

Module 3

STANDARDIZED TEST ADMINISTRATION AND PREPARATION

In this module, we focus our attention on the administration of standardized tests. Although we touched on this process in Module 1, we will focus on aspects such as the types of preparation practices in which teachers engage with students—some of which they should do, and others that they should not do. We will examine various skills that students can gain to help facilitate their performances on these tests. Finally, we discuss the meaning behind the phrase *teaching to the test*.

STANDARDIZED ADMINISTRATION PROCEDURES

Since most standardized tests are given in classrooms—or, in the case of individually-administered tests, in some other school-based environment—teachers are typically responsible for administering them to students. The most crucial aspect of administering standardized tests to students is to follow the directions carefully and explicitly (Linn & Miller, 2005; McMillan, 2004). Strict adherence to the instructions provided by the test publisher is key to maintaining the comparability of the results, especially in the case of norm-referenced tests. The specific testing procedures are established to ensure standardization in the conditions under which students in different classrooms, buildings, districts, and states take the test. The directions that appear in a test’s administration manual specify what you are to say, how you should respond to students’ questions, and what you should do while students are working on the test. You owe it to yourself and to your students to familiarize yourself with the directions prior to reading them to your students

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(Hogan, 2007; Kubiszyn & Borich, 2007). Even if you have administered a particular test consecutively over a number of years, avoid the temptation to paraphrase the directions or recite them from memory (McMillan, 2004). Published tests must be administered under the same conditions if the results are to be meaningfully interpreted (Linn & Miller, 2005); otherwise, the resulting interpretations will be nothing short of misleading (Airasian, 2005; Kubiszyn & Borich, 2007). For example, it would not be reasonable to compare the performance of a student who had 45 minutes to complete a subtest to that of the norm group of students who had 30 minutes (per the directions from the test publisher).

During the test, it is typically permissible to answer student questions about the directions or any procedures for answering test items. However, by no means should you provide assistance with an answer or with the interpretation of a test item (McMillan, 2004). Additionally, teachers are often tempted to give certain students hints to correct answers, to encourage them to move faster through the test, or even to slow down and think a little bit harder. It is necessary, but sometimes difficult, for educators to step out of the role of teacher and assume that of a test administrator for a few hours (Linn & Miller, 2005; McMillan, 2004). The bottom line is that educators must know what constitutes acceptable behavior and what does not. These are ultimately issues of conscientiousness and professional ethics.

Finally, the time limits must be rigorously followed. Once the time limit has expired for a given subtest, the completed answer sheets and tests must be promptly collected. To ensure test security, all copies of the test and answer sheets must be accounted for (McMillan, 2004).

To summarize the responsibilities of a teacher or other educator, five relatively simple tasks are listed and described below (Hogan, 2007; Kubiszyn & Borich, 2007; Linn & Miller, 2005). These tasks are expressed as follows.

- **Motivate the students.** As educators, we want our students to perform to the best of their abilities. To help students accomplish this goal, we should encourage them to do their best. The purpose of the test and how the results will be used should be clearly explained to students. Most importantly, however, may be the demonstration of a positive attitude toward the test results. This ultimately begins with a positive attitude coming from the teacher. If students are convinced that valid scores are beneficial to them, then their level of test anxiety tends to decrease and their level of motivation tends to increase.
- **Follow directions strictly.** The importance of strictly following testing directions has already been discussed, but cannot be overemphasized. If the test is not administered in complete accordance with the directions, the test scores will contain an unknown amount of error. This will result in misinterpretation and misuse of the results, typically meaning that numerous decisions—many of them containing substantial consequences—may simply be wrong decisions.

- **Keep time accurately.** One of the important aspects in the standardization process is ensuring that students, regardless of their geographic location, have the same amount of time to complete a test or subtest. It is crucial that time be kept—and, perhaps, even recorded—with the utmost precision.
- **Record significant events.** It is also important to carefully observe students during the administration of a test. You may want to record any unusual behavior or event that you witness that you believe could somehow influence test scores. For example, you might observe a student who seems very anxious or seems to be marking responses in a random manner without reading the test items. You should make note of your observation since it could certainly shed light on the interpretations of the student's test performance when the results are returned. Since test results are not returned sometimes for two or three months, it is not advisable to rely on your memory. Similarly, any interruptions to the testing period—including the nature and length of a given interruption—should be noted, for its occurrence could supply additional information for accurate test score interpretation.
- **Collect test materials promptly.** Once the testing time has ended, all materials should be collected promptly so that students are not able to work beyond the allotted time and so that all materials can be accounted for and secured.

