure the effectiveness of the current Ontario public education curriculum. The *Act* (EQAO Act, 1996) allows the EQAO to gain and maintain authority over Ontario public schools by defining what constitutes the quality of an effective education system. Through the legislative creation of the EQAO, the agency acquires the lawful authority to dictate what skills are acceptable for students to learn in schools.

By implementing assessment practices that reflect the degree to which teachers and students engage in a predefined, effective learning experience, the *EQAO Act* (EQAO Act, 1996) constructs a power relation between a governing body, the agency, and a respective social body,

the student. The procedures put in place to assess the quality and effectiveness of the province's education, including the administering of tests (EQAO Act 1996, s.3 [2]), may be regarded as a "technology of thought [...] that render a realm into discourse as knowable, calculable and administrable object" (Miller & Rose 1993, p.79). Whether or not the purposes of education are defined in a 'correct' manner is only considered correct through a subjective interpretation and collective agreement; the purposes of education, as well as the effectiveness of education and the degree to which the student has acquired knowledge and skills while enrolled in elementary and secondary education is defined by the governing body who has the power to create such definitions.

Establishing the necessity to strengthen the relationship between the province's public education system and the province's economic stability in an attempt to overcome the crisis regarding the claimed increase of graduates unable to properly gain employment (Gidney, 1999; Kearns, 2016; Klein, 2008; Martin, 2012; Pinto, 2012), the EQAO's ability to create and implement an accountability systems, the OSSLT, represents a technology that translates the province's literacy education into a measurable form that may be displayed to the public. Adopting a Foucauldian framework, Blades (2012) explains that "what passes for truth and knowledge operate to maintain the discourses that *produce* claims of truth and knowledge" (p.30). Establishing the necessity of ensuring that schools equip students with the skills which will enable them to gain employment, the EQAO constructs what knowledge is considered useful and acceptable for the students to acquire in order to fulfill the purposes of education.

The discourse of quality and the EQAO's objective to ensure that Ontario school's effectively comply with the purposes of education is established as a "technology" (Spencer, 2012, p.133) as the discourse used to justify the relation between education and the economy

moves beyond the “abstract rationalities [and] into concrete forms” (Spencer, 2012, p.133). Spencer (2012) explains that an authoritative, governing body utilizes technologies, such as “policy documents [...] reports, and the specific or prescribed ways in which these tools are used” (p.133) govern and regulate another social body, such as teachers and students. Specific practices, such as literacy practices, exist within the techniques of power, such as the school, and are defined and regulated through the legal discourse implemented in legislation, policy documents, curriculum and assessment practices, and so forth. The *EQAO Act* (EQAO Act, 1996) allows the EQAO to determine what constitutes an effective education system and how to regulate the students’ learning experiences to ensure that the predefined purposes of education are met. Working to reconstruct the learning experience into a product that can be measured and displayed to education stakeholders, the transformation of the definition of literacy practices within the public education setting must be discussed and critically analysed.

The Ontario Curriculum, Definition of Literacy Practices & The Challenges of Large-Scale, High-Stakes Standardized Literacy Assessment

The Ontario curriculum policy documents present educators with the knowledge and skills that they are expected to provide to students. *Ontario Curriculum: Grades 9 and 10 – English* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) policy document allow the students and teachers understand what actions should be taken to ensure that students participate and learn in a constructive educational setting. The curriculum document notes that “[l]anguage development is central to students’ intellectual, social, cultural, and emotional growth and [...] will help students to thrive in the world beyond school” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p.3). Both the Royal Commission on Learning report and curriculum document establish the notion that education does not stand isolated from the surrounding economy, but are instead spaces where students

may have the opportunity to understand who they are as individuals, as well as what actions they are required to take in order to properly transition from the school into society once graduated.

The curriculum document immediately establishes the notion that literacy practices provide individuals with the ability to critically examine who they are as individuals and gain a stronger understanding of how their own identity is formed throughout their lifetimes.

Grote (2006) explains that “texts are seen as powerful ‘tools’ to communicate social meaning and values, construct ethnic and gendered identities” (p.480). Literacy practices themselves cannot exist within a confined classroom. The written text extends beyond the written page, beyond proper grammar, and beyond the walls of the classroom; the written text is any form of communication. Whether an individual is texting a friend by using improper words, such as ‘lol’ to signify their amusement within the conversation, or writing on the wall of a bathroom stall, the very act of communicating through the medium of writing is an extension of how that individual understands themselves, as well as the world around them. Anyone who has the ability to read and write may consider themselves literate and should have the opportunity to experience multiple forms of literacy practices that will allow them to “make meaningful connections between themselves, what they encounter in texts, and the world around them” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p.4). However, the EQAO’s ability to regulate literacy practices may diminish a student’s opportunity to discover the complexity of literacy practices and appreciate its omnipresent nature. The definition of literacy practices in schools should invite students to think critically and act creatively for such experiences will allow the student to gain a better understanding of who they are as human beings.

The curriculum document reflects the importance of experiencing a diversity of reading practices, such as “literary, informational, and graphic texts that engage students’ interest and

imagination – for example, novels; poetry; myths [...] magazine articles; instructions and manuals; graphic novels, comic books, and cartoons” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p.16). The numerous genres of reading materials the document suggests students have the opportunity to engage in demonstrates that the province’s literacy education works to implement multiple literacy strategies that will not only engage the students through activities that relate to their own interests, but will also ensure that students experience multiple forms of written communication.

Supporting the notion that students should be presented with reading and writing practices that go beyond a single approach to literacy education, Street (1994) explains that “there are many different ways in which we can act out our uses and meanings of reading and writing in different social contexts and [...] it is misleading to think of one single, unified thing called literacy” (p.139). Although both the EQAO and Ontario curriculum policy documents establish literacy practices as the ability to read and write for the purposes of participating in society, gaining employment and so forth, the curriculum policy document demonstrates that literacy does not hold a single definition. Therefore, the EQAO and Ontario curriculum policy documents hold a conflicting definition of literacy practices. Whereas the curriculum policy documents support the notion that literacy practices are reflected in “magazine articles; instructions and manuals; graphic novels, comic books, and cartoons” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p.16), the EQAO fails to acknowledge the multiplicity of literacy practices. Rather than allowing the student to display their literacy skills relating to such literacy practices as poetry, the standardizing of literacy practices for the sake of producing a numerical product that informs the public of the effectiveness of the province’s education system contradicts the complex definition of literacy practices.

Literacy practices are established as any form of written communication (Giampapa, 2010); from an application for an employment position at McDonald's to a classic Superman comic, from an Ikea instructional manual to Marcel Duchamp's signature on his 1917 work, "Fountain", any written form of communication may be considered literacy. Although incorporating each and every approach to literacy practices into the classroom is a near impossible feat, the curriculum policy document encourages literacy educators to provide students with the opportunity to expose the students to a diverse range of literacy practices, while also working alongside the student to discover their literacy interests and the ways in which the learner may improve upon their literacy skills (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007).

Providing individuals with the opportunity to experience a multiplicity of literacy practices allows for students to carefully craft and refine their literacy skills in a manner that suits their own purposes as such practices are used to negotiate, develop, understand and evolve ones' identity (Barton *et al.*, 2000; Enriquez, 2011; Evans, 1996; Grote, 2006; Hall *et al.*, 2010; Hall, 2012a; Lillis *et al.*, 2001; Packer & Goicoechea, 2000; Street, 1994). The Ontario curriculum allows the school to act as a site where students have the opportunity to experience a diverse range of literacy practices that enable the student to not only understand that literacy practices are tools which may be framed and utilized to express oneself and communicate with others, but also to illustrate to the student that they have the ability to engage in a unique range of literacy practices that will allow them to reach a greater understanding of themselves and the world around them.

Although the Ontario curriculum policy document works to ensure that students experience a diverse range of literacy practices to pursue their own interests and acquire new forms of knowledge which will develop their understanding of themselves, the Royal

Commission on Learning's recommendation that a "literacy test be given to students, which they are required to pass before receiving their secondary school diploma" (Royal Commission on Learning 1995h, n.p.) restricts literacy practices to a discipline that may be measured and assessed in an objective manner. The definition of literacy practices is diminished by the EQAO which seeks to standardize literacy education. The OSSLT becomes an inaccurate reflection of the student's literacy skills as certain aspects of a student's literacy capabilities are disregarded in favour of the objectively measurable practices that display the effectiveness of the school's ability to provide students with employable skills.

Discussing the challenges that English departments in Ontario secondary schools face in regards to large-scale standardized literacy tests of education, Skerrett (2010) explains that "testable, literacy skills directed the [...] practice toward 'ensuring that [students] have the skills they're going to need' even while teachers did not necessarily believe that the test provided an accurate assessment of students' abilities" (p.650). The notion that an individual's literacy skills may be assessed through a single, unified assessment practices contradicts an understanding of literacy as a practice that cannot be defined as "one single, unified thing" (Street, 1994, p.139). Recommending that the provincial government incorporate a province-wide high-stakes test which students are required to successfully pass in order to graduate diminishes both the teachers' and students' ability to govern their own literacy education practices. The definition of literacy practices are transformed from a complex, abstract concept that draws from multiple forms of communication and text and reconstructs literacy practices into a measureable form that prohibits non-uniform results and ensures that only the production of a technically reproducible product is continually achieved and presented to the public and other education stakeholders.

The EQAO Regulating Literacy Practices

Noting that the Royal Commission on Learning's recommendations led to the creation of the EQAO, followed by the OSSLT, Furumoto's (2005) explanation of "school militarization" as the "production and control of knowledge, values, and ideas within schools that define how young people think about the world and their role in it" (p.200) establishes the notion that literacy practices cannot only be defined, but can also be controlled and regulated. Although a student's literacy strengths may lie in their ability to decipher a poem, or create a strong metaphor within their own creative writing, the report's recommendations that would eventually lead to the creation of the OSSLT reflect the government's ability to simultaneously adhere to the demands of the public and regulate the literacy practices students experience in Ontario's public education system.

The report's discussion regarding the purposes of education as a space that constructs the learner as an employable individual who is capable of transitioning from school to the workspace is further reflected in the *Framework* (EQAO, 2007) document, as well as the OSSLT. The *Framework* (EQAO, 2007) document references several national and international assessments to demonstrate that large-scale literacy assessments "determine the extent to which students near the end of compulsory education have acquired the knowledge and skills that are essential for full participation in society" (p.9). The EQAO defines literacy skills as an individual's ability to read and write in a manner that will enable them to participate in society. The discourse of social integration establishes the notion that the acceptance into a Western society demands for each individual to acquire specific literacy skills. The *Framework* (EQAO, 2007) document constructs the OSSLT as a tool to determine the student's ability to participate in Western society by

utilizing literacy skills that will allow the student to graduate, gain employment and contribute to the economy.

