

---

# Foreword

## *Teachers' Pets or Teachers' Frets?*

**E***ducational Tests*: Are they teachers' *pets* or, these days, are they teachers' *frets*? Putting it more prosaically, should today's teachers regard tests as the friends or enemies of their instruction efforts? This seemingly simple question, more potent than it first appears, requires a far-from-simple answer. Yet, providing a practical answer to the pet/fret puzzle is the central premise of an exciting new book about reading instruction by Liz Hollingworth and Hilleary Drake. Honestly, who could imagine a more propitious moment for a book about the teaching and the testing of reading to rumble onto our educational stage?

Let's face it, when it comes to the way most teachers currently view externally imposed educational tests, this could surely be characterized as "the worst of times." Most teachers view large-scale educational tests—particularly those tests linked to federal or state accountability programs—as downright nuisances or worse. There's not the slightest hint that today's test-dominated schooling somehow can also be regarded as "the best of times."

Droves of teachers now regard accountability tests as a bona fide blight on their educational landscapes. Externally imposed, most high-stakes exams are seen to constrain the curriculum, transform teaching into test-preparation, and remove much of the genuine joy that should be found in our classrooms. No, today's accountability tests do not rank high on most teachers' popularity parades.

It is against this pervasive, profoundly negative backdrop that Hollingworth and Drake have set out to suggest how externally imposed accountability tests could have a positive impact on elementary teachers' reading instruction. These two authors have, clearly, chosen a potentially sour cherry on which to chew. But, as will become clear while reading the Hollingworth-Drake book, there are magic classroom moments when,

if teachers truly understand what's going on with the external tests being used, results of those tests can spur a teacher to adopt the sorts of instructional choices likely to benefit students.

At first glance, this seems to be a book about how to teach reading. But a closer look will reveal that it's a book about how to teach reading while dodging the adverse impact of inappropriate large-scale testing. Indeed, the book is peppered with suggestions about how to pick up positive pay-offs from typical standardized reading tests. It's a book, in short, about how to use external tests as effectively as possible to enhance students' reading skills.

In the book's early pages, the authors tell us they want their book to (1) provide teaching tips for elementary reading classrooms, (2) ensure that all students are prepared for high-stakes reading tests, and (3) show teachers how to supply such test-preparation without "teaching to a test." Those are three laudable aspirations. But you'll also see another significant theme slithering in and out of the book's chapters. Hollingworth and Drake, you see, want young children to *love* reading.

That's right, these authors recognize not only the *necessity* for today's students to read—in school and once school is over—but also the immense *pleasure* that reading can bring to anyone who reads with reasonable comprehension. The book frequently reminds teachers how important it is to have students *enjoy* the act of reading. Whether children are reading a hardback book, a laptop computer screen, or the words wafted to them by tomorrow's next-generation electronic device—reading should gratify the reader. And, regrettably, readers' gratification cannot be taken for granted. It, as with many covert variables, needs to be assessed.

Perhaps, if we put as much assessment energy into measuring students' attitudes toward reading as we put into measuring students' ability to spot a paragraph's main idea, we'd stimulate more teachers to engender positive reading attitudes along with higher test scores. We do, in truth, measure what we treasure. But if we only yammer about getting students to groove on reading, and never get around to actually assessing students' attitudes toward reading, then we send a strikingly clear message that students' attitudes toward reading really aren't important.

Hollingworth and Drake make a sincere effort to strip away the mystery from how large-scale reading tests are born. What few teachers recognize is that the most fundamental steps in the creation of an accountability test in reading are not remarkably different from what takes place when a teacher creates a classroom test of reading. Although reading tests typically emerge from big-box measurement companies—often behind closed doors—there's little going on when high-stakes reading tests are built that's incomprehensible to most teachers.

This new book is loaded with practical suggestions regarding how elementary teachers can do a niftier job with their reading instruction. Of particular merit is the authors' early-on treatment of alignment. This is because their analysis of the necessary match among curricular aims, classroom instructional activities, and high-stakes achievement tests sets the stage for their subsequent recommendations regarding how to avoid "teaching to the test." Indeed, one of the book's continuing themes revolves around how teachers can help students score well on externally required accountability tests without those teachers' turning their classrooms into test-preparation factories.

Co-authored books often feature a pair of collaborating professors or, perhaps, two in-the-trenches teachers. In this book, however, we encounter a delightful blend of one university academic and one K–12 classroom teacher. It is clear that the assessment and instructional views of these two friends has, on occasion, been sharpened by the career experiences of their co-author. The result is a readable account of how teachers of reading can go about their work in a way that external tests can become, if not a flat-out friends, at least not lasting enemies.

W. James Popham  
*Emeritus Professor*  
*University of California, Los Angeles*