"I think it's important for a teacher to show and have their students feel an aura of invincibility with tests and to feel confident. And if a teacher has a strong negative attitude about standardized tests I think that's very difficult to hide with students."

—Jeff Burkett,
Sixth-Grade Teacher

TESTWISENESS SKILLS

There are numerous things that teachers can do to help students prepare for standardized tests. Many of these represent ethical and legitimate practices; however, other preparation practices do not. In this section, we will take a look at one category of student test preparation practices that is ethical and appropriate. In the next section of this module, we will examine a wide variety of additional practices, both appropriate and inappropriate.

There are numerous ways that teachers can help their students prepare to perform well on standardized tests. The single most important thing a teacher can do, first and foremost, is to provide sound instruction (Airasian, 2005; Hogan, 2007). Planning for and delivering instruction by incorporating periodic reviews; by clearly emphasizing important terms, concepts, and skills during instruction; by providing practice on key instructional objectives; and by providing an appropriate learning environment is simply good teaching. Furthermore, these practices also tend to result in good learning.

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Beyond the provision of good, sound teaching, teachers can also help students develop a set of skills known as *testwiseness skills*. Students who possess testwiseness skills are those that have the ability to use test-taking strategies during a particular standardized test. Whenever students are required to take a standardized test, we want and expect them to put forth their best efforts and to demonstrate the extent to which they have mastered certain content learning and related skills. However, some students do not perform to the best of their abilities because they lack skills in test taking (Hogan, 2007; Linn & Miller, 2005). Students should be provided with training in test-taking strategies to prevent this type of inadequacy from lowering their test scores. Although this seems to be somewhat of a commonsense recommendation, instruction and practice in test-taking strategies are often not provided to students or may not be reinforced from year to year. These skills can be mastered fairly easily, but students need practice to develop them (Linn & Miller, 2005). Fortunately, many test publishers now provide practice tests that can be given prior to the actual tests. These give students and their teachers opportunities to become familiar with the testing format before it really counts. Among testwiseness skills that students should be taught and given the opportunity to practice are the following:

- listening to and/or reading test directions carefully (this includes following proper procedures for marking responses on the answer sheet);
- listening to and/or reading test items carefully;
- establishing a pace that will permit completion of the test or subtest;
- skipping difficult items (instead of wasting valuable testing time) and returning to them later;
- making informed guesses as opposed to just omitting items that appear too difficult;
- eliminating possible options (in the case of multiple-choice items), by identifying options that are clearly incorrect based on knowledge of content, prior to making informed guesses;
- checking to be sure that an answer number matches the item number when marking an answer; and
- checking answers, as well as the accuracy of marking those answers, if time permits (Linn & Miller, 2005).

It is important to note that there are some testwiseness skills that are considered to be unethical. In other words, application of these skills during a standardized test may result in the improvement of a student's score beyond that which would be attained from mastery of the content alone (Mertler, 2003). These techniques are seen as ways to eliminate incorrect answers—without knowing anything about the content—based purely on clues provided within the item. For example, the following clues could be used by students as a means of blindly guessing a correct answer (Airasian, 2005):

- If vague words (e.g., some, often, seldom, or sometimes) are used in one of the options, that option is likely to be the correct answer.
- The option that is the longest or the most precisely stated is more likely to be the correct answer.
- Any choice that has a grammatical or spelling error (which is not likely to occur on a published standardized test) is not likely to be the correct option.
- Choices that do not connect “smoothly” to the stem of a test question are not likely to be correct.
- Finally, there is an old adage among test-taking students: *When in doubt, pick C*. This belief stems from the fallacy that in any given standardized test, option *C* is correct more often than any other. Therefore, in situations when you simply do not know anything about a test item, *C* is most likely a good guess at the correct answer.

When students use these or similar strategies, they are, in essence, compensating for or overcoming their lack of content knowledge (Airasian, 2005). They end up with a score that is higher than their actual level of mastery.

DO'S AND DON'TS OF TEST PREPARATION

As educators, we always want our students to demonstrate what they have learned and what they are capable of doing to the best of their abilities. Helping them develop their testwiseness skills—those that are ethical and appropriate, of course—can go a long way in terms of providing more accurate test scores for valid instructional decisions. In this current age of increased accountability and pressure on both teachers and students to perform, it is easy to get carried away with test preparation practices. With increasing frequency, many teachers are focusing more of their attention on the contents of the standardized tests that they administer. Unfortunately, this can lead to poor instructional practices and inflated test scores (Linn & Miller, 2005).