Fairbairn and Fox (2009) explain that “[standardized testing] is rooted in the belief that treating all learners in the same way, applying common standards of performance, will increase social integration” (p.11). The EQAO’s efforts to implement accountability measures that display the province’s ability to educate future citizens who will graduate from secondary education and participate in society is reflected in the EQAO’s discussion regarding the purposes of the OSSLT. By justifying the incorporation of the OSSLT into the province’s secondary education system as a means of ensuring social integration, the EQAO establishes the notion that if students are unable to achieve success on the OSSLT, they will not have the ability to gain employment and thus, will not have the ability to participate in society.

The EQAO defines the purposes of literacy practices as a form of communication that allows individuals to participate in the production of services and contribute to the economic activities in a Western society. Working to fulfill the purposes of education and determine the effectiveness of the Ontario education curriculum, the EQAO utilizes the OSSLT to govern and “strengthen national economic competitiveness, yet they do so in a way that entails adaption and accommodation to a pre-existing social order” (Pinto *et al.*, 2007, p.87). The EQAO is responsible to determine the quality and effectiveness of the province’s elementary and secondary education. The EQAO gives priority to literacy practices that display a student’s ability to conform to a pre-determined way of life and enter the workforce. The EQAO’s discourse of literacy and social integration in the *Framework* (EQAO, 2007) document allows the agency to establish literacy skills as the ability to participate in societal activities, specifically contributing to the economy through employment.

Discussing the purpose of literacy assessment practices as an evaluation of a student's capability to effectively engage with literacy practice that will allow them to participate in Western society, the EQAO ignores the complexity and multiplicity of literacy practices. Literacy is more than simply reading and writing (Archer, 2006; Barton *et al.*, 2000; Bickerstaff, 2012; Giampapa, 2010; Hall *et al.*, 2010). However, the EQAO's efforts to ensure that students are assessed on the OSSLT in a manner that reflects "objectivity and consistency" (EQAO, 2007, p.5) causes the complex definition of literacy to become ignored. Discussing the negative impact that high-stakes standardized testing, specifically the OSSLT, has on the learning experience in public schools, Ricci (2004) explains that as external influences regulate the learning, "the more control that is exercised from the outside, the less flexibility teachers and students have to creatively manipulate and therefore better their learning" (p.344). Although the OSSLT may determine the degree to which a student has acquired the minimal standard of literacy skills, the OSSLT *literacy* assessment ignores the unique strengths of each literacy learner. The OSSLT determines how well a student has conformed their skills and knowledge to a predefined understanding of literacy practices.

The OSSLT does not evaluate the complex literacy skills that each student holds because the nature of standardized literacy tests incorporate "'literacy' with 'standards' and, hence, with matters of assessment, measurement and testing" (Green 1999, p.393). Whether it is the multiple-choice questions, or written sections of the OSSLT, the literacy skills evaluated are skills that utilize a pre-defined understanding as to how the "texts are structured" (Kalantzis *et al.*, 2016, location 3646). The literacy approach adopted for the OSSLT cannot be exceedingly complicated, diverse, or multiple, because the OSSLT standardized test is evaluated in a

singular, objectively measurable manner. The EQAO sacrifices the unique individual student for a standard product that may be easily integrated into a pre-existing social order.

The EQAO Defining Literacy Practices: Critical Literacy

Students, as well as teachers, principals, and school boards, are pressured to ensure that students achieve success on the OSSLT. Researchers have noted that the EQAO's jurisdiction to dictate what literacy skills a student is required to obtain in order to graduate manipulates the literacy education that students receive in Ontario public secondary schools (Klinger & Luce-Kapler, 2007; Luce-Kapler & Klinger, 2005; Pinto *et al.*, 2007; Skerrett, 2010; Takeuchi, 2008; Volante, 2007; Wal & Ryan, 2014). The EQAO's authority to regulate and determine the quality and effectiveness of Ontario's literacy education reflects the notion that "*literacy practices are patterned by social institutions and power relationships, and some literacies are more dominant, visible and influential than others*" (Barton *et al.*, 2000, p.11). The EQAO draws from the Ontario education curriculum policy documents to define literacy practices as a communal learning experience that provides students with the opportunity to engage with a variety of different literary genres (EQAO, 2007). However, the OSSLT does not allow students to display their literacy knowledge and skills through some forms and genres, such as "poetry, [...] biographies [...] résumés" (EQAO, 2007, p.12), and so forth. The high number of multiple-choice questions within the OSSLT reflects the EQAO's efforts to ensure that each student is evaluated in a consistently objective manner. As a result, many forms of expression and methods of literacy practices are disregarded due to the notion that such literacy practices may not be evaluated in a standardized manner.

Disregarding the complexity of literacy, the literacy practices presented on the OSSLT do not ask the student to critically examine a text. Isolating the student, requiring each student to

individually answer multiple-choice questions and adhere to predetermined literacy standards to display reading and writing skills, the OSSLT does not invite the student to “critique, and engage [with] multiple texts [...] to create the classroom as a public space where all ideas, even those that fabricate our lives, can be scrutinized” (Brannon *et al.*, 2000, p.16). Critical literacy practices exist within a community of individuals who may examine, critique and explore the social, historical, cultural and political aspects of a text in order to better understand how the texts shapes, and is shaped by, such influences. Critical literacy practices allow individuals to better “understand the ways things are constructed in the world by people's values and actions. Its assumption is that the world of learning is not simply a series of rules to be obeyed, facts to be learned and knowledge authorities to be followed” (Kalantzis *et al.*, 2016, location 4338-4340). Critical literacy guides an individual’s interaction with a text to actively analyse and uncover underlying messages and biases within the text. Critical literacy skills allow students to engage in a transformative reading or writing experience where their perspective for their own work, or the work of another author, expands beyond the text itself and allows the students to recognize how external influences shape their ongoing understanding of the text.

The critical analysis of the *Framework* (EQAO, 2007) document and the OSSLT sample test demonstrates that the EQAO does not provide students with the opportunity to display their critical literacy skills. The absence of critical literacy practices on the OSSLT illustrates that the student’s literacy education favours a standardized learning experience which may be measured (Green, 1999), rather than explored. The EQAO’s authority to determine which literacy practices are included on the OSSLT, and which are not included, reduces the definition of literacy practices into one that simplifies the transformative power of critical literacy and creates a hierarchal ordering of literacy practices. The public’s demand for increased accountability that

resulted in the legislative creation of the EQAO authorizes the agency to regulate which “forms of literacy [...] is *required*” (Takeuchi, 2008, p.494) for students to learn, creating a hierarchal dependency on the OSSLT to determine which forms of literacy practices reflect an effective education system (Ricci, 2004). As a literacy assessment, the literacy practices not included on the OSSLT establishes the notion that the literate student is not regarded as an individual who is capable of writing poetry, creating a résumé pertaining to a specific career, and so forth, rather, the literate individual is someone who has acquired the skills to achieve success on the OSSLT. Providing no feedback regarding the students’ literacy skills, students are left to assume that the experience of engaging in a literacy practice occurs within a single moment and cannot be critically assessed, nor provided with any form of constructive criticism and improved.

When students are provided with the opportunity to engage in literacy practices, the EQAO structures such questions on the OSSLT in a manner that focuses “more on demonstrating formulaic writing structures as opposed to literacy” (Klinger & Luce-Kapler, 2007, p.43). So long as the students comply with the description of the writing “Task” as outlined in each writing section (see Appendix D, Appendix E, Appendix G, Appendix K), students will achieve success on the OSSLT. Although the OSSLT may reflect a student’s ability to follow instructions and display literacy skills that will allow the individual to participate in society, “standardized testing leads to compliance [...] and marginalizes ethical discourse” (Ricci, 2004, p. 359). The critical analysis reveals a strong social and economic discourse that works to ensure the province’s education system provides student’s with the skills that will allow them to gain employment once graduated. However, the EQAO’s objective to create a form of assessment that will objectively determine the quality and effectiveness of Ontario’s curriculum education warps the definition of literacy practices. The OSSLT multiple-choice questions and writing activities present a

“technical undertaking, not a critical one” (Pinto *et al.*, 2007, p.98). As a result of standardizing literacy education for the sake of a reproducible method of evaluation, the unique strengths, interests and needs of each individual student is replaced for a consistent product that accurately reflects the predefined quality and effectiveness of the province’s education system. The EQAO draws from a technical rational perspective of education to ensure that Ontario’s literacy education is accurately regulated and governed.

The OSSLT evaluates the students’ literacy skills through their response to literacy practices relating to the structure of the text; multiple-choice questions instructing students to define the meaning of a specific word (for examples of such questions in the OSSLT, see Appendix A, question number 2; Appendix C, question number 4; Appendix F, question number 1; Appendix I, question number 6), display their understanding as to why a certain paragraphs and sentences are structured in a certain manner (for examples of such questions in the OSSLT, see appendix A, question number 5; Appendix B; Appendix F, questions number 2 and 4; Appendix H; Appendix I, questions number 3 and 4), or demonstrate their understanding of formal and conventional uses of grammar and punctuation (for examples of such questions in the OSSLT, see Appendix A, question number 4; Appendix B, questions number 3 and 4; Appendix C, question number 2; Appendix F, question number 4; Appendix I, question number 4; Appendix J, question number 2) reflect the EQAO’s emphasis on conventional literacy skills that require individuals to adhere to previously established rules regarding literacy practices. The critical analysis of the OSSLT sample test demonstrates that literacy practices are defined by the EQAO as a measurable product which may be obtained by a student and displayed on paper. However, Freire and Macedo (1987) argue that literacy acts, not as “merely a technical skill to be acquired, but as a necessary foundation for cultural action for freedom, a central aspect of what it

means to be a self and socially constituted agent” (p.7). The EQAO diminishes the complexity of literacy in an attempt to adhere to the purposes of education and reconstruct literacy practices as something that an individual is required to acquire in order to participate in society. By redefining literacy practices to align the acts of reading and writing to the confinements of a large-scale, high-stakes standardized test, the EQAO pressures students to conform their literacy learning experience into a pass or fail grade. As a result, the students are robbed of the opportunity to analyse and reflect upon their culture, society and who they are as human beings.

