

# Mania for Measuring: Testing Is Not Teaching

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Why do provinces make students write standardized progress tests?

At the end of January, Grade 10 students all over this province will be writing newly minted compulsory exams in order to meet graduation requirements. The pressure is on and the stresses are deeply felt. Like so many boxes on an assembly line, the students will be subjected to a quality-control exercise. It's part of the process of manufacturing recruits for the workplace at minimum cost to the public treasury. With the rise of standardized testing across Canada, we are welding our public education system to the business world.

Even though the British Columbia government has ripped hundreds of millions of dollars out of public education, the education ministry is anxious to provide evidence that all is well. Why worry about closing schools and cutting teaching positions and learning supports? Apparently, the students are doing just fine—the tests say so.

Should we now accept that education is about assessing superficial standards and supplying marketable commodities? Does meeting minimum standards for literacy and numeracy replace the joy, community spirit and curiosity of learning to search for answers?

Today's education lingo is permeated by business speak; we must "invest" in our children so they can secure "saleable skills." Our teachers are now frequently referred to as "instructors." Our kids must meet "assessment" regimes that determine "success" and

"failure." Teachers are pressured to stick to the curriculum so they can "teach to the test" and get results.

But our kids are not investments like stocks, bonds and real estate.

We want them to be well-rounded, thoughtful human beings. This emphasis on training for the marketplace will only produce efficient little test-takers who compete furiously to meet targets of uniformity—now defined as "excellence."

If testing for success takes over the classroom, it will create a lasting rut in the road for a bland and soulless school experience. Although standardized testing represents a hurdle for the kids, it also stands as a heavy-handed method of surveillance for their teachers.

It must disappoint many teachers to see their enthusiasm for entering their profession undermined by an obligatory routine of cold-blooded product delivery. No one is more capable of truly evaluating our kids and their advancement than the teachers they spend their days with. Inspiring kids to love learning, appreciate the endeavour of acquiring knowledge and practice critical thinking is a truly admirable undertaking.

A handful of business loyalists who want to remake our schools in the image of commerce should not dictate our thinking on public education. Why must everything have an economic aim? Testing is not teaching and never will be. Standardized testing must stop. Let our kids learn from their teachers.

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