For example, in a recent research study examining the impact of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) on teachers' instructional and assessment practices (Mertler, 2006), an overwhelming majority (93%) of teachers indicated that NCLB has changed the nature of instructional motivation for teachers and has placed more stress on teachers, and 73% of teachers believed that NCLB has changed the nature of academic motivation for and has placed more stress on students. Two-thirds of teachers

“There’s pressure to have students perform because it’s a reflection on ourselves as well as the student in the classroom and the school, the school district, the state, etc. So I think there’s that issue. I have no problem being held accountable for what I teach.”

—Jeff Burkett,
Sixth-Grade Teacher

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agreed that NCLB has forced them to change the focus of their classroom instruction. The vast majority (84%) of teachers agreed that NCLB had influenced what or how instruction is provided to students. Additionally, 74% indicated that they have substantially decreased the amount of time spent on content that they knew was not tested on the state-mandated tests. Similarly, 82% responded that they had substantially increased the amount of time spent on content that they knew would appear on the state tests.

As you can see, this pressure to perform has become immense. I firmly believe that this pressure has the capability to produce the standardized testing version of good versus evil (see Figure 3.1). Within the most ethical of teachers, it can create an internalized tug-of-war. Teachers want their students to perform well—and, in doing so, provide evidence that they are highly effective educators—but at what cost? Care on the part of all educators must be exhibited to avoid the temptation to engage in student test preparation practices that would be considered unethical. Unethical test preparation practices will likely improve students' scores; however, in the end, they also result in scores whose validity is suspect, perhaps even highly questionable. It is important to remember that the ultimate purpose of any test is to improve teaching and learning (Kober, 2002).

We have already discussed some preparation practices—namely test-taking strategies—variations of which can be both ethical and unethical. There are numerous additional types of test preparation practices with which educators should be familiar. Although this scheme oversimplifies the situation, we typically discuss these practices as being ethical/appropriate or unethical/inappropriate. More appropriately, these types of practices exist on a continuum, ranging from most ethical and appropriate to least ethical and appropriate.

The majority of these practices can be categorized into one of five general areas of test preparation (Miyasaka, 2000) with each having their own respective range of appropriateness:

- curriculum and test content—practices that involve content objectives and curriculum standards;
- assessment approaches and item formats—practices that involve familiarizing students with a variety of assessment approaches (e.g., multiple-choice items, short answer items, extended response items, performance assessment) and item formats (e.g., different types of multiple-choice item formats);
- test-taking strategies—practices involving general test-taking or testwise-ness strategies, unrelated to specific test content;
- timing of test preparation—practices conducted at various points in time before or during test administration; and
- student motivation—practices related to motivating students to perform to the best of their abilities.

Figure 3.1 The Standardized Testing Version of Good Versus Evil

Each of these five categories of test preparation practices will now be discussed in detail.

Test preparation practices related to curriculum and test content are arguably some of the most crucial, and sometimes the most easily confused and misunderstood. Much of this confusion is directly associated with specific phrases that are used to describe these practices. Educators, as well as measurement experts, tend to use the same phrase to refer to different types of practices. Miyasaka (2000) offers the following distinctions between these common phrases:

“Teaching to the curriculum objectives”	→	Teaching the objectives or the knowledge and skills in the curriculum content domain
“Teaching to the test”	→	Teaching/reviewing only the content objectives that are tested and including highly similar test item content
“Teaching the test”	→	Teaching the actual content/skills in the items appearing in the test

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Most, if not all, standardized tests assess content that is part of national, state, and/or district curriculum standards and instructional objectives. In most states, teachers are required to teach to the standards that represent what students should know and be able to do. Regular classroom instruction and assessment that focuses on the adopted standards is test preparation. Therefore, teaching to the curriculum objectives (or standards) constitutes an ethical and appropriate test preparation practice—in addition to being good, sound teaching.