Arguing that the OSSLT restricts students from properly displaying critical, as well as creative, literacy skills, Pinto *et al.*, (2007) scrutinize the EQAO’s assessment methods as they do not “call on students to demonstrate critical thinking or critical analysis, nor to respond in meaningful ways to the readings” (p.98). The conventional grammar practices reflect a didactic approach to literacy as students are expected to comply with the “formal rules of what is presented as the one, correct way to write” (Kalantzis *et al.*, 2016, location 2051). Working to incorporate standard accountability measures regarding student learning, the EQAO implements multiple-choice questions onto the standardized test as a means of objectively measuring the literacy skills students acquire in Ontario public schools. Thus, the literacy practices presented on the OSSLT contain “objective and quantifiable” (Fanetti *et al.*, 2010, p.77) assessment practices that objectively measure the students’ literacy skills.

The students are not expected to critically engage in the literacy practices on the OSSLT, rather, students are expected to complete the standardized test by following instructions and demonstrating their ability to decipher the literal meaning of the text. For example, the sixth question of “Section A” instructs the student to explain why “Lizarda [is] a good choice for [the] internship” (see Appendix A); the question does not allow the student to critically examine the

effectiveness of the internship and demands that the student accept the notion that the internship is a beneficial decision. Throughout the OSSLT, the literacy assessment practices evaluate the student's ability to adhere to the formal conventions of reading and writing practices (EQAO, 2007, p.12). However, while some literacy practices allow an individual to properly decode a text, the steps towards participating in society as a moral, political and social *individual* cannot occur if critical literacy, and other literacy skills are ignored (Finn, 2009). Due to the complexity of literacy practices, the government creates the EQAO through legislation as an authoritative power mechanism that will redefine the literacy education within Ontario public schools in order to preserve authority over its citizens by displaying the degree to which Ontario public schools contribute to the economic needs of the present and future.

The OSSLT constructs literacy as a product which exists in a social environment and serve a social purpose. The successful completion of the OSSLT signifies an individual's ability to not question society, but rather, to "become passive subjects rather than active agents" (Wal & Ryan, 2014, p.5). Successful completion of the OSSLT demonstrates the student's ability to comply with specific, structured literacy practices. While the student is influenced to act as a passive, productive and dependable citizen whom will contribute to the ongoing functioning of society, the student is robbed of the opportunity to think critically of the world around them; the student is instead domesticated, regulated and constructed as a product that will be passively integrated into Western society and serve the economy. The EQAO establishes literacy practices as something that must be followed, rather than criticized.

The EQAO Defining Literacy Practices: Functional Literacy

The EQAO governs literacy education, diminishing the complex definition of literacy practices and placing emphasis on literacy practices in order "qualify, measure, appraise, and

hierarchize” (Foucault, 1978 p.144) various aspects of literacy practices and literacy education. The literacy practices within Ontario’s education curriculum are interpreted through a technical rational perspective that determines which literacy practices are beneficial for the overall economy and which are not. The EQAO’s authority to dictate which literacy practices are included on the literacy assessment, and which are not, reflects the compromise made by education stakeholders who replace independent learning with a “standardized diagnostic, remedial, and reporting procedures [which] cast strongly in a ‘lingering basics’” (Lankshear, 1998, p.362). Adopting Lankshear’s (1998) discussion of the ‘lingering basics’ approach to literacy practices, Pinto *et al.*, (2007) explain that the “lingering basics, or functional literacy, conception is pragmatic in its emphasis on readying people for the necessities of daily life” (p.86). The EQAO uses the OSSLT as a governing tool that measures the student’s ability to act in accordance with the rules and regulations they will encounter not only on the test, but throughout the remainder of their lives once graduated; whether an individual is expected to adhere to the instructions on the OSSLT, or the instructions on a workplace procedure manual, the EQAO incorporates literacy practices that are regarded as useful literacy skills for employment and participation in society.

To ensure that the purposes of education are met and students “have acquired the knowledge and skills that are essential for full participation in society” (EQAO, 2007, p.9), the EQAO draws from literacy practices that reflect Verhoeven’s (1994) definition of “functional literacy” as a “systematic focus on context, social purpose, text structure, and language features from the early stages of literacy development” (p.441) in order to create its standardized test. The literacy practices on the OSSLT provide education stakeholders with the opportunity to understand whether or not students are acquiring the literacy skills that will allow them to

understand why a text is written, when and where the discussion takes place, who has written the text and who speaks within the text, as well as how the purpose of the written text is achieved.

Although functional literacy skills allow individuals to understand the literal meaning of a text and communicate with others, “[functional literacy] skirts moral possibilities of literacy and orients itself according to the practical concerns that serve the economic needs of a particular community” (Endres, 2001, p.401-402). Functional literacy practices disregard ethical considerations of reading and writing, replacing the moralistic conceptions of literacy as a powerful forms of communication with the aspects of literacy practices that provide individuals with the skills to comprehend what actions may be taken to adhere to the rules and regulations are deemed appropriate by forms of authority and the greater society. The EQAO works alongside the government and schools to ensure that students gain the ability to participate in society and support the economy; the functional approach to literacy provides individuals with the knowledge to participate in society, socialize with others and support the economy. While the EQAO mainly draws from a functional approach to literacy practices determine the student’s ability to decode a text and gain an understanding as to how the text functions in a certain manner, the authoritative influence that the EQAO has on the student’s literacy learning experience draws attention to the notion that students will graduate with a narrow set of literacy skills that does not include critical literacy skills.

Through the implementation of various literacy practices that focus on context, text structure, as well as the correct use of the “conventions of language—grammar, usage, spelling, and punctuation” (EQAO, 2007, p.12), the OSSLT prioritizes the functional approach to literacy practices. Although the functional approach to literacy practices display the Ontario public education system’s ability to provide students with the knowledge and skills required to

participate in society and contribute to the economy, an emphasis on functional literacy practices is “pragmatic” (Pinto *et al.*, 2007, p.86) due to the notion that other literacy practices are disregarded as a result.

Several literacy practices within the OSSLT that instruct the student to consider “career exploration” (for examples of such questions in the OSSLT, see Appendix A, question number 6), environmental issues (for an example in the OSSLT, see Appendix D), the employment of high-school students (for an example from the OSSLT, see Appendix G), and other literacy practices relating to economic issues illustrates that the EQAO utilizes a limited definition of literacy that “focuses on the meaning of real-world texts and the ways in which different types of texts are structured to serve different purposes” (Kalantzis *et al.*, 2016, location 3646). “On the premise that a strong educational system is vital to the future” (Royal Commission on Learning, 1995c, n.p.), literacy practices are regulated and assessed through the implementation of high-stakes standardized testing to ensure that students are equipped with the knowledge and skills that “are essential for full participation in society” (EQAO, 2007, p.9). The literacy practices on the OSSLT incorporate literacy practices that individuals may encounter outside of the school in order for the EQAO to evaluate the degree to which the province’s education system prepares students to participate in society and gain employment once graduated.

Demanding that the government strengthen the quality of the public education system and implement accountability measures that will determine whether or not Ontario’s public schools prepare future citizens to contribute to the economy, the OSSLT is constructed as a mechanism that will regulate and restrict literacy practices that are not perceived as “a technically reproducible product” (Anderson, 1980, p.46). Barton *et al.*, (2000) argue that forms of governance and knowledge are embedded into socially powerful institutions, such as education

through the prioritization of certain literacy practices. Noting that the functional approach to literacy dominates the literacy practices assessed on the OSSLT as both the test and functional approach to literacy focus on reading and writing skills in relation to structure and social purpose, functional literacy practices are constructed *as* literacy practices on the OSSLT; other literacy practices, such as critical literacy, are non-existent on the standardized test to ensure that the standardized test objectively measures the students' literacy skills. The complex definition of literacy practices that enable an individual to gain a stronger understanding of the complex reality that surrounds them and communicate the experience with themselves, and others, is sacrificed for the sake of informing the public that they need not worry about the state of the public education system.

Literacy practices that students acquire throughout their primary and secondary education experiences must include literacy skills that extend beyond simply functional literacy. However, Green (1999) explains that the efforts to implement standardized tests that associate “‘literacy’ with ‘standards’ and, hence, with matters of assessment, measurement and testing” (p.394) are embedded within a discourse of functional literacy. While Green (1999) does not relate the discussion to that of the OSSLT and the EQAO’s definition of literacy practices, the author’s discussion illustrates that functional literacy is given priority for executing literacy assessments that are objectively measured. While the definition of functional literacy in education establishes the notion that students will gain the knowledge and skills to “productively inhabit our world and strengthen national economic competitiveness, [...] they do so in a way that entails adaption and accommodation to a pre-existing social order” (Pinto *et al.*, 2007, p.87). The EQAO utilizes the OSSLT as a form of surveillance that will dictate whether or not school boards, teachers, students, and so forth, are acting in accordance with the objectives of literacy education. The

literacy skills students are required to obtain in order to graduate from the secondary level of education in Ontario is exploited by the government to ensure that schools continue to support the economy.

The school serves the economy by providing students with the skill training necessary to participate in “the world of work” (Furlong, 1992, p.168). Thus, the EQAO can be regarded as the “normalizing gaze, a surveillance” (Foucault, 1984, p.197) that determines which literacy practices are effective for the purposes of defining a citizen as literate, and also determines who qualifies as literate and punishes those who are not literate. Literacy education is utilized by the EQAO, as well as the provincial government, as a technique of power that allows the agency to integrate a level of surveillance over the citizens of Ontario without directly revealing themselves as an authoritative body within the school (Graham & Neu, 2004). Therefore, the OSSLT may be regarded as a technology utilized by EQAO “to organize, regulate, and monitor” (Spencer, 2012, p.133) the learning experiences that occur within the walls of the Ontario public classrooms. The OSSLT and the functional literacy practices are representative of Foucault’s technique of power that is utilized by the EQAO to construct the belief that a new, efficient method of governing the education system is capable of objectively evaluating the effectiveness of secondary education, without being burdened by the influences of political parties, nor teachers unions, or other influences already involved in Ontario’s education system.

The EQAO is provided with an autonomous level of authority to create a technology that will govern, measure, evaluate and display the degree to which the purposes of education are fulfilled by schools, teachers, and students. The surveillance methods put in place are simply regarded as a ‘normal’ outcome; the pressure to abandon any literacy skills that do not align with the literacy practices assessed on the standardized test is established as a necessary and natural

action individuals are expected to take to participate in society. Functional literacy is utilized by the EQAO in order to create a technology, the OSSLT, to measure and display the students' learnings.

