

# PASSING THE TEST

*false*  
The Promises of Standardized Testing

edited by Marita Moll



**PASSING THE TEST** | The false promises of standardized testing

Edited by Marita Moll

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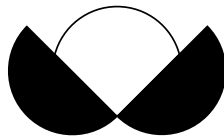
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## IN MEMORIUM | David Ireland 1937-2003

Friend and well-known educational testing expert, David Ireland, died suddenly September 12<sup>th</sup>, 2003. David's enlightened perspective on educational testing, described here by his colleague Peter Moskos, was a lasting gift to the educational community and one for which we shall remember him.

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When David started a research project, he would always ask the client three questions:

- What do you want to know?
- Why do you want to know it?
- And what would you do if you did know it?

It was really important to David that research mattered, that it would have an impact on peoples' lives, an impact that would make their lives better.

The work of which he was proudest in his career was the work he did in the Carleton Board on board-wide exams. The project was David's brainchild. He conceived it. He had the vision. The Board told David it wanted board-wide exams. But David had the brilliance to do it in a way that gave it over to teachers in math and English and let them carry it out. He trusted teachers and he believed that they had the experience and ability to execute the project. When we designed exams, it was classroom teachers, not Board consultants who did it. And every teacher had a role to play, whether it was in writing questions, marking papers or figuring out what the results meant. The project worked brilliantly because teachers carried it out. It was there to help them and support them and to help and support students. And when we had school and board-wide results, what mattered to David most was what we were going to do about them. How were we going to change our teaching so that students' performances and their knowledge and abilities improved?



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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>CLI</b>	Canadian Learning Institute
<b>CMEC</b>	Council of Ministers of Education, Canada
<b>CTBS</b>	Canadian Test of Basic Skills
<b>HRDC</b>	Human Resources Development Canada
<b>ICT</b>	Information and Communication Technology
<b>IEA</b>	International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement
<b>NCLB</b>	No Child Left Behind
<b>NLSCY</b>	National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>PCAP</b>	Pan-Canadian Assessment Program
<b>PISA</b>	Programme for International Student Assessment
<b>PIRLS</b>	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
<b>SAIP</b>	School Achievement Indicators Program
<b>SAT</b>	Scholastic Aptitude Tests
<b>SITES</b>	Second Information Technology in Education Study
<b>TIMSS</b>	Third International Mathematics and Science Study
<b>YITS</b>	Youth in Transition Survey



## FOREWORD



# Passing the test

## The false promises of standardized testing

**In** recent years, large-scale testing projects have become firmly established in Canada and around the world. Students in many provinces are inundated with regional tests, provincial tests, national tests and international tests. Appropriating resources from already cash-starved systems, these tests are now self-perpetuating industries with considerable public monies being spent on their design, production, implementation, analysis, and promotion. In Ontario alone, \$57 million will be spent annually to push students through a battery of 20 provincial tests by the time they reach Grade 12. The tests have become increasingly politicized, with schools ranked publicly in local newspapers, and high school graduation (in Ontario) hinging on the outcome of a single literacy test.

While opposition to these large-scale testing programs is mounting, it is difficult for the public to enter into the debate when presented with tables, pie charts, and graphs derived from processes that are not fully explained to them and little contextual information within which to interpret the results.

The articles and essays in this book will extend the information usually provided about standardized testing by documenting concerns of



researchers, teachers, parents and students to current processes, their impacts, and the use of results. The prospect of a public education system driven by the demands of standardized testing does not sit well with parents or the general public. This collection will help explain why that is so and what can be done about it.

The editor wishes to thank all who made this collection possible by contributing their papers and articles, and the staff at CCPA for the work that goes into preparing a manuscript for publication. The assistance of Dietrich Gunther, who, as part of field work activities as a teacher education student at Queen's University, did some of the early research for the testing tables, is also appreciated.

The support of Susan Ohanian and John P. Fox, who contributed artwork, is gratefully acknowledged.

For further information on standardized testing in Canada, including updated tables and e-copies of selected articles, please see [www.maritamoll.ca](http://www.maritamoll.ca)

— Marita Moll