

(Download pdf) *Whatever It Takes: Geoffrey Canada's Quest to Change Harlem and America*

Whatever It Takes: Geoffrey Canada's Quest to Change Harlem and America

Paul Tough

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Paul Tough : Whatever It Takes: Geoffrey Canada's Quest to Change Harlem and America before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised *Whatever It Takes: Geoffrey Canada's Quest to Change Harlem and America*:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A wonderful read for leaders considering the school organizational structure and their role in Leading ReformBy Nicolas Kay*Whatever It Takes* chronicles the struggle of the Geoffrey Canada and the Harlem Childrens Zone in their work against institutional poverty here in Harlem, NY. This powerful reflection examines how organizational structures and services evolved from Canadas recognition that historically disenfranchised communities especially those like the one he grew up in, developed contaminated cultures that did not support young people as they embarked on academic ventures in their schools. Recognizing the disparities between the childhoods of middle class white Americans and the childhoods students of color endured in poverty stricken inner city communities, Canada and the Harlem Children's Zone began identifying programs that would counteract the hardship students in Harlem endured. The book illustrates some interesting aspects these programs took on to inform both their structure and management. For instance, since the Harlem Childrens Zone was a charter school a significant source of its funding was through private foundations. As a result the schools operates with a different requirements and methods for accountability than of most public schools. Canada used this to make student achievement the goal that would drive every aspect of their work. Canada believed the best way to achieve that goal was to act not like a bighearted altruist but like a ruthless capitalist, devoted to the bottom line. He didnt think it was right to hold himself

or his employees to a looser standard of achievement simply because they happened to be making the world a better place. (pg. 135) This perspective raises some concerns regarding what motivates our work in education and what we truly value about schools and the growth of the young people we serve. Although I struggle with this idea of acting like a ruthless capitalist, I can certainly agree with the notion of using data to drive decision making and the urgency of work and change that needs to take place within an organization to facilitate progress towards making all of our students successful. This in part certainly motivated the community partnerships that allow the Harlem Children's zone to engage in so much of the social education and services work that has made their work so successful. As schools consider their place and roles within communities Whatever It Takes offers valuable insight on how and why organizational partnerships within local networks don't happen nearly enough within our schools. In this way the Harlem Children's Zone is a fantastic model for school leaders to use in examining how they can better utilize resources already present within their communities to support the families and children they serve. The way the book describes how these partnerships and programs have interwoven into the organization fabric of the Harlem Children's Zone made this idea of the Conveyor Belt of safety nets and support structures that have made the school so successful. What I think is lost in the book is that Organizational frames were consciously used to inform how these programs developed. (Structure, Human Resources, Political, Symbolic) But, the context was unique to Harlem and although Canada's quest has been to change Harlem and America the book fails to illustrate the degree of impact that context has on this work. While Baby College, 3 Year Old Journey, and Pre-Kinder (All Day) programs did wonders for Harlem many other factors need to be considered in developing functioning Conveyor Belts across schools in the United States. Whatever It Takes gives school leaders an opportunity to consider how relations with external organizations can be worked into the fabric of a school's structure. There are many lessons to be gained from considering how social capital can be cultivated from similar work and there are plenty of things to consider with regard to how Canada's very authoritarian leadership style drove change in this institution through passion, dedication, and an unrivaled commitment to the students and community he serves in Harlem. Although this would not be a recommended read if you're looking for examples of distributed leadership, there are important lessons that can inform leaders of times that require more definitive charge and direction from a leader. Whatever It Takes is a wonderful read for leaders considering the structure and connections within their organizations and will challenge readers to consider the role leadership should take in driving school reforms.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Making a difference in the lives of poor inner-city youth in Harlem By J. Henderlite Geoffrey Canada has developed a comprehensive, holistic formula to successfully educate poor kids in Harlem who historically have not had a good educational outcome. This book details the work that went into the program his Harlem Children's Zone developed and administers. One of the best parts of the book is the detailed discussion of why kids who come from a background of poverty more often than not do not do well in school. It debunks myths that these kids have inferior intellects. It covers how their upbringing by well-meaning but highly stressed and beleaguered parents puts them behind their affluent peers. It details how Canada, who was born in a poor neighborhood in the South Bronx, decided that if these kids were going to succeed in large numbers that his approach was going to have to affect every part of their lives, not just what happens while they are in school. The city I live in, Charlotte, NC, struggles with many of the same problems of a wide achievement gap between affluent white kids and poor black and Latino children. I am telling anyone who will listen that there is a way to educate all of the kids in our community and that what Geoffrey Canada has come up with may be the best approach. This is a great book that anyone who is passionate about public education and the inequities that exist in them will enjoy reading.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Great read By Stephanie Sylvestre I thought this book was a great read and summarizes what I believe is the true cause of the great divide. Lack of access and knowledge by the poor that they truly have choices. And that part of having choices is that they can make add choices to the list of options not only select from the options presented. More access and belief in true choices is what is necessary. Easy to say, near impossible to achieve but no reason not to try!