In contrast, teaching to the test can have a detrimental effect on the testing process. If instruction is designed to parallel only those standards and/or objectives that actually appear on the test, then the focus of instruction—and, therefore, test preparation—has simply been narrowed too much. This is especially problematic with tests where a small number of alternate forms of the test exist (Miyasaka, 2000). For example, if there is only one form of a test that is given each year, the actual objectives as well as actual items can become familiar to the teacher who administers (and therefore sees) the test each year. This is typically the situation when the good versus evil temptation begins to surface. Having the knowledge that certain material is tested and other material is not is sometimes too great a temptation to the teacher who really, *really* wants students to perform well. This would obviously result in an unethical and inappropriate type of test preparation. However, in situations when there are multiple forms of a given test, when the standards and objectives that are sampled on the various forms are different, and when the items differ from one form to another, teaching to the test results in the content and test prep focus to be much broader. This type of situation then would constitute an ethical and appropriate type of preparation practice. The difficulty, however, lies in the fact that teaching to the test is not necessarily a black and white issue; there exists a multitude of situations that would fall in the gray area in between the two scenarios presented here, which lie at the extreme opposite ends of the continuum.

In stark contrast to the two previous approaches to instruction and test preparation, teaching the test clearly represents an unethical and unacceptable form of test preparation. This practice takes the notion of a narrowed focus of instruction and test prep, as previously discussed, to the ultimate extreme. Here, teachers may become so familiar with the content tested, as well as with the format of actual test items, that this is all that they teach (Miyasaka, 2000). They actually abandon their content standards and teach only those topics (and perhaps even actual test items) that appear on the test.

With respect to this category, teachers should instruct, practice, and assess the entire domain of content knowledge including but not limited to those objectives covered on the test during regular classroom instruction. They may practice with actual content on previous forms or items of the test, provided they have been released by the publisher for use in this manner. Teachers should not teach or practice objectives that are based solely on the content objectives of the test.

Additionally, they should not teach or practice with highly similar test content on parallel forms of a test, nor should they teach or practice with actual test items from the current form of the test (Miyasaka, 2000).

The next category, assessment approach and item format test preparation practices, has previously been discussed. To reiterate, these practices focus on familiarizing students with various assessment approaches and various types of item formats that they are likely to encounter on standardized tests. Familiarizing students with different assessment approaches (e.g., selected-response items, such as multiple-choice and alternate-choice items, and constructed-response items, such as performance assessments and extended-response essay items) is a widely accepted type of test-taking strategy. This serves to expose students to the various types of test items that they can expect to see on diverse standardized tests. Furthermore, using a variety of assessment approaches as part of classroom instruction and assessment has the potential to enrich instruction as well as to better prepare students to take standardized tests. The main reason that this is an acceptable test preparation practice is that it occurs completely separate from the content of the test itself. With respect to this category, teachers should design and administer classroom assessments that include a wide range of assessment approaches and item formats. They may administer practice tests with samples of actual items only if the item format and not the content is the focus of the practice. They definitely should not administer classroom assessments that only contain item formats from the standardized test due to the limiting effect that this practice has on allowing students to demonstrate their learning in a variety of ways.

The third category, test-taking strategy test preparation practices, has also been previously discussed under the designations of test-taking strategies or testwiseness skills. Recall that the purpose of these skills is to familiarize students with the process of taking a standardized test. These preparation practices allow students to become familiar with the testing format prior to actually taking the test. Essentially, these skills prevent students from receiving a lower score due not to their lack of content knowledge but to their lack of basic knowledge of testing. For example, students should be exposed to and given opportunities to practice skills such as marking answer sheets, making educated guesses, and allocating and pacing their test-taking time. Teachers should incorporate these types of skills into their regular teaching.

"I think that [teaching kids the format of the test] is something that some really good teachers do.

—Sue Garcia,
Primary Intervention Specialist

The fourth category of test preparation practices addresses the timing of test preparation practices. Test preparation practices can take place at various times during the instructional process: long before, just before, or during the administration of the standardized test. The earlier suggestion that test preparation involving content objectives, assessment approaches, and item formats be embedded within regular

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instruction implies that these various preparation practices can and should take place throughout the school year (Miyasaka, 2000). Cramming instruction or test preparation into the week or two immediately preceding the standardized test can typically do more harm than good, especially for lower-achieving students. Teachers should embed the various test preparation practices we have discussed into their regular instruction throughout the entire school year. In the weeks leading up to the test, they should teach and review a wide range of content objectives and assessment approaches and they may administer appropriate practice tests. Teachers should not review only those objectives that are tested. Additionally, once they may have seen the actual test, perhaps just before testing, teachers should most certainly not teach or review the actual test content nor should they administer practice items that actually appear on the test.