The functional literacy practices incorporated into the OSSLT objectively assess the students' "ability to meet the reading and writing demands of an average day of an average person. [Functional literacy] [...] makes a person productive and dependable but not troublesome" (Finn, 2009, p.ix). The EQAO redefines literacy practices as a simplistic tool humans utilize to communicate with one another. The individual who does not achieve success on the OSSLT is regarded as a burden to society and requires further surveillance to ensure that they do not pose any threats to the Western society or the economy. The EQAO's definition of literacy practices utilizes a functional approach that disregards any aspect of literacy that does not directly benefit society and the support the economy. The EQAO and provincial government work to construct a public education system that provides students with the literacy skills to understand and follow rules, rather than reflect upon and critique rules. The OSSLT pressures students to adapt their literacy skills to a functional understanding of literacy which then influences students to abandon their ability to creatively critique societal norms, such as pursuing PSE or seeking employment after graduating. The EQAO and provincial government utilize the OSSLT to ensure that the citizens of Ontario do not act in any manner that would not support the economy. Those who achieve success on the OSSLT are dependable citizens of Ontario who may participate in society and contribute to the economy, without being troublesome, no capable of critiquing Western society and state of the economy.

The EQAO Defining Literacy Practices: Illiteracy & The Illiterate Identity

Students who fail to adapt their literacy knowledge and skills to the OSSLT evaluation run the risk of not graduating and thus, not participating in society, gaining employment, nor contributing to the economy; without a high school diploma, students will face much larger challenges when seeking employment. Requiring students to achieve success on the OSSLT in order to graduate, the EQAO's ability to establish certain literacy practices as superior to others promotes "functionally driven, narrow conceptions of critical thinking [...] aimed at outcomes tied to 'economic prosperity'" (Pinto & Portelli, 2009, p.9). Pinto and Portelli (2009) explain that the overriding concern to ensure that schools contribute to the economy by equipping students with the skills to obtain employment once graduated diminishes the possibility of acquiring the knowledge that will enable individuals to critically examine societal structures and norms that shape forms of communication and the relationships between people, groups, and all forms of life.

As critical literacy, and other literacy practices are regarded as less superior than the literacy practices assessed on standardized test, Lillis (2001) explains that "there is no justification for [...] associating [the] use of [dominant] literacy with cognitive development" (p.39-40). Simply because an individual is unable to disregard their own unique literacy strengths that stand outside the functional literacy practices incorporated into the OSSLT, such actions should not indicate whether or not an individual is literate. Research has shown that the publication of OSSLT results "builds pressure to conform" (Wal & Ryan, 2014, p.4) which cause students to "conduct themselves as passive subjects further serve to impact the identity and self-concept of the adolescent literacy learner" (Wal & Ryan, 2014, p.5). The EQAO's dominating

presence within the students' literacy learning experiences warp their understanding of, not only as to what constitutes literacy practices, but what constitutes a literate individual as well.

Literacy practices are shaped by social rules (Barton *et al.*, 2000); the EQAO draws from the notion that the public school system is incorporated into the society and support the economy in order to “regulate the use and distribution of texts, prescribing who may produce and have access” (Barton *et al.*, 2000, p.7-8). Through a narrow and restricted definition of literacy as a practice that gives priority to the functional approach, the EQAO and provincial government utilize OSSLT as a technology that governs how all citizens perceive the empowering tool of literacy practices; as students abandon their own unique literacy skills, their perception of the human's ability to communicate thoughts and critically examine, as well as act upon, the societal structures that continually shape the ways in which people interact with themselves, others and reality in general, is significantly affected. Students, teachers, the public, and other education stakeholders are influenced to accept literacy practices as a mechanism that can be measured and evaluated, but not changed or criticized. The limited definition of literacy practices on the OSSLT allows the EQAO to govern the ways in which individuals participate in literacy practices.

The literacy practices students experience throughout their lifetime will play a significant role in establishing their own identity, as well as an understanding of themselves and their relation to the world around them. The definition of literacy practices on the OSSLT influences individuals to perceive literacy practices in a certain manner, suggesting that the EQAO's authority to determine what literacy skills students are required to acquire before graduating will shape the student's identity. As previously stated, identity may be best defined as the formation of a one's understanding of themselves and their relation to the world around them (Barton *et al.*,

2000; Enriquez, 2011; Evans, 1996; Grote, 2006; Hall *et al.*, 2010; Hall, 2012a; Lillis *et al.*, 2001; Packer & Goicoechea, 2000; Street, 1994). Discussing the social functions of language and literacy learning in the classroom, Hall *et al.*, (2010) explain that “literacy learning leads to changes in identity” (p.234). The OSSLT may be regarded as a form of governance that disciplines the student to disregard any aspect of their identity that does not coincide with the behaviours one is expected to acquire in order to achieve success on the OSSLT.

Students who hold unique literacy strengths that stand outside the literacy practices assessed on the OSSLT are pressured to disregard such aspects of themselves in the pursuit of obtaining a literate identity that will enable them to participate in society. The impact that a student’s perception of their own literacy capabilities has on the ways in which they act and interact with others (Enriquez, 2011) may warp an individual’s identity and perception of their own capabilities as a result of the restrictive definition of literacy practices upheld by the public, the EQAO and the provincial government. The authority of the EQAO influences people to overlook the notion that one’s success on the OSSLT does not immediately suggest that they are literate or illiterate; although a student may not achieve success on the OSSLT, surely their ability to read text and reach the ninth grade in the Ontario public education system establishes them as a literate individual.

Students have claimed that the OSSLT is a stressful experience that influences their perception of their own capabilities beyond the classroom (Cheng *et al.*, 2007; Fairbairn & Fox, 2009; Kearns, 2011; Kearns, 2016; Main, 2008; Takeuchi, 2008; Wal & Ryan, 2014). Literacy is a complex practice and cannot be defined using a single, objective definition. However, the EQAO’s implementation of a standardized test standardizes the definition of literacy as a practice that is used to participate in society, gain employment. Thus, literacy practices are

established as a mechanism that “functions to either empower or disempower people” (Freire & Macedo 1987, p.141). The defining of literacy practices in the province’s education system has allowed the government to maintain authority over its citizens by authorizing the EQAO to determine whether or not a student is capable of participating in society; those who do not achieve success on the OSSLT cannot graduate, nor obtain employment. The illiterate individual is no longer regarded simply as one who does not achieve success on OSSLT, rather, the illiterate individual is regarded as one to be feared and isolated from the economic activities that occur outside of the school. Literacy is a power mechanism that controls how people interact in society.

Discussing the impact that the OSSLT has on a student’s understanding of literacy practices, as well as the construct of the illiterate individual, Kearns (2016) constructs a binary opposition between the literate and illiterate to demonstrate how the fear of the illiterate figure is used as an accountability measure and regulating instrument that governs how students, teachers, parents, and even those citizens who have long since graduated from the Ontario public education system, think and communicate within society. Kearns (2016) explains that the EQAO uses the OSSLT as a means of constructing the illiterate individual as one who cannot act independently. The illiterate figure is socially constructed as something to fear and is exploited by the EQAO and government in order to pressure the individuals to “[learn] that their knowledge is not valuable; they must learn to say what those in a position of authority want them to say” (Kearns, 2016, p.133). The voice of the individual is sacrificed in order to enter society. Fearful of becoming excluded from society and losing the opportunity to gain employment and contribute to the economy, the student is pressured to abandon their own unique literacy skills as they work to adapt their literacy skills to the literacy practices presented on the OSSLT.

Some students may have the fortunate ability to align their literacy knowledge and skills to the OSSLT and have the opportunity to preserve their own identity throughout their learning experiences and beyond. However, Martinez-Brawley (2000) explains that “standardized testing, by its very nature, denies the possibility of success to students whose experiences and strengths are ‘outside the standard’” (p.5-6). Thus, the figure of the illiterate individual pressures students to disregard their unique form of existence, their individual understanding of themselves and the world around them, and surrender their identity as they fear that they will be ostracized from society. Literacy may be regarded as both a powerful tool that individuals may use to question the fundamental aspects of society and become a knowledgeable individual who controls the ways in which they interact in reality, as well as an authoritative governing instrument that prohibits others from empowering themselves and transforming the world around them (Hall *et al.*, 2010). The OSSLT influences the student to relinquish their own knowledge and skills in the hopes that by conforming their own patterns of reading and writing to the literacy practices that are deemed acceptable by the EQAO, they will be accepted as a literate citizen by the public, EQAO and government.

Students who have strong literacy skills and are engaged in creative practices may face challenges on the OSSLT because their literacy skills are not aligned with the functional approach to literacy on the test (Klinger *et al.*, 2006). The very existence of the illiterate individual “minimizes differences between young people” (Kearns, 2016, p.125). The individual is pressured to disregard their interests in specific literacy practices not evaluated on the OSSLT as they attempt to adapt themselves to the Western society. Although students have the freedom to participate in various literacy practices in their daily lives, many students face difficulty when considering forms of literacy practices that exist beyond the walls of the classroom (Barton *et al.*,

2000, p.166). The restrictive definition of literacy restricts the individual from appreciating the multiple forms of communication that enable humans to express themselves through the medium of language and create a stronger understanding of our existence. As students are influenced by the EQAO to value a definition of literacy practices that draws from a functional approach, students are simultaneously influenced to conform their identity to one that complies with the norms of society and will be easily integrated into Western society. The definition of literacy practices employed by the EQAO into the OSSLT manipulates students to believe that the literacy practices on the standardized test draw from an all-encompassing definition of literacy practices. However, the limited definition simultaneously limits the individual's ability to understand their own capabilities and future opportunities that may lay ahead in school, post-secondary education and beyond.

Providing the EQAO with the authority to create a form of technology that will determine what constitutes a high quality, effective public education system (EQAO Act, 1996), the definition of literacy is constructed as a finite object that is measurable. The OSSLT utilized as the form of technology which determines whether or not the student has acquired the specific literacy skills that demonstrate their ability to meet the “minimum level of literacy” (EQAO 2007, p. 10) as defined by the EQAO. Freire and Macedo (1987) explain that “just as illiteracy does not explain the causes of massive unemployment, bureaucracy, or the growing racism in major cities [...] literacy neither automatically reveals nor guarantees social, political, and economic freedom” (p.48). The EQAO constructs the false notion that so long as Ontario schools provide students with the literacy skills to achieve success on the OSSLT, the society will flourish and the economy will be supported.

The EQAO creates a definition of illiteracy as the absence of specific literacy skills that will support the economy and allow for a cooperative society. However, the existence of the illiterate individual hides the notion that a literate individual who has achieved success on the OSSLT may not necessarily have the skills to participate in society and contribute to the economy. The OSSLT distracts the citizens of Ontario from questioning their own government, the ongoing state of the society, as well as the state of the economy, because the EQAO works to assure people that its methods of assessment flawlessly produce citizens who will contribute to the economy and participate in society. Issues, such as racism or higher unemployment rates may no longer be discussed in relation to Ontario's public education system because the EQAO establishes the notion that such issues simply stem from a small minority which is contained and regulated.

