

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF COLLEGIATE  
AND DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
MARKS IN MANITOBA

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CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION

Marks play such a significant role in our educational system that they are a never-ending field for investigation. From the time a child enters school, marks are with him until he graduates. They not only indicate present progress in school work but continue to affect a child, directly or indirectly, all his life, and have, consequently, a powerful social influence. Some system of measurement is essential in order to present, in a manner that indicates as exactly as possible, pupil progress. Learning involves psychological processes and it is impossible for any system to measure the working of the human mind with the accuracy that can be secured in measuring human efficiency in limited operations such as cutting down a tree, or measuring a quart of milk. As the secondary school becomes more complicated and demanding, the problem of establishing a highly valid system of measurement acquires ever increasing importance. Such a system must not only be valid among educational bodies, but must also be acceptable in the economic world into which every child is eventually absorbed. The present marking system, is the answer presented by our educators to the need for measurement, and, accordingly, is subjected to constant study with a view to rendering it more adequate.



Controversy has been endless in the study of this educational instrument, the effort always being towards the establishment of potential accuracy and comparative validity. The present investigation employs what the writer believes to be a worthwhile approach to the evaluation of the system in use at present in the Province of Manitoba.

### Measurement by Marks

Marks are used extensively in all secondary schools throughout the academic year, and contribute to the establishment of a final mark at the end of the school year. This final mark carries great weight in that it is accepted as a measure of progress throughout the year. Teachers' marks, therefore, occupy a vital position in securing uniformity in estimating pupil progress across the Province as a whole.

In order to focus attention upon the importance of marks, it is important to have a general understanding of their origin and development. Two phases of this subject are evident, namely, (1) origin and purpose, (2) the effect of the changing conception of education in reference to the marking system. Let us consider first the original purpose of examinations. Briefly, examinations formerly endeavored to test the mastery of certain narrow fields of subject-matter. Naturally, the teaching was as simple as the system of testing, and consisted of definite assignments by the teacher, study of them by the pupil, recitation or tests of assignments in class, and, lastly, the

evaluation of learning by means of marks obtained in a written examination. As will be seen later, recent years have brought noteworthy changes in this educational program of the secondary school. Secondly, as the concept of education has changed, the method of evaluation has changed accordingly. The mastery of subject-matter as the chief purpose of education has given way to a much broader goal which emphasizes the achievement of well-rounded pupil personality. The two developments are closely interlocked, and, as the technique of instruction has changed, so the purpose of examinations has broadened. Marking, as an accurate representation of student intellectual growth, has inevitably been profoundly affected.

The following two quotations will reveal something of the old and the new conceptions of marks as the measure of intellectual growth:

"Traditionally, the sole basis for marks has been subject matter achievement as measured by tests and examinations. This was only natural, since until recently the mastery of subject matter was the chief immediate goal of the secondary school program. The pupil was expected to accumulate a designated mass of facts and information. The mark was used to indicate the degree to which he succeeded. The inadequacy of subject matter as the sole basis for marks has long been recognized. Obviously, such a policy is not at all in harmony with the philosophy that presently underlies the program of educational units." <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> W.T.Gruhn-H.R.Douglas. The Modern Junior High School. New York: The Ronald Press Co. 1947, p.385.

"Since the teacher's mark is now and almost certainly will continue to be the most frequently recorded measure of pupil accomplishment, it is very important that the class room teacher have a definite notion of the functions of such marks. Teacher's marks function in a four-fold way: (1) they provide the basis for the school's record of the child's educational history, (2) they furnish the teacher with a record of the pupil's achievement and progress, (3) they reveal to the pupil the school's evaluation of his effort and accomplishments, and (4) they furnish to the parent reasonably accurate information concerning the pupil's achievement. For school administrators marks afford the common basis for determination of promotions, scholastic honors, and school classification. For the teacher, marks provide a working basis for group distinctions in assignments, work requirements, extra-curricular activities, etc. For the pupil, marks should give accurate information concerning the amount and quality of work done. For the parent, the marking system should supply accurate information on pupil achievement which should indicate relative success or failure in unmistakable terms. Obviously, the realization of these four-fold functions of the marking system places it under a very severe burden. The real severity of this burden is better appreciated when we recall the implications of the experimental evidence on the reliability of teachers' marks, and then in the face of these disturbing facts, realize the seriousness with which these marks are taken by the pupil, by the parents, and even by the school itself." 2

In the Canadian Provinces marks are the measure for admittance to higher courses of study. Hence, the centralized, provincial examination for all pupils not accredited by the particular school is necessitated.