The final category of test preparation practices includes those related to student motivation. Test preparation practices should help students understand the importance of doing their best on the test without feeling inappropriately or excessively pressured (Miyasaka, 2000). One of the best ways teachers can help students prepare for standardized tests is to help them understand why schools are required to administer them, why students are required to take them, and how the scores are used to benefit both individual students as well as the school as a whole. It is important to note that positive student attitudes typically begin with a positive teacher attitude—if teachers are positive, or at least avoid being negative, students are more likely to react similarly to the notion of being required to take standardized tests.

Teachers should routinely discuss the importance of tests with their students (Hogan, 2007). They should encourage students to do their best and to persevere in completing the test. Encouraging students, by telling them and by sending notes

"I see myself as a coach and they understand [that]. [I tell them] you are going to perform during 'the game' as well or not as well as you practiced. And so practicing the achievement tests is vital . . . you need to know your opponent. If you go into a game cold, then chances are you're not going to do as well. But we know our opponent. We know who we're 'playing.' We know the strategies they have. We know what plays they're going to run. So we work on meeting it."

—Jeff Burkett,
Sixth-Grade Teacher

home to parents, to get a good night's sleep and to eat a good breakfast on testing days are also beneficial and appropriate ways to prepare them. Teachers—as well as administrators—should take care in avoiding other types of external motivators, such as pep rallies or providing incentive awards if they do well. These types of practices are considered unethical because they take the focus off learning and create too much pressure, albeit it of a different kind, to do well on the tests.

Popham (2002) has provided two ethical standards that essentially encapsulate this discussion about the appropriateness of certain test preparation practices. Educators at all levels would be wise to keep these standards in mind and use them to judge whether or not individual teachers as well as entire schools are preparing students appropriately for standardized tests. The two ethical standards of test preparation are:

Standard of Professional Ethics	No test preparation practice should violate the ethical standards of the education profession.
Standard of Educational Defensibility	No test preparation practice should increase students' test scores without simultaneously increasing student mastery of the content domain tested.

The do's and don'ts of test preparation practices are summarized in Figure 3.2.

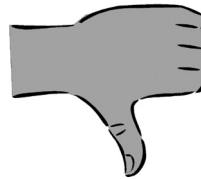
Figure 3.2 Student Test Preparation Do's and Don'ts

Standardized Test Preparation Do's



- Instruct, practice, and assess entire domain of content knowledge
- Practice with actual content on previous forms or items of the test, provided they have been released by the publisher
- Design and administer classroom assessments that include a wide range of assessment approaches and item formats
- Administer practice tests with samples of actual items, only if the item format is the focus of the practice
- Practice test-taking skills such as marking answer sheets, making educated guesses, and allocating test-taking time
- Embed test preparation practices into regular instruction throughout the school year
- Teach and review a wide-range of content objectives and assessment approaches and administer appropriate practice tests prior to the test
- Routinely discuss the importance of tests with students
- Encourage students to do their best and to persevere in completing the test
- Encourage students to get a good night's sleep and eat a good breakfast

Standardized Test Preparation Don'ts



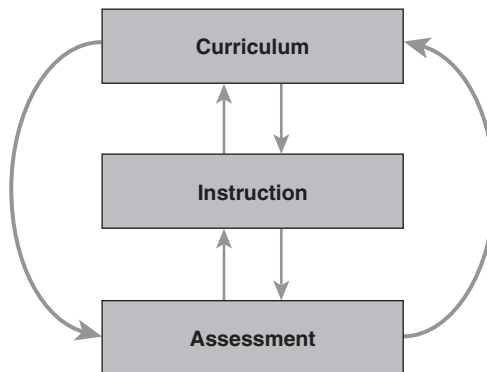
- Do not teach or practice objectives that are based solely on the content objectives of the test
- Do not teach or practice with highly similar test content or with actual test items from the current form of the test
- Do not administer classroom assessments that only contain item formats from the standardized test
- Do not review only those objectives that are tested
- Do not teach or review the actual test content or administer practice items that actually appear on the test
- Avoid using motivational techniques that provide external forms of motivation for students

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**“TEACHING TO THE TEST” VERSUS
“TEACHING TO THE STANDARDS”—A FINAL WORD**

Many people are confused or simply disagree about what the term “teaching to the test” exactly means (Kober, 2002). In its extreme unethical form, it means cheating—for example, giving students actual questions from a secure version of a standardized test. In its more common forms, it means direct preparation for a particular test, such as administering practice questions, teaching students how to fill in answer sheets, or focusing instruction on a limited number of skills (Kober, 2002). Although many of these practices may be permissible, they are not educationally sound. In its rarer—also extreme, but in this case ethical—form, instruction is focused on the most important knowledge and skills as outlined in national, state, or district content curriculum standards.