Discussing issues regarding poverty and the problematic minority student within the education system, Connell (1994) explains that the division between the advantaged and disadvantaged student is "fundamentally arbitrary [...] so as to indicate a modest-sized minority" (p.130). Substituting the figure of the illiterate individual for the disadvantaged student, the EQAO can be seen to utilize the technology, that is, the OSSLT, as a means of continually informing education stakeholders that while the illiterate individual continues to exist, the authority the EQAO has over the education system must be maintained and preserved in order to work towards maintaining an acceptable outcome of successful OSSLT test-takers and literate citizens. At the same time, the notion that the illiterate figure pressures students, teachers, schools, and education stakeholders to fear the existence of an education system without the guidance of the EQAO, the illiterate, modest-sized minority, will never cease to exist because the modest-size minority creates and maintains a dependency on the EQAO; the EQAO exploits the

illiterate individual in order to preserve its authority and continue to ensure that students do not acquire the empowering literacy skills that exist beyond the literacy practices evaluated on the OSSLT. The society and economy are not brought into question, nor criticized, so long as Ontario schools continue to display a high percentage of successful OSSLT test-takers.

The EQAO Literacy Practices Limiting The Learner in School and Beyond

The ways in which an individual perceives the purposes of literacy practices, as well as how to engage in literacy practices will play a significant role in how an individual understands who they are as a human beings and what they are capable of achieving throughout their lifetime (Barton *et al.*, 2000; Enriquez, 2011; Evans, 1996; Grote, 2006; Hall *et al.*, 2010; Lillis *et al.*, 2001; Packer & Goicoechea, 2000; Street, 1994). When students are led to believe that they have poor literacy skills, or are illiterate, they may become disengaged from the literacy learning experience altogether (Hall, 2012a). The pressure students face to achieve success on the OSSLT forces students to conform their own learning goals to the accepted standards for a secondary education diploma. However, as students abandon their own literacy skills in order to achieve success on the OSSLT, they are deprived of the opportunity to understand how literacy practices not only extend beyond the definition presented by the EQAO, but are valuable tools that they may use in a PSE setting, as well as outside of the academic realm (Luce-Kapler & Klinger, 2005). As students conform their literacy skills to achieve success on the OSSLT, the student's learning behaviors and academic desires are reshaped and warped under the authority of the EQAO's definition of literacy practices. The student's perception of their own capabilities is limited as a result of the limited definition of literacy practices.

Due to the nature of the EQAO's literacy assessment, the student's "written work on the OSSLT is scored as first-draft (unpolished) writing" (EQAO, 2007, p.10) and constructive

feedback is not given to the test-taker. When critical literacy education is undermined and ignored, the classroom environment is transformed into an isolated setting where each student is expected to behave in a certain manner and learn without drawing from their unique identities to contribute to the community (Brannon *et al.*, 2010; Volante, 2006). As the needs of each unique student is put in jeopardy for the sake of ensuring that all students are assessed in an objectively standardized manner, the communal learning experience is diminished and without any personal feedback regarding their academic success, the learner may feel unfulfilled and unsure of their own capabilities (Amrein & Berliner, 2003; Horn, 2005). Students are then left unmotivated to challenge themselves academically and may disregard the opportunity to enroll in courses which would prepare the learner for PSE experiences (Long *et al.*, 2012). The EQAO's presence in the public education system affects the students' learning experience as the classroom environment is altered and transformed from a community that provides support and constructive feedback, into an isolated setting where students are required to comply with the rules and regulations of the test. The OSSLT replaces the student centered learning experience with a standardized society and economy-centered learning experience.

During the completion of the OSSLT, the student is forced to participate in a learning experience that prohibits them from receiving constructive feedback and understanding the ways in which they may improve their learning. Discussing the possible impact that high-stakes standardized testing has on the student's learning experience and their life beyond high school, Fanetti *et al.*, (2010) note that there is a "fundamental incompatibility between the product model of standardized testing as quality control and the process model of student-centered learning. In short, standardized testing is antithetical to real learning, lifelong or otherwise" (p.81). The high-stakes standardized test diminishes the purposes of the education as a space that should "[foster]

a love of learning as the foundation for continuous lifelong learning, by nurturing the natural curiosity of students” (Royal Commission on Learning, 1995e, n.p.). Learning, as well as literacy learning and literacy practices, are reduced to a single act that now occurs when a student sits at a desk and spends up to several hours completing a single assessment. Students are lumped together and their learning experience is determined by a faceless external organization, the EQAO, which informs each student and the entire public whether or not the student is a literate person who may enter society. The OSSLT, transforms the classroom environment into an isolated space where communication and constructive criticism are nonexistent.

The learning experience concludes with the completion of a standardized test and nothing more. When the OSSLT is complete, the EQAO determines whether the student is literate or illiterate. In doing so, the authority of the EQAO to determine who is literate simultaneously influences students to perceive literacy practices through a limited definition that causes students to become “passive subjects rather than active agents” (Wal & Ryan, 2014, p. 5). The EQAO’s definition of literacy practices may restrict the student from appreciating the transformative power of reading and writing that will enable them to gain a stronger understanding of who they are and how a certain text shapes, and is shaped by, various influences. The EQAO’s presence in the public education system as an external form of authority that determines and displays the quality and effectiveness of Ontario schools influences the public to rely upon the EQAO to regulate the ways in which students learn and how the purposes of literacy and education are perceived. As a result of the public’s dependency on the EQAO to govern the activities that take place within Ontario schools, an individual’s learning experience is restricted under the authority of the agency. Without the critical literacy skills that one may use to reflect upon, and change the

learning experience that takes place in Ontario schools, students are influenced to passively accept the education experience they receive under the guidance of the EQAO.

As individuals are pressured to adhere to specific rules and are restricted from questioning figures of authority, such as the EQAO, their experiences after graduating high school may be overwhelmingly unfamiliar. Kurlander and Larsen (2013) explain “that most public secondary and postsecondary systems of education are badly misaligned” (p.2). Students may graduate from Ontario high schools without the proper literacy skills that will allow them to reflect upon the academic decisions they make and participate in a PSE environment. As students are continually expected to prepare for the OSSLT, their perceptions of education and how to achieve success are shaped by the literacy practices presented on the OSSLT, causing many students to miss the opportunity to acquire more complex skills that will allow them to achieve success in PSE (Luce-Kapler & Klinger, 2005). Standardized tests influence both students and education stakeholders to assume that the assessment indicates the degree to which an individual is capable of utilizing certain skills beyond the test itself. However, “the language on tests is [...] different from that which students may encounter in everyday academic settings” (Fairbairn & Fox, 2009, p.14). Although the EQAO’s definition of literacy practices does not accurately represent the complex, multiple definitions of literacy practices discussed elsewhere (Archer, 2006; Barton *et al.*, 2000; Bickerstaff, 2012; Giampapa, 2010), the authority of the EQAO establishes the notion that its definition of literacy practices is sufficient for individuals in high school and beyond. The EQAO’s ability to prevent students from graduating pressures students to abandon the skills which they may use to achieve success in a PSE setting.

Standardized testing must not restrict students from obtaining the skills that will allow them to achieve success when pursuing PSE. As a result of the significant influence that

standardized tests may play in a student's learning experience, Horn (2005) explains that such testing should "be weighed, in part, against the potential indirect effects that such decisions may have on college access" (p.338). A single, high-stakes test that determines whether or not a student will graduate may also determine whether or not a student will attend PSE. Martin (2012) reinforces the notion that students who face difficulty in achieving success on the OSSLT are influenced to pursue post-secondary careers in the workforce, rather than consider continuing their learning process and attending a PSE institution. Research has shown that the students' opportunities to engage in a variety of educational experiences is diminished as a result of the emphasis placed on preparing for the OSSLT, influencing many students to ignore the benefits of the literacy assessment and "[look] beyond their school years to consider the impact of the OSSLT on their future" (Luce-Kapler & Klinger, 2005, p.167). The Ontario elementary and secondary education systems must allow students to experience a variety of disciplinary skills which they may utilize once graduated. While literacy practices presented on the OSSLT are vital to the students' post-secondary life, other practices are also similarly significant and cannot be disregarded. The EQAO's definition of literacy practices should be continually critiqued in order to understand the potential implications that such a definition has on students, their perception of their own capabilities, their perception of the world around them, and their lifestyles within an academic setting and beyond.

Concluding Remarks: The EQAO's Definition of Literacy Practices & the Potential Implications of the Definition for Students

The Royal Commission on Learning's report establishes Ontario public schools as a space that is expected be controlled and evaluated in order to ensure that the education students receive is one that will allow them to contribute to society once graduated. The Commission's

report provides a fundamental understanding of how the provincial government, the public, and other education stakeholders understand the purposes of education as a vital organ to the economy. The report's recommendations that have created the EQAO through legislation allows the EQAO to determine the effectiveness and quality of Ontario's education. The EQAO's authority to determine what literacy practices are effective and which are not demonstrates that the EQAO has the ability to exclude literacy practices that do not directly strengthen the economy.

The EQAO's explanation that the student's success OSSLT will reflect their ability to participate in society, those who do not achieve success are prohibited from graduating and thus, prohibited from participating in society, gaining employment, engaging in a community and contributing to the economy. However, the EQAO's definition of literacy practices emphasizes a functional approach that governs how citizens understand the transformative nature of literacy practices. The OSSLT may be regarded as a form of governance that disciplines the student to disregard any aspect of their identity that does not coincide with the behaviours one is expected to acquire in order to achieve success on the OSSLT. The EQAO pressures others to abandon the literacy practices that are not assessed on the OSSLT or face the risk of being regarded as an illiterate individual who may not participate in society. The EQAO creates a definition of illiteracy as the absence of specific literacy skills that will support the economy and allow for a cooperative society. However, the existence of the illiterate individual hides the notion that a literate individual who has achieved success on the OSSLT may not necessarily have the skills to participate in society and contribute to the economy.

The illiterate individual is more than simply an individual who does not achieve success on OSSLT. The EQAO establishes the illiterate individual is regarded as one to be feared and

isolated from the economic activities that occur outside of the school. The EQAO uses the definition of illiteracy and notion of the illiterate individual to maintain its authority and ensure that the collective understanding of literacy is passively accepted as a practice that does not contain critical literacy skills. As a result of the narrow definition of literacy produced by the EQAO, the absence of proper critical literacy skills allow the EQAO and provincial government to ensure that the society and economy are not brought into question, nor criticized. The EQAO's ability to prevent students from graduating pressures students to abandon the skills which they may use to achieve success in a PSE setting. Students are grouped together and labelled literate, or enter the modest-sized minority of the illiterates. Literacy is a power mechanism controls how people interact in society.

