

Introduction

The mind is not a vessel to be filled, but a fire to be kindled.

—Plutarch

TEST DAY . . .

. . . do these words lift your heart? Are your students ready with eager minds and sharpened pencils?

Probably not. We wrote this book to learn more about how the latest brain research can help us prepare students for optimal learning and standardized tests. We have witnessed the negative spirit in which tests are often administered and taken. Yet, as educators, we know students need positive learning to develop their knowledge of test-taking skills to succeed in school and beyond. These concerns about testing are based on our experiences in education, which include teaching and working in PreK through college classrooms. Our concerns also come from our work in consulting and assisting administrators, teachers, parents, and students with the standardized testing dilemmas. Our investigations and experiences lead us to call for a major paradigm shift from negative to positive approaches to all tests. Creating this change has become our mission.

Throughout this resource, you will find practical tips to design a brain-compatible classroom where every student can become test-ready. These ideas are drawn from our research and experiences involving optimal learning.

We know educators work diligently every day to meet the needs of each learner using differentiated instruction and authentic experiences. As a result, students are more self-directed and better problem solvers than in the past. However, students are not always able to show their abilities on tests. We believe teachers must create bridges between the many ways

students learn and the way they approach formal test formats. The innovative learning strategies presented here are designed to teach students how to retain and transfer information to all tests, to all subjects, and to real-life experiences.

We believe everyone benefits when tests are viewed as celebrations of the brain's phenomenal abilities, not as dreaded events. To that end, this book is filled with practical ideas and suggestions for teachers, administrators, parents, and students to create positive test environments.

As "playwrights," we prepared this book to present the necessary tools to transform traumatic testing scenes into meaningful celebrations of learning. The stage is set for you. As the scenes unfold and you plan the performers' roles, we hope you will adapt the ideas and establish a positive climate where students tackle tests with the same high spirits they exhibit when approaching challenging games.

Join us in our preparation for the test performance . . .

—Carolyn and Rita