Initially, it is important to remember that three key components of the instructional process should always be aligned with one another: curriculum, instruction, and assessment (Mertler, 2003).



This visual representation of the process and the relationships among the three components implies that each of the three steps is dependent on and is informed by the other two. For example, when planning a unit on photosynthesis (based on curriculum or standards), science teachers might want to consider various approaches to teaching the content (delivery of instruction). In other words, the teachers would need to make decisions regarding the types of resources, materials, and visual aids to incorporate into the unit. In addition, they would need to consider how best to determine the level of student learning and the extent to which their students understood the photosynthetic process (assessment). Additionally, when developing

particular assessments for the unit (assessment), they must consider not only the specific content that was taught (curriculum or standards), but also how it was presented to students (instruction). As suggested by this example, all three components must be aligned with one another for appropriate instruction and subsequent learning to occur. In other words, the instruction that is planned by a teacher (as reflected in curriculum standards) should directly relate to the actual instruction, and the assessments should closely reflect both the planned and delivered instruction (Mertler, 2003). In this sense, teaching to the test is not a bad thing. In contrast, it is an ethical and appropriate practice—it simply means that as a teacher you have taught your content standards, and your assessments of student learning reflect this fact.

Of course, teaching to the test and actually teaching the test as described earlier can most emphatically be unethical practices. Narrowing or limiting the scope of instruction to only that content that is specifically covered on any assessment essentially deprives students from gaining additional skills and knowledge that still may be extremely important in their own right, even if not covered on a test. It is critical to remember that any standardized test is intended to serve as just one measure of an extremely large domain of content knowledge and skills. The scores resulting from that test are only a single indicator of a student's possible performance in the larger domain implied by the complete content standards (Nitko, 2004). One of the goals of any assessment is to be able to generalize from students' performances on the assessment to the larger domain of knowledge and skills. However, if actual instruction or test preparation practice focuses only on a limited number of tasks, the ability to generalize students' learning to broader learning targets—one of the real goals of education—is equally limited (Nitko, 2004). In essence, even though students may score higher, this type of practice actually invalidates their standardized test performance (Airasian, 2005).

Unfortunately, the phrase teaching to the test has developed a substantially negative connotation. Most people, educators included, interpret the phrase to mean only those unethical test preparation practices we have discussed. I would like to strongly suggest that we, as professional educators,

"If you're not instructing what's going to be on the standardized tests, then you're not preparing your kids. And that's my job professionally, to prepare my kids not only for the test but for the future, and they're directly related. I can't do one without doing the other. If I don't use the data to drive my lessons to prepare my kids for the next step in their ventures, then I'm not doing my job."

—Cori Boos,
High School Mathematics Teacher

"Some people are nervous about accountability. You know, their complaint is about 'teaching to the test.' Well, you're always teaching to a test, so I can't say that that's a good excuse. I think it's more because it's different; it's a change that it makes them more accountable."

—Martha Fether,
Elementary Principal

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cease using the phrase “teaching to the test.” Instead, I would like to suggest that we replace it with two alternatives: “teaching to the content represented by the test” or “teaching to the standards” (see Figure 3.3). In the case of either alternative, we are making it clear that we are teaching that knowledge and those skills that we are supposed to be teaching. And guess what? For the most part, the standardized test will be covering the same material. Therefore, our students should be able to demonstrate their best performance since they have been taught a very broad range of knowledge and skills, many of which will also appear on the test.

Figure 3.3 Alternatives to the Phrase “Teaching to the Test”

EDUCATORS SHOULD AVOID USING THE PHRASE:

“Teaching to the test”

TRY TO SAY INSTEAD:

“Teaching to the content represented by the test”

OR:

“Teaching to the standards”

Summary

The administration of standardized tests involves procedures that must be followed carefully and explicitly. Teachers and administrators must adhere to the publisher’s directions. Violations of these standardization procedures invalidate any possible comparisons of resulting scores. It is permissible to answer student questions during the test, provided they are questions of a procedural nature. Assistance with actual test questions should be avoided at all cost. Any educator who is acting in the role of a test administrator has a responsibility to motivate students to do their best, follow directions strictly, keep the testing time accurately, record any significant events that could effect test scores, and collect test materials promptly.