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2

H.A. Greene-A.N. Jorgensen. The Use and Interpretation of High School Tests. New York: Longmans, Green and Co. 1940, p. 566.

## Secondary School Examination System in Manitoba

Bearing in mind, then, how important it is that the final score should be accepted as truly representative of the year's progress, satisfactory evidence must be available that, according to some general standard of measurement, it is as close to being accurate as possible. The standard in Manitoba is the one set by the Department of Education in a series of examinations.

The final mark determined at the end of the school year should compare closely with this generally accepted standard. This standard, as noted, is established by a series of examinations set and marked under the supervision of the Department of Education in June and July, and written by certain groups of students to whom we shall later refer. Accordingly, class marks, as determined by teachers in individual schools, can be checked against those obtained in Departmental examinations and their worth estimated.

The examination system directed by the Department of Education to-day is the result of many years of sustained effort and constant development. As in the past, the Department is the administrative centre of examinations, but authority is not now as narrowly centralized as formerly. Fifty years ago, the examination system was dominated by the Department of Education for all grades from VIII to XII inclusive. These examinations were held throughout the Province. Committees,

picked by the Advisory Board, set these Departmental examinations. All written papers were marked in Winnipeg by committees appointed jointly by the Department of Education and the University. The marks given were accepted by both the Department and the University. There was, however, one important difference in acceptance of these marks. In some subjects, a different pass standard was set by the Department and by the University. This meant that each educational authority was a law unto itself and each prescribed its own standards. If a student failed in two or more subjects, he had to repeat his year. The pass standards generally were high, and Manitoba was considered to have a satisfactory system of examining.

Shortly after the First World War, Grade VIII examinations directed by the Department, were abolished. About the same time another innovation was made. The number of examinations was reduced in Grade IX to four subjects—those subjects which were not carried on past Grade IX. In Grade X, examinations were reduced to those subjects that were completed in Grade X and not carried on into Grade XI. The Grade XI examinations completed the roster. Gradually the number of places approved for the writing of Department of Education examinations was increased. The pass standard was fixed at 50 but, as before, if there were two failures, all the subjects had to be repeated. Later final credit was allowed for every 50% subject and only those below 50% had to be repeated. The University still compiled and interpreted its own set of marks and the Department retained

its own.

This dual operation continued until the middle thirties when the Manitoba Examination Board, consisting of University and Department representatives, was established. This is now a statutory body controlling the setting of examinations. When a Departmental paper is set, University and Department representatives work as a committee to produce a suitable examining paper that is acceptable to both authorities. The Department representatives are selected from teachers actually engaged in teaching the subject being examined, so that they are thoroughly cognizant of both the student and the teacher problems. To-day there is one set of marks, which is retained in the Department, as the University now accepts this joint marking. Changes may occur in the curriculum from time to time but the examination papers are adjusted accordingly.

#### Purpose of this Study

We have indicated in the foregoing sections the foundation for our study, namely, establishment of the fact that the Department of Education is the central authority for examinations in Manitoba. Schools throughout the Province with the same official standing have students writing the same examinations all of which are marked by the same marking committees. In addition all schools record teachers' and general school examination marks. With these lists of marks as our data, the investigation begins. Its purpose is to determine whether a comparatively close, or a very wide,

discrepancy exists between school marks and those of the Department of Education. In other words, do these two sets of marks reveal marked over-estimation or under-estimation when we compare the school marks with the Departmental marks? An illustration may clarify our position. If a school gives a student 50 in a subject and he makes 60 in the Departmental examination, the school mark is lower by 10 and the net result is scored as a -10. On the other hand, if the student makes 35 on the Department examination, he would be scored as +15. Detailed records and tables referring to this point will be found in succeeding chapters.