Chapter Nine: Conclusion

Performing a critical analysis to analyze documents associated with the OSSLT and consider the EQAO's definition of literacy practices, as well as the agency's perception of the purposes of literacy practices, this MRP illustrates that the EQAO and provincial government restrict the complex definition of literacy practices for the purposes of governing the citizens of Ontario. The illiterate figure pressures students to abandon critical literacy skills in order to be accepted into society once they have graduated. The significant authority the EQAO has over the students' literacy experiences in Ontario public schools reduces their ability to examine numerous aspects of a text, as well as communicate their own thoughts. As a result, the EQAO jeopardizes the individual's, as well as a community's, ability to critically examine themselves, the world around them, and the ways in which existing structures shape, and are shaped by, their own perception of reality. Noting that the functional approach to literacy dominates the literacy practices assessed on the OSSLT as both the test and functional approach to literacy focus on

reading and writing skills in relation to structure and social purpose, functional literacy practices are constructed *as* literacy practices on the OSSLT. This MRP contributes to ongoing the ongoing research of literacy education by demonstrating that the EQAO and provincial government represent forms of authority who utilize their power to redefine literacy practices in a manner than enables them to govern others and employ literacy as a power mechanism that controls how people interact in society. The OSSLT overlooks the unique needs of each individual student for the sake of a reproducible product which is utilized by the government to regulate public education and govern literacy learning.

The public's faith that the purposes of education are fulfilled is substituted by the fear that public education can no longer sustain in the new global economy. As the purposes of education are reflected in the degree to which schools produce individuals who will contribute to the economy, the concern to ensure that the province's education system fulfills its purpose causes the immeasurable nature of learning for the sake of learning to be restricted and confined into a product that may be measured and displayed for the public to see. The wonders of the student mind are disregarded and substituted for the profitable citizen who will contribute to the economy. The EQAO and provincial government's use of the OSSLT as a means of ensuring that students may enter society and contribute to the economy once graduated establishes the notion that if students are unable to achieve success on the OSSLT, they will not have the ability to gain employment and thus, will not have the ability to participate in society. The OSSLT determines how well a student has conformed their skills and knowledge to a predefined understanding of literacy practices. Although providing students with the knowledge and skills to successfully contribute to the economy is a necessary objective Ontario schools strive to achieve, the EQAO's overemphasis on the standardization of literacy practices for the sake of the society

and economy restricts individuals from gaining the critical literacy skills that would enable them to better understand the functioning of the economy and collectively work to understand how to better the economy, rather than conform to the economy.

The demands of the public to ensure that the effectiveness of education is measured by the ability to produce citizens who will contribute to the economy causes the definition of literacy to become a limited, measurable practice. Fearing the future of an unstable economy, the public and other education stakeholders anxiously demand for the schools to “‘do more,’ on the premise that a strong educational system is vital to the future” (Royal Commission on Learning, 1995c, n.p.). The Royal Commission on Learning report and curriculum document establishes the notion that education does not stand isolated from the surrounding economy, but is instead a space where students may have the opportunity to understand who they are as humans and become knowledgeable individuals who can contribute to the economy. Responding to the demands of the public, the discussion of the purposes of education within the report reflect the increasing concern that students are expected to obtain the knowledge and skills that will allow them to gain employment once graduated.

The purposes of education discussed are adopted and integrated into the objectives of the EQAO outlined in the 1996 *Education Quality and Accountability Office Act* (EQAO Act, 1996) and the EQAO’s *Framework: Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test* document (EQAO, 2007). The discourse of the relation between education and the economy is utilized by the government and the EQAO to transform the abstract relation into a tangible form that may be measured. Through the creation of a technology that allows the EQAO to regulate student learning, monitor literacy learning outcomes, measure the quality of the literacy education that students receive, and produce a tangible product that education stakeholders may use to understand the

effectiveness of the province's public education system, the EQAO holds the authority to determine which literacy practices are regarded as useful. The tangible product displayed to education stakeholders exists through the technology of the large-scale, high-stakes standardized test, the OSSLT. The EQAO's authority to determine which literacy practices are included on the OSSLT creates a hierarchal ordering of literacy practices that prioritizes those literacy practices which may be objectively evaluated.

As a literacy assessment, the literacy practices not included on the OSSLT establishes the notion that the literate student is not regarded as an individual who is capable of writing poetry, creating a résumé pertaining to a specific career, and so forth, rather, the literate individual is someone who has acquired the skills to achieve success on the OSSLT. The successful completion of the OSSLT signifies an individual's ability to not critically analyse society, but rather, to act in compliance with society. Successful completion of the OSSLT demonstrates the student's ability to comply with specific, structured literacy practices. However, the pressure to ensure that the province's public education system demonstrates its ability to provide students with the literacy skills necessary for life beyond the walls of the classroom and in the ever-changing economy causes the complex definition of literacy, including critical and creative literacy practices, to be ignored for the sake of informing education stakeholders that they no longer need to worry about the state of the education system. The government creates the EQAO as an instrument which allows the EQAO to gain authority over the technique of power, the school, and implement its own technology, the OSSLT, as a means of governing the people of the state; the public, and other education stakeholders, are influenced to believe that the EQAO is an essential form of authority that has the ability to best determine the effectiveness of the province's public education system.

The EQAO utilizes the OSSLT as a form of surveillance that will dictate whether or not school boards, teachers, students, and so forth, are acting in accordance with the objectives of literacy education. Through the fear of the uncertain future of the economy and illiterate individuals who cannot support themselves once graduated, the surveillance method of the OSSLT is simply regarded as a normal, necessary outcome. The student, as well as teachers, schools, and so forth, are constructed as groups who require governance. However, as the EQAO utilizes the OSSLT as a form of surveillance to pressure students to acquire the skills that will allow them to be regarded as 'literate,' the 'illiterate' student is simultaneously constructed as a figure which is to be feared, controlled and disciplined. Students who fail to adapt their literacy knowledge and skills to the OSSLT evaluation run the risk of not graduating and thus, not participating in society; without a high school diploma, students will face much larger challenges when seeking employment. The illiterate individual is not simply an individual who cannot achieve success on the OSSLT. The illiterate individual is constructed as a figure who cannot enter society as a reliable, employable human who can communicate with others and participate in society. The illiterate figure is constructed as something to be feared and isolated from the economic activities that occur outside of the school. Students, teachers, the public, and other education stakeholders are influenced to accept literacy practices as a mechanism that can be measured and evaluated, but not changed or criticized. Literacy is a power mechanism controls how people interact in society.

Limitations

As previously discussed, the interviews with students regarding their experiences relating to the OSSLT have provided a powerful narrative of the impact that the literacy assessment has on a student's self-esteem and understanding of their own abilities; researchers have noted that

many learners who do not achieve success on the test begin to believe that they are inadequate of success (Cheng *et al.*, 2007; Kearns, 2011; Klinger & Luce-Kapler, 2007; Main, 2008).

Interviews with students support the notion that the OSSLT regulates and controls the ways in which they approach literacy activities, diminishing their opportunity to participate in certain literacy practices, such as critical literacy practices (Wal & Ryan, 2014). Kearns' (2016)

interviews with students demonstrates that the illiterate student is culturally constructed as something to fear and influences students to believe that "their knowledge is not valuable; they must learn to say what those in a position of authority want them to say" (Kearns, 2016, p.133).

These powerful interviews provide a guiding voice from the test-takers themselves as to how schools may overcome the dependency on the OSSLT to determine the quality of the province's education system. Although a continuation of Kearns' (2016) research regarding the students' belief that "the literacy test should be cut" (p.138) through interviews with students, the nature of this MRP influenced me to instead focus on a qualitative research method. Further interviews directly with students, as well as teachers, may not only strengthen our understanding of the impact that the OSSLT has on the learning experience and public education system as a whole, but may also directly reveal the ways in which the OSSLT influences the student's consideration and understanding of their PSE opportunities.

Regarding the notion that I chose to pursue a qualitative research method, performing a critical analysis on several documents relating to the EQAO, rather than a quantitative method through interviews, the documents chosen provide only a small glimpse as to how the EQAO approached the definition of literacy practices and creation of the literacy assessment, the OSSLT. For instance, a much more thorough document analysis on the Royal Commission on Learning's report, *For the Love of Learning* (Royal Commission on Learning, 1995a) itself may

reveal a stronger understanding of how the purposes of education are defined; drawing from various articles that explain the political influences that shaped the education reform and bring the report's recommendations into consideration with the future of public education may reveal the ways in which education serves a narrow purpose. Providing a seemingly endless number of resources from the EQAO, a focus on the EQAO's *Framework: Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test* document (EQAO, 2007) and other articles published by the EQAO may reveal the ways in which the agency defines the purposes of education and literacy practices.

Concluding Remarks: Moving Forward With the EQAO & Further Research

While the nature of high-stakes standardized testing calls for an objective evaluation of each student, the EQAO and educators must work cooperatively to reach a more appropriate form of literacy assessment that does not replace the student-centered learning experience with a standardized-centered learning experience. Those who have experience in the field of education, as well as what actions are required by individuals to achieve success in a PSE setting, should work alongside the EQAO to transform the accountability measure of the OSSLT from an isolating, narrowly defined literacy assessment into a literacy evaluation experience that reflects, not only the needs of the twenty-first century economy, but also reflects the ways in which the complex nature literacy is continually changing into forms of expression that have adapted to the advancements of human kind. Moving forward as humans, the literacy tools we use cannot simply be measured in an objective, static form. One single definition of literacy practices cannot exist. One single assessment of literacy practices cannot exist.

Further research must be completed regarding the impact that the EQAO's definition of literacy practices has on students, as well as the province of Ontario. Researching the ways in which critical literacy practices provide students with the skills to achieve success in secondary

school, PSE, as well as in their own community through the interactions they share with others and the community as a whole, may demonstrate the detrimental impact that the OSSLT has on an individual's understanding of who they are and how a broader definition of literacy practices may improve each person's perceptions of their own capabilities and society overall.