There are numerous things that teachers can do to help students prepare for standardized tests. Some of these practices are ethical and appropriate, but others are neither. First and foremost, teachers should provide good, sound instruction. They can also help students develop testwiseness skills. These skills consist of various test-taking strategies. Practice in developing testwiseness skills permits students to become familiar with testing directions, proper procedures for completing an answer sheet, pacing their progress through a given test, and checking answers, among others. It is important to note that some testwiseness skills are considered unethical.

The application of any test-taking strategy that results in the improvement of students' scores beyond that which would be attained from content mastery alone is unethical. In other words, these techniques enable students to blindly guess correct answers when they do not know anything about the content.

The pressure for students to perform on standardized tests has become immense—for both students and teachers. It is crucial that teachers avoid the temptation to raise student scores at any cost. This attitude or approach often results in higher test scores; however, they are typically considered to be invalid due to the strategies used to achieve them. Five categories of test preparation practices exist, most of which fall on a continuum ranging from highly ethical and appropriate to unethical and inappropriate. These categories are curriculum and test content, assessment approaches and item formats, test-taking strategies, timing of test preparation, and student motivation. Educators should adhere to two important ethical standards of test preparation:

- No test preparation practice should violate the ethical standards of the education profession.
- No test preparation practice should increase students' test scores without simultaneously increasing student mastery of the content domain tested.

Since curriculum, instruction, and assessment should always be aligned with one another, the notion of teaching to the test is not necessarily a bad one, as many in and out of the education profession have come to believe. If instruction and test preparation practices are specifically limited to only those content areas and skills that appear on the test, then teaching to the test (or teaching the test) is an unethical practice. However, if instruction is designed to parallel the broader content standards, which are also assessed by the standardized test, then teaching to the test is an appropriate practice. Perhaps the best solution to this ethical dilemma is to avoid using the phrase teaching to the test and replace it with teaching to the standards.

Activities for Application and Reflection

1. Make a list of any test preparation practices that you use with your students. Classify each along the ethical continuum as highly ethical, somewhat unethical, or highly unethical. Assuming that you will stop doing anything that is highly unethical, what could you do to improve the appropriateness of those practices you may have classified as somewhat unethical?
2. Using the two ethical guidelines for standardized test preparation as presented in this module, evaluate the appropriateness of each of the following practices:

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- a. The school uses the latest version of a particular standardized test. A teacher uses a version of the test that is no longer being administered in the school to give students special practice.
 - b. A teacher copies test items from a version of the test that is currently being used in the school and provides these items to students for practice.
 - c. A district's curriculum guide calls for learning various rules of addition of two-digit numbers that are covered by the standardized test used in its schools. Several teachers instruct students on how to use these rules to answer the same format of items that appears on the test, but do not provide practice numbers larger than two digits.
 - d. A district's curriculum guide calls for learning various rules of addition of two-digit numbers that are covered by the standardized test used in its schools. Several teachers instruct students on how to use these rules to answer the same format of items that appears on the test and on how to apply these same rules to numbers larger than two digits.
3. Imagine that you receive a note from the parents of one of your more high-achieving students. The note says the following: "Why do you spend so much valuable class time teaching to the test? Shouldn't our children be learning more than just what's on the test?" How would you respond to this comment/question? Compose a brief note in response to the parents.
 4. Carefully read the interview transcripts, which appear in Section IV, for Jeff Burkett, sixth-grade teacher, and Sue Garcia, intervention specialist, paying particular attention to techniques they use to help prepare students for standardized tests. Comment on the usefulness of these techniques for your current and/or future students.
 5. Carefully read the interview transcript for Ellen Sharp, first- and second-grade teacher, paying particular attention to her comment that "assessment drives instruction." What do you think this means? How does this compare or contrast with teaching to the test and teaching to the standards?
 6. Carefully read the interview transcript for Cori Boos, high school math teacher, paying particular attention to her comment that teaching test-taking skills "needs to be part of the daily classroom." Do you agree or disagree with this comment? Explain your answer.
 7. Carefully read the interview transcripts for Sara Caserta and Megan Newlove, high school English teachers, paying particular attention to their discussion of the importance of providing positive motivation for students in advance of taking standardized tests. Do you believe that this is important? Why or why not?