In the course of this study, which is conducted through schools of the same rating for a period of three consecutive years, 1949, 1950, and 1951, the writer aims to discover any local trends that affect marks. Should a school reveal significant over-evaluation in a subject, a tendency to over-estimation exists. This phase of the study will be expanded as the investigation develops.

Finally, as a secondary deduction developing from the major aim of the investigation, the writer endeavours to explore the probability that certain subjects by their inherent nature possess advantages over others from the point of view of exactness in marking. Should Composition produce closer scores than French? This, and other observations of similar nature, will develop as the study proceeds. The main purpose, however, of this investigation is to determine the existence of tendencies towards under-estimation or over-

estimation of school marks as compared to those awarded on the Provincial examination.

### Sources of Data

All the data for this study are obtained from two main sources:

- (1) Record Sheets of Accredited Collegiates.
- (2) Official Records of the Department of Education.

Before discussing these sources, let us examine the meaning of the word "accredited" as applied to schools in Manitoba.

Accredited Schools; The following quotation indicates the type of school involved:

"Each Collegiate Institute, on being granted powers of recommending pupils without Departmental Examinations shall be classified as an 'Accredited Collegiate Institute'. . . . Pupils who are not recommended may write the Departmental Examinations. . . . and must obtain a standing on the year's work of not less than fifty per cent (50%) in any subject and an average of at least sixty-seven (67%) on the full Second Level (Grade XI)." <sup>3</sup>

The power to recommend pupils without Department examinations, i.e., the standing as an Accredited Collegiate, is granted to a Collegiate when it can meet the regulations set down by the Department in three respects: (1) teachers' and principals' academic qualifications and experience, (2) proper equipment for laboratory and library work, (3) certification that pupils have completed required courses in all subjects and attended regularly. In the following



study, students from accredited schools only are included, as the standards governing instruction in these schools are those required by the Department.

A large percentage of the Collegiates in the Province, which could have the privilege of granting accredited standings, do not ask for it. There are seventeen Accredited Collegiates and, for our purpose, we have chosen six, so feel the study should be representative. The City of Winnipeg is represented by Gordon Bell and Kelvin, the suburban schools of Manitoba by West Kildonan (Centennial), and the Province at large by Portage la Prairie, a small city, and two country towns, Morden (Maple Leaf), and Dauphin. There was no thought as to any special selection except in so far as an effort was made to choose types representative of different population areas. An additional set of marks from a second suburban school in St. Vital (Glenlawn) is included in the Appendix for further comparative or reference purposes, if required.

In all these schools, as we have indicated, pupils are recommended on the basis of a high mark standing, and those not receiving 67% average have the opportunity of writing the Department examinations in June. The system has been accepted as fair and is seldom questioned. Most of the students in these schools fulfil the 67% average requirement for recommendation. The others, those below the 67% average, are "non-exempt" and, to obtain their Second Level standing, must

write the examinations of the Department. It is the marks of these students with which we are concerned in this investigation. In Literature, Composition, History, Geometry, Algebra, Chemistry, Physics, French and Latin, the two sets of marks, Collegiate and Department, are studied with a view to determining whether there is significant over or under-scoring by teachers.

1. School Marks; Our first source of data was that secured from school records. School marks have been filed on Kardex Forms, in files, or in suitable books, from year to year, so that the writer was able to secure students' marks quickly and accurately.

In order to have the data in convenient form for later analysis, a Tally Sheet was prepared. On it were recorded the school, the year, and, in four columns, (1) the number of the student, (2) school marks, (3) Departmental marks and (4) a column for purpose of further analysis.

2. Department of Education Marks; The results of the June Examinations are sent by the Department of Education to all schools towards the latter part of July. These scores are contained on special Departmental Forms and become the property of the school. These records of marks in schools date back many years. The writer had access to all such records and it was a simple matter to list them on our Tally Sheets. A total of 3552 marks from each source, the Department and the school