Drawing from the discussion regarding the EQAO's definition of illiteracy and treatment of the illiterate individual, further research of what actions the EQAO takes to assist schools and students to overcome the challenges they face to achieve success on the OSSLT may demonstrate that the EQAO's evaluation methods contain an arbitrarily placed test score that does not effectively signify whether a student is literate or illiterate. An in-depth review of the students' lives after completing the OSSLT may reveal that the student's experiences with the OSSLT may not only cause them to become disengaged from the learning process, but may influence students to choose to enter the workforce, rather than pursue a PSE experience. Researching students who achieve success in non-literacy focussed courses, such as mathematics, and comparing such experiences with their experiences on the OSSLT may illustrate that students who do not have strong literacy skills that align with the EQAO's definition may be at a disadvantage for graduating and pursuing PSE; for example, such students may have excellent scientific research skills, however, their experiences in relation to the OSSLT may cause them to feel pressured to focus on literacy skills that may not help them once having graduated. Through interviews and document analysis, the absence of literacy practices on the OSSLT may demonstrate that the EQAO jeopardizes the students' opportunities to be successful in non-English specific courses.

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Appendix ³

Appendix A – Section A of the OSSLT: Multiple Choice Questions⁴

Section **A** Reading page 3

Provide your answers in Answer Booklet 1.

Multiple-Choice Questions

<p>1 What will the focus of Lizarda's internship be?</p> <p>A films</p> <p>B cartoons</p> <p>C video games</p> <p>D action sequences</p>	<p>4 What do Quesnelle's quotes indicate about him?</p> <p>F He knows a lot about internships.</p> <p>G He focuses on technical aspects of animation.</p> <p>H He recognizes skill and creativity in his students.</p> <p>J He suggests interesting storylines to his students.</p>
<p>2 Which word is closest in meaning to "confidential" as used in paragraph 2?</p> <p>F secret</p> <p>G personal</p> <p>H confusing</p> <p>J professional</p>	<p>5 Which paragraph presents information in chronological order?</p> <p>A paragraph 2</p> <p>B paragraph 4</p> <p>C paragraph 5</p> <p>D paragraph 7</p>
<p>3 According to Quesnelle, what ability is most important for an animator?</p> <p>A creating characters</p> <p>B pleasing an audience</p> <p>C developing a demo reel</p> <p>D programming computers</p>	

Open-Response Question

6 Why is Lizarda a good choice for this internship? Use specific details from the selection to explain your answer.

³ For the purposes of this MRP, the appendix includes various sections of the "OSSLT Sample Assessment Booklet: New Layout" (EQAO, 2015a; EQAO 2015b) in order to accurately reflect the reading and writing practices that are presented to students when writing the OSSLT. Created by the EQAO agency, the sections from the "OSSLT Sample Assessment Booklet: New Layout" (EQAO, 2015a; EQAO 2015b) are included in the Appendix of this MRP will present the specific literacy practices "in the same order and with the same instructions as an actual [OSSLT]" (EQAO, 2015d, n.p.). The Appendices of this MRP are intended to objectively demonstrate which literacy practices the EQAO incorporates into its OSSLT assessment.

⁴ The first section of the "OSSLT Sample Assessment Booklet: New Layout" (EQAO, 2015a, p.2-3) asks students to demonstrate their understanding of a written text by answering six multiple-choice questions, as well as a written response to one single question. The written text is an adaptation from "A Jedi from Scarborough: Animation Student Wins Spot at George Lucas's Elite Academy" by Robyn Doolittle (EQAO, 2015a, p.12). Students are required to follow the instructions of the assessment and properly demonstrate their understanding of the text in the same section.

Appendix B – Section B of the OSSLT: Multiple Choice Questions⁵

Section **B** Writing

page 4

Provide your answers in Answer Booklet 1.

Multiple-Choice Questions

- 1** Choose the sentence that does **not** belong in this paragraph.

(1) Traffic is busy on city streets. (2) Cars, pedestrians and cyclists must share them. (3) Pedestrians often cross the street where it is convenient but not always where it is safe. (4) Tall buildings often line the streets. (5) Navigating city streets can be a challenge.

- A sentence 2
- B sentence 3
- C sentence 4
- D sentence 5

- 2** Choose the best place to insert the following sentence.

They were originally chew sticks made from twigs, feathers, bones and even porcupine quills.

(1) The first toothbrush dates back over 3000 years. (2) In the 1700s, bristled toothbrushes began to appear. (3) Today, they come in all shapes, sizes and colours. (4) With so many choices, it is easy to have good dental hygiene.

- F after sentence 1
- G after sentence 2
- H after sentence 3
- J after sentence 4

- 3** Which of the following sentences needs revision?

(1) The Tri-Town Snow Travellers is a snowmobile club in Ontario. (2) When the club was formed in 1968, it focuses on teaching safe driving on snowmachines. (3) Since then, it has raised money to purchase two snow groomers. (4) Now, club members maintain the snowmobile trails so that everyone can ride safely.

- A sentence 1
- B sentence 2
- C sentence 3
- D sentence 4

- 4** Which sentence is written correctly?

- F Ice fishing, a popular activity in northern regions, requires skill.
- G First, you need to drill a hole, in the ice on a lake using an auger.
- H Some avid anglers, use an ice shack, while waiting for the fish to bite.
- J Ice fishing in the north requires patience a stool to sit on and warm winter clothing.

⁵ “Section B” of the “OSSLT Sample Assessment Booklet: New Layout” (EQAO, 2015a, p.4-5) instructs students to respond to five multiple-choice questions to assess the students’ writing proficiency. Each questions asks students to consider the proper use of punctuation, sentence structure, and so forth.

Section **B** Writing

page 5

Provide your answers in *Answer Booklet 1*.

5 Choose the sentence that is written correctly.

- A What time is it in Sao Paulo, Brazil!
- B Put the wrapper in the recycling bin.
- C I am so tired that I could sleep in class?
- D Will the hockey game be over in an hour.

Appendix C – Section C of the OSSLT: Multiple Choice Questions⁶

Section **C** Reading

page 7

Provide your answers in Answer Booklet 1.

Multiple-Choice Questions

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>1 How does Nat show that he prepared for his interview with Alex?</p> <p>A by shaking hands with Alex</p> <p>B by sharing his business plan</p> <p>C by having his questions ready</p> <p>D by volunteering at a seniors' residence</p> | <p>4 What is the meaning of "aspiring" as used in paragraph 9?</p> <p>F mature</p> <p>G hopeful</p> <p>H friendly</p> <p>J struggling</p> |
| <p>2 The colon in paragraph 3 is used to</p> <p>F end a sentence.</p> <p>G introduce a list.</p> <p>H indicate a pause.</p> <p>J highlight the next idea.</p> | <p>5 Which of the following best shows that Alex is creative?</p> <p>A He attended college.</p> <p>B He borrowed money.</p> <p>C He started a mobile salon.</p> <p>D He volunteered at a seniors' residence.</p> |
| <p>3 The questions in paragraph 7 are a request for</p> <p>A proof.</p> <p>B a reason.</p> <p>C permission.</p> <p>D clarification.</p> | |

Open-Response Questions

- 6** Is the interview with Alex beneficial to Nat's career exploration? Use specific details from the selection to support your answer.
- 7** How does this selection show the benefits of volunteering for community service? Use specific details from the selection to support your answer.

⁶ "Section C" of the "OSSLT Sample Assessment Booklet: New Layout" (EQAO, 2015a, p.7) requires students to respond to a written text and demonstrate their understanding the text by answering five multiple-choice questions, as well as a written response to two questions.

*Appendix D – Section D of the OSSLT: Short Writing Task*⁷

Section D Writing page 8

Provide your answer in Answer Booklet 1.

Short Writing Task

1 Identify an important environmental issue. Use specific details to explain why it is important.

Do not write in this area.

⁷ The EQAO includes literacy activities that instruct students to display their writing skills. “Section D” of the “OSSLT Sample Assessment Booklet: New Layout” (EQAO, 2015a, p.8) requires students to consider a significant environmental issue and “explain why it is important” (EQAO, 2015a, p.8). Students are required to adhere to the instructions of the writing task and properly explain why a certain environmental issue holds importance.

Appendix E – Section E of the OSSLT: Writing a News Reports⁸

Section **E** Writing a News Report

page 9

Provide your answer in Answer Booklet 1.

Students Participate in Important Election



1 Task:

Write a news report based on the headline and picture above.

- You will have to make up the facts and information to answer some or all of the following questions: Who? What? Where? When? Why? How?
- You must relate your news report to **both** the headline **and** the picture.

Purpose and Audience:

to report on an event for the readers of a newspaper

Length:

The lined space provided in the *Answer Booklet* for your written work indicates the approximate length of the writing expected.

⁸ “Section E” of the “OSSLT Sample Assessment Booklet: New Layout” (EQAO, 2015a, p.9) asks students to write a news report based on the picture provided and must consider the location, time, of the event, as well as who is involved, why the events unfold and how such events unfold. Students must also address the audience as a reader of the newspaper in their response. The EQAO works to assess the students’ ability to properly construct a coherent response to an open-ended question and include various aspects of a news story.

Appendix F – Section F of the OSSLT: Multiple Choice Questions⁹

Section **F** Reading

page 11

Provide your answers in Answer Booklet 1.

Multiple-Choice Questions

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>1 What is the best meaning of “endure” as used in line 10?</p> <p>A start</p> <p>B enjoy</p> <p>C tolerate</p> <p>D prevent</p> | <p>4 What is set off by the comma in the final sentence of the selection?</p> <p>F a contrast</p> <p>G a definition</p> <p>H items in a list</p> <p>J a repeated detail</p> |
| <p>2 Which option best describes how the information in lines 4 to 7 is presented?</p> <p>F chronologically</p> <p>G by cause and effect</p> <p>H as a problem and solution</p> <p>J by similarities and differences</p> | <p>5 Which of the following is likely to occur if the average temperature continues to rise in the Arctic?</p> <p>A The polar bear population will rise.</p> <p>B Polar bears will consume less seal meat.</p> <p>C Polar bears will spend less time on land.</p> <p>D Polar bears’ dependency on berries will decrease.</p> |
| <p>3 How did the biologists determine which bears had recently eaten berries?</p> <p>A They tested blood samples.</p> <p>B They looked for stained teeth.</p> <p>C They measured their muscles.</p> <p>D They used masks to capture breath.</p> | <p>6 Which is compared in this selection?</p> <p>F blueberries and crowberries</p> <p>G tranquilized and awake bears</p> <p>H past and more-current research</p> <p>J muscle measurements and blood samples</p> |

Open-Response Question

- 7** State a main idea of this selection and provide one specific detail from the selection that supports it.

⁹ “Section F” of the “OSSLT Sample Assessment Booklet: New Layout” (EQAO, 2015a, p.10-11) instructs students to demonstrate their understanding of a 2009 *Toronto Star* article (EQAO, 2015a, p.12) by answering six multiple-choice questions, as well as a written response to one single question. Students are required to follow the instructions of the assessment and properly demonstrate their understanding of the text in the same section.

Appendix G – Section G of the OSSLT: Writing a Series of Paragraphs¹⁰

Section **G** Writing a Series of Paragraphs

page 2

Provide your answer in *Answer Booklet 2*.

1 Task:

Write a **minimum of three paragraphs** expressing an **opinion** on the topic below. Develop your main idea with supporting details (proof, facts, examples, etc.).

Audience:

an adult who is interested in your opinion

Length:

The lined space provided in the *Answer Booklet* for your written work indicates the approximate length of the writing expected.

Topic:

Is it a good idea for high school students to have a part-time job?

Do not write in this area.

¹⁰ “Section G” of the “OSSLT Sample Assessment Booklet: New Layout” (EQAO, 2015b, p.2) instructs to write a minimum of three paragraphs discussing their opinion as to whether or not it is a good idea for students to have a part-time job. The EQAO assesses the students’ literacy ability to use supporting details and are instructed that the audience is an adult who is interested in their opinion.

Appendix H – Section H of the OSSLT: Multiple Choice Questions¹¹

Section **H** Writing

page 3

Provide your answers in Answer Booklet 2.

Multiple-Choice Questions

- 1** Which option is the best concluding sentence for this paragraph?
Many cities struggle with public transportation needs. New subway construction is expensive, and space for above-ground rail lines is limited. Adding more buses can't always reduce street congestion. Transit users dislike fare increases, but that is one way to raise money for improvements.

 - A Public transportation was cheaper in the past.
 - B There are no easy solutions to transit problems.
 - C There are various ways to eliminate the need for cars.
 - D Urban population growth means more cars on city streets.
-
- 2** Choose the sentence that is written correctly.
 - F Improving your focus starting the day with breakfast.
 - G Regular exercise result in better mental functioning.
 - H Taking frequent breaks can improve focus and concentration.
 - J Concentrating better with music or television playing in the background.
-
- 3** Choose the option that best combines the following sentences.
Carl J. Eliason invented the snow machine.
It was made using bicycle and car parts and a pair of skis.
It was patented in 1927.
 - A Carl J. Eliason's snow machine invention, patented in 1927, was made using bicycle and car parts and a pair of skis.
 - B The snow machine was invented out of parts from a bicycle, a car and a pair of skis in 1927 and patented by Carl J. Eliason.
 - C The snow machine was patented after Carl J. Eliason used parts from a bicycle, a car and a pair of skis to invent it in 1927.
 - D Carl J. Eliason patented a snow machine in 1927 because he used parts from a bicycle, a car and a pair of skis to invent it.
-
- 4** Choose the sentence that is written correctly.
 - F We observe the stars last night.
 - G Teresa and Sam witnessed the accident.
 - H Aminah and Khalil is going to see the latest adventure film.
 - J Of the whole class, only Winnie and Omar is going on the field trip.

¹¹ "Section H" of the "OSSLT Sample Assessment Booklet: New Layout" (EQAO, 2015b, p.3) instructs students to respond to four multiple-choice questions to assess the students' writing proficiency and assesses the students' literacy skills by evaluating their ability to understand the proper use of punctuation, sentence structure, and so forth.

Appendix I – Section I of the OSSLT: Multiple Choice Questions¹²

Section **I** Reading (continued)

page 6

Provide your answers in Answer Booklet 2.

Multiple-Choice Questions

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>1 Where was Chainey living when she was diagnosed with kidney disease?</p> <p>A Spain</p> <p>B Toronto</p> <p>C Burlington</p> <p>D Kapuskasing</p> | <p>4 What is the purpose of the dashes in paragraph 1?</p> <p>F to set off an explanation</p> <p>G to replace quotation marks</p> <p>H to indicate a change in topic</p> <p>J to separate an idea and an example</p> |
| <p>2 Early on, how did Chainey demonstrate her dedication to high jumping?</p> <p>F She went to Kapuskasing to train competitively.</p> <p>G She competed at the Canadian track and field championships.</p> <p>H She competed even though she had received dialysis treatments.</p> <p>J She frequently travelled long distances to train at York University.</p> | <p>5 Why is paragraph 5 important to the selection?</p> <p>A It reveals Chainey's determination.</p> <p>B It describes the dangers of dialysis.</p> <p>C It proves that Chainey should not compete.</p> <p>D It explains why high jumping is an elite sport.</p> |
| <p>3 How is the information in paragraphs 1 to 3 organized?</p> <p>A present to past</p> <p>B cause and effect</p> <p>C similarities and differences</p> <p>D more important to less important</p> | <p>6 Which word is closest in meaning to "deterred" as used in paragraph 7?</p> <p>F stopped</p> <p>G punished</p> <p>H confused</p> <p>J exhausted</p> |

¹² Drawing from a 2012 *Toronto Star* entitled "A Stunning Comeback to an Elite Sport," by Randy Starkman (EQAO, 2015b, p.14), "Section I" of the "OSSLT Sample Assessment Booklet: New Layout" (EQAO, 2015b, p.5-7) instructs students to demonstrate their understanding of the written text by responding to nine multiple-choice questions. Students are expected to demonstrate their understanding as to how and why the text was written, as well as what events unfolded in the text.

Section **I** Reading

page 7

Provide your answers in *Answer Booklet 2*.

7 What impact did kidney disease have on Chainey?

- A Chainey became dissatisfied with anything less than a win.
- B Chainey stopped using jumping as an escape from her troubles.
- C Chainey valued her fellow competitors as encouraging supporters.
- D Chainey no longer expected to be flawless in what she attempted.

8 Why was Chainey satisfied with her finish at the national championships?

- F She had jumped her personal best.
- G She had met her coach's expectations.
- H She had defeated her closest competitor.
- J She had returned to the sport she enjoyed.

9 What idea connects the introductory paragraph to the conclusion?

- A Chainey is a champion high jumper.
- B Chainey's last place finish is a victory.
- C Chainey's kidney disease is a curable illness.
- D Chainey has qualified for the national championships.

Appendix J – Section J of the OSSLT: Multiple Choice Questions¹³

Section **J** Reading

page 9

Provide your answers in Answer Booklet 2.

Multiple-Choice Questions

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>1 What would be the most appropriate title for this selection?</p> <p>A A New Start</p> <p>B A Chef's Special</p> <p>C Father Knows Best</p> <p>D Practice Makes Perfect</p> | <p>4 How does Gerry feel when he exhales loudly in paragraph 10?</p> <p>F He is beginning to relax.</p> <p>G He is exhausted with worry.</p> <p>H He is impatient with his children.</p> <p>J He is irritated to receive so much advice.</p> |
| <p>2 What is indicated by the single quotation marks in paragraph 4 around "Go! Hurry!"?</p> <p>F Gerry is talking to himself.</p> <p>G Two people are talking at the same time.</p> <p>H Gerry is speaking someone else's words.</p> <p>J The words are thoughts, not conversation.</p> | <p>5 In which paragraph is a general idea supported with specific information?</p> <p>A paragraph 3</p> <p>B paragraph 9</p> <p>C paragraph 11</p> <p>D paragraph 14</p> |
| <p>3 What does Hanna mean when she says "I was a wreck" (paragraph 7)?</p> <p>A She was exhausted from lifeguarding.</p> <p>B She feared starting a new lifeguarding job.</p> <p>C She was injured while she was on the job.</p> <p>D She needed help from the Second Career program.</p> | |

Open-Response Questions

- 6** Does Gerry believe that Hanna's suggestions will help him? Use specific details from the selection to support your answer.
- 7** What does this selection show about Gerry and Hanna's relationship? Use specific details from the selection to explain your answer.

¹³ "Section J" of the "OSSLT Sample Assessment Booklet: New Layout" (EQAO, 2015b, p.8-9) presents a brief text written by the EQAO (EQAO, 2015b, p.14) for the purposes of the OSSLT. Students are instructed to demonstrate their understanding of the written text by responding to five multiple-choice questions, as well as two written-response writing tasks.

Appendix K – Section K of the OSSLT: Short Writing Task¹⁴

Section **K** Writing

page 10

Provide your answer in Answer Booklet 2.

Short Writing Task

- 1** Identify one action you take in your daily life to be healthy. Use specific details to explain how this action contributes to your health.

Do not write in this area.

¹⁴ Students are instructed to identify one action they take that is considered healthy and use specific details to explain how the action contributes to their health. “Section K” of the “OSSLT Sample Assessment Booklet: New Layout” (EQAO, 2015b, p.10-11) allows the EQAO to evaluate the students’ writing skills and assess their ability to properly construct an argument and explain their thoughts through writing.

Appendix L – Section L of the OSSLT: Multiple Choice Questions¹⁵

Section **L** Reading

page 13

Provide your answers in Answer Booklet 2.

Multiple-Choice Questions

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>1 What word is closest in meaning to “exporter” as used in the paragraph below the title?</p> <p>A investor
B purchaser
C distributor
D manufacturer</p> <p>2 Why is a bar graph appropriate for the forest management data?</p> <p>F It shows decreasing size.
G It shows changes over time.
H It shows increasing importance.
J It shows a comparison of categories.</p> <p>3 How is the “Canada’s Forest Management” graph organized?</p> <p>A by degree of success
B by size of production
C by changes over time
D by geographic location</p> <p>4 What was true about British Columbia’s forest management in 2008–2009?</p> <p>F Less area was burned than planted.
G More area was burned than planted.
H Less area was planted than harvested.
J More area was harvested than burned.</p> | <p>5 What is an accurate conclusion that can be drawn from the information in the pie charts?</p> <p>A Wood product manufacturing generated the largest percentage of revenue but the smallest percentage of wages in 2008.
B The percentages of revenue and those of wages and salaries from the major sectors of Ontario’s forest industry were similar in 2008.
C The largest percentage of wages came from pulp and paper product manufacturing in 2008, even though that sector generated the smallest amount of revenue in 2008.
D The smallest amount of money was invested in forestry and logging in 2009, even though that sector generated the largest amount of revenue in 2008.</p> <p>6 What conclusion can be supported by information in this selection?</p> <p>F The forest management of each region or province is unique.
G It is likely that Alberta’s forest industry is similar to that of Ontario.
H The pie charts suggest that forestry and logging in Ontario is the most profitable sector.
J Manitoba’s forest industry determines Canada’s international position as an exporter of forest products.</p> |
|---|--|

¹⁵ “Section L” of the “OSSLT Sample Assessment Booklet: New Layout” (EQAO, 2015b, p.12-13) includes both written and visual information regarding various statistics on Canada’s forests, created by the EQAO. The section contains six multiple-choice questions that assess the students’ understanding of the text and ability to decipher how and why certain information is included through writing, as well as visual information charts